THE ROLE OF FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAMMES TO SUPPORT EMERGENT LITERACY IN YOUNG LEARNERS

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that THE ROLE OF FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAMMES TO SUPPORT EMERGENT LITERACY IN YOUNG LEARNERS is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete reference.

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ABSTRACT

Collaboration between the parents and the school has a powerful influence on a child's literacy development. However, home-school partnerships to support young learners' emergent literacy development are weak in South Africa. Research into family literacy in South Africa is particularly important due to many socio-economic factors impacting negatively on family life and on children's literacy development. The South African education system lacks a dedicated policy for the promotion of family literacy. Against this background the present study investigated the role of family literacy programmes in supporting emergent literacy among young children. A literature study on family literacy and family-school-community partnerships to support literacy framed an empirical inquiry following an interpretivist approach, using an action research design and qualitative techniques of data collection. The Wordworks Home-School Partnerships programme was selected for implementation and the programme was modified through the design and inclusion of a children's component. A multicultural independent primary school situated in Pretoria, South Africa was selected through a combination of purposeful and convenience sampling. The school principal, four Foundation Phase teachers and seven families including nine children participated in the study. Criteria for family inclusion were that the participating families should have at least one child enrolled in Grade R and at least one parent should agree to attend the full six-week duration of the modified Wordworks School-Family Partnerships programme. Data was gathered during parallel sessions from parents, children and teacher-facilitators through multiple techniques: observation, interviews, feedback sessions, artefacts and journals. Data was analysed according to qualitative principles and the findings were presented in a narrative format substantiated by verbatim quotations. Key findings indicated a greater sense of community among the families and the teachers, improved quality of parent-child interactions, parents' improved knowledge of emergent literacy skills and improved confidence in supporting their children with early literacy development. The medium term impact of the programme includes benefits for the whole school, the teaching staff, parent body and children. Based on the findings of the literature study and the implementation of the family literacy programme through action research, recommendations were made to improve school-family partnerships with a view to supporting emergent literacy development among young learners.

350 WORDS

Parent involvement is everybody's job but nobody's job until a structure is put in place to support it.

-Joyce Epstein

"This is the only way we can build a better future for them. Because, look, the future is in our children. These are the people who need to take the country forward. The moment we slack and we don't teach them this kind of things – sorry, there is no future for us.

- Sam Ndlovu, a participating parent

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training
ACRWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
ANA	Annual National Assessment
ANC	African National Congress
CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
CEA	Centre for Evaluation and Assessment
CEPD	Centre for Education Policy Development
CPTD	Continuous Professional Teacher Development
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DoH	Department of Health
DSD	Department of Social Development
ECCE	Early Child Care and Education
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ELRU	Early Learning Resource Unit
EPWP	Expanded Public Works Programme
FLP	Family Literacy Project
FWIP	First Words in Print
GHS	General Household Survey
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
HL	Home Language
HSRC	Human Science and Research Council
IEA	International Association for the Evaluation for Educational Achievement
IIEP	International Institute for Educational Planning
IQMS	Integrated Quality Management System
LiEP	Language in Education Policy
LoLT	Language of Learning and Teaching
NCF	National Curriculum Framework
NEEDU	National Education Evaluation and Development Unit
NELDS	National Early Learning Development Standards
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NIPECD	National Integrated Plan for ECD

NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OCED	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
ORIM	Opportunities, Recognition, Interaction, Model
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PRAESA	Project for the study of Alternative Education in South Africa
READ	Read, Educate, Adjust, Develop (Educational Trust)
REFLECT	Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SACE	South African Council for Educators
SACMEQ	Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
SADC	South African Development Community
SASA	South African Schools Act
SBST	School-Based Support Team
SGB	School Governing Body
SIAS	Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support Policy
STELLAR	Strengthening of Early Language and Literacy in Grade R
TIMMS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNISA	University of South Africa

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CHAPTER 1
BACKGROUND, PROBLEM FORMULATION AND AIMS

1.1   INTRODUCTION

Nelson Mandela, former president of South Africa said:

> *"Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mineworker can become the head of a mine; that the child of farm workers can become the president of a country. It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given, that separates us from one another"* (Mandela 1994:194).

This statement expresses the hope and the dream of many parents in South Africa. Unfortunately South Africa has one of the poorest performing education systems in the world (Wilkinson 2015; CEPD 2009; Simkins 2013; van der Bergh, Taylor, Gustafsson, Spaull & Armstrong 2011). By the time many South African learners reach grade 4 they are already two or more years behind, particularly with numeracy and literacy (Pretorius 2014:61; Howie, van Staden, Tshele, Dowse & Zimmerman 2012:28). Research has also shown that, when learners start behind, they stay behind. Stanovich (1986), refers to the "Matthew effect", a term derived from the gospel of St Matthew in the Bible in which the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. In reading research the Matthew effect refers to the hypothesis that while good readers gain new skills very rapidly and quickly move from learning to read to reading to learn, poor readers become increasingly frustrated with the act of reading and try to avoid reading when possible. The gap is relatively narrow when children are young, but rapidly widens as children grow older (Rigney, 2010:76).

Although literacy level is not the only determinant of success in our society, the lack of literacy is linked to un- and underemployment, poverty and crime. As a nation, billions are spent on education but even more on unemployment, welfare, police, prisons and jails. When the education system fails to meet the emergent literacy needs of young children, it pays tenfold in a myriad of social and educational problems. A high level of drop-outs is detrimental to the

economy, as dropouts are often unemployed or only able to get low paying jobs. They will eventually receive support in the form of government grants or become a burden on the state in other ways (Swick 2009:405; Holborn & Eddy 2011:7-14).

It is clear that intervention at an early age is a matter of great urgency. Knowing about literacy practices and skills valued by schools confers advantage on some children starting formal education, just as lack of it disadvantages others. The relevant knowledge can include awareness of the purposes of literacy, awareness of story, knowledge of letters, or phonological awareness. According to Parette, Hourcade, Dinelli and Boeckmann (2009:356) best practices in emergent literacy instruction in early childhood settings include strategies that support skill development in five key emergent literacy areas: phonemic awareness, word recognition, concepts about print, alphabetic principles, and comprehension. Effective emergent literacy programmes seek to incorporate these concepts and practices. If children have this knowledge at school entry it seems reasonable to infer that they have acquired it in their families. If they do not have it (and if it is desirable that they should), there is a strong case for family literacy programmes to help them acquire it. Family literacy programmes are based on the assumption that children learn about literacy in their home environments and that the beneficial impact of families on literacy learning is considerable. Family literacy programmes are programmes designed to support the literacy learning of children across home and school environments (Crawford & Zygouris-Coe 2006:261).

In Chapter 1 I will therefore motivate why I chose to study family literacy programmes as a developmental pathway to literacy. I will explain how an initial literature review led to the research question and directed the aims of the study. This chapter will also provide a brief outline of the research design, clarify the key terms used in the study and conclude with a chapter outline of the study.

1.2   MOTIVATION FOR THE RESEARCH

My motivation for this study was prompted by the gap in research dealing with family literacy programmes in the South African context as initially established by a literature search. Firstly, an overview of the field of family literacy and the impact thereof on emergent literacy of children indicates that, over the past 5 years, most empirical studies were done in the United

States of America (USA). In this regard, a Pro Quest search of dissertations and theses dealing with literacy globally over the past 5 years produced 30 items; only 12 studies explored the influence of either the home environment or family literacy programmes on literacy development (Knight 2014; Carroll 2013; Gobey 2012; Cassel 2011; Baroody 2011; Haynes 2010). Six of the 12 studies investigated home literacy environments of immigrant families, such as Latino, French or Chinese families (Wang 2014; Schick 2012; Tazi 2011; Kuroki 2010; Harper 2010; Zhang 2010). Secondly, within the South African context, very little has been published on the influence of the family on emergent literacy over the same five year period. A Sabinet search of e-publications on the influence of either the home environment or family literacy programmes on literacy yielded only 12 scholarly articles related to the keyword search. Two articles focussed specifically on the literacy development of Grade 4 and 5 learners (Combrink, Van Staden & Roux 2014; Pretorius 2014). Five articles focused on the improvement of teacher practice regarding the literacy development of learners in the age range of 3-7 years (Linington, Excell & Murris 2014; Mbatha 2012; Wessels & Mnkeni-Saurombe 2012; Vally 2012; Van der Mescht 2014). One article (Pitt, Luger, Bullen, Phillips & Geiger 2013) focussed on building collaboration (including cooperation with parents) to support the development of school readiness with all the developmental aspects in mind including literacy. Only four articles focussed on how parents and schools can work together to support emergent literacy: a study of a family literacy programme (Desmond 2010); the implementation of the Epstein model of family-school relations to promote family literacy (Lemmer 2011); and two studies on parent-child reading (Le Roux & Constandius 2013; Ramroop 2011).

From a professional viewpoint, I have been motivated by my position as Advisor: Professional Development of the third largest teacher union in South Africa. In this position I am deeply involved in teacher professional development focussed on addressing weaknesses and gaps in the education system. My knowledge of the poor academic performance of South African learners in nationally and international assessment impressed upon me that early intervention in literacy development is paramount. My prior experience as a teacher in the Intermediate Phase (Grades 4-6) strengthened this conviction. Many learners enter the Intermediate Phase with poor reading skills, and with the current shift in focus from 'learning to read' to 'reading to learn' many learners in this phase struggle to cope with the academic demands, because their reading skills are two or more years behind (Pretorius 2014:61). Furthermore, my academic development (B.Ed Honours and M.Ed) with a specialisation in special educational needs had indicated the importance of early identification and support.

1.2.1 The role of the family in literacy development

A preliminary study of the literature has raised my awareness of the importance of phonemic awareness in early childhood as a precursor to later reading success. I realised the importance of emergent literacy skills that have their genesis in the home, long before the child enters formal schooling. Crawford and Zygouris-Coe (2006:261) as well as Parcel, Dufur and Zito (2010:828) concur that literacy learning is often rooted in the home experience. That is why, according to Vasilyeva, Waterfall and Huttenlocher (2008:85) large individual differences already exist in the level of language mastery by the time the children start acquiring literacy skills. A South African study by the University of Stellenbosch (Van der Berg, Girdhood, Shepherd, Van Wyk, Kruger, Viljoen, Ezeobi & Ntaka 2013:8) supports their finding. This study indicated that children with language difficulties at age 3 are nearly five times more likely to experience literacy problems at age 8 than a control group; children with language difficulties continue to have difficulties at age 13. Moreover, children who have difficulty in Grade 1 are more likely to have difficulty in other school domains later on and are more likely not to complete high school nor to pursue their education beyond high school (Sénéchal 2012:175).

These findings further sharpened my interest in the home environment and the linkages between the literacy of parents and of their children. Studies in the USA indicate a very strong association between the extent of literacy materials (newspapers, magazines, books, dictionaries) in the home and children's reading test scores at ages 9, 13 and 17 (Burchinal & Forestieri 2011:86-87; Barone 2011:377). Although demographic characteristics such as parental education, social class, family structure and neighbourhood safety play a part, the quality of interactions between young children and the adults in their family play the most crucial role in literacy development. Young children raised in homes with more stimulating books and objects also show faster acquisition of language skills. Reading to young children has also been widely advocated because it is a consistent predictor of early language and literacy skills. Reading exposes children to vocabulary in context in interactions with parents that are usually positive and provides children with scaffolded learning experiences. This topic is fully dealt with in Chapter 2 of this study.

1.2.2   The role of the family in literacy development in South Africa

Studying family literacy in South Africa is particularly important, firstly due to the crisis within the family brought about by conditions such as poverty, violence, migrancy and HIV/AIDS (Holborn & Eddy 2011:1). It is also crucial due to the relationship between strong family literacy practices and achievement at school. This topic is covered in depth in Chapter 3 of this study. Many South African children experience a variety of barriers to educational success in general and literacy development in particular which include (Train 2007:296-297):

- Lack of early language and reading experiences: where young people are not encouraged to talk and take part in extended conversations with those they spend their time with, their understanding of the spoken and written word is poorer than that of their peers.

- Intergenerational barriers: where parents did not enjoy reading, or were not read to themselves, they do not necessarily see its importance. Reading is consequently seen as a chore.

- Poor basic skills: where parents' own basic skills are poor they are less confident and able to support their own children's reading.

- Economic and financial barriers: in periods of poverty due to debt, poor housing, health problems or unemployment, reading becomes a luxury rather than a necessity.

- Cultural barriers: for reasons of language, tradition, or economic circumstance, some communities do not see the reading habit as part of their culture.

- Institutional barriers: people's needs may not be recognised by the infrastructure that support them, because some institutions like schools and even a number of libraries, fail to engage effectively with them (Train 2007:296-297).

Economic and financial constraints not only impact on family life, but also on schools. Lower quintile schools (schools are ranked from quintile 1-5; quintile 1 representing the poorest schools) are challenged by a lack of physical resources, under-qualified teachers, ineffective teaching methods, poor school governance and poor delivery of learning materials (Pretorius & Machet 2008:264). In addition schools in the lower quintiles also battle to cope with children from dysfunctional families who do not provide enriched home environments. Many learners in South Africa attend lower quintile schools and also come from homes where parental literacy

levels are low and where books or other print-based materials are lacking in the home. On the other hand successful schools have the advantage of building on the efforts of successful families (Heckman & Masterov 2007). This dichotomy provided added motivation for this study.

Furthermore, literacy instruction is often viewed as something best suited for the domain of experts who can develop and present instructional material to children in a systematic, scientifically based manner (Crawford & Zygouris-Coe 2006:262). As a result school and home are seen as distinct and separate among many groups in South Africa. This stresses the need to endorse the importance of home-school partnerships that support young children's learning and development. Unfortunately many South African teachers are unaware of the value and benefits of family involvement for the children and may resent adding one more element to the mix (parents) when there are already enormous demands from the education department. Other teachers may be well aware of the benefits of including families, but are unfamiliar with how to engage parents (Lemmer & van Wyk 2007). As a result, many teachers view parents as trespassers in schools, unwanted and excluded, and at best as invited guests but not as full partners in their children's education (St. George 2009:3). Family literacy programmes is the ideal tool for schools to assist or encourage parents to work with teachers in literacy development so that children enjoy the mutual benefits of a three-way learning process (teacher, child and parent).

However, according to Nutbrown, Hannon and Morgan (2005:104), teachers need specific and planned opportunities to equip them for direct literacy work with parents. The authors (2005) note that adult learning is different from young children's learning and therefore teachers engaged in family literacy programmes need focussed professional development to work with parents, both as adult learners and as the parents of their children in family literacy endeavours. Unfortunately the South African education system does not at present have a policy or practice to promote family literacy, or teacher development for family literacy. Family literacy is still in its infancy in South Africa. Except for a few pioneering and exemplary projects it is seen as an add-on or a "nice to have", and projects struggle financially to survive (Desmond 2012).

Thus, in this section (1.2) I have motivated this study based on the gap in research on family literacy, my professional position and an initial literature review. For these reasons I have elected to study the role of family literacy programmes to support emergent literacy in young learners in South African context.

1.3 PROBLEM FORMULATION

Against the background given above the main research question has been formulated as follows: *What is the role of family literacy programmes that are aimed at supporting emergent literacy in young learners?*

The main research problem has been sub-divided as follows:

1. What theoretical frameworks inform family literacy programmes? How can the role of the family in early literacy development be described in historical context? What are the barriers, benefits and features of effective family literacy programmes which function in partnership with the school? (See Chapter 2)

2. How can family literacy practices in South Africa be described in the light of family structures and the implications for family literacy? How is literacy provided for in formal education and through family literacy programmes? (See Chapter 3)

3. What are the perceptions and experiences of selected teachers, parents and learners during the implementation of a family literacy programme aimed at supporting emergent literacy in young learners in a selected primary school in Gauteng using an action research approach? (See Chapters 4 and 5)

4. What recommendations can be made for the design and implementation of family literacy programmes to support emergent literacy in South Africa based on the findings of the literature and the empirical inquiry? (See Chapter 6)

1.4 AIMS OF THE STUDY

In the light of the above research problem the prinicple aim of the study was to investigate the role of family literacy programmes aimed at supporting emergent literacy in young learners.

The following objectives were identified:

1. To identify the theoretical framework that informs family literacy programmes, to describe the role of the family in early literacy development in historical context and to highlight the barriers, benefits and features of effective family literacy programmes in partnership with the school.

2.	To describe family literacy practices in South Africa in the light of family structures and underline the implications for family literacy and literacy provision in formal education and through family literacy programmes.

3.	To explore the perceptions and experiences of parents, teachers and learners during the implementation of a family literacy programme aimed at supporting emergent literacy in young learners in a selected primary school in Gauteng using an action research approach.

4.	Based on the findings of the literature and the empirical inquiry, to make recommendations for the design and implementation of family literacy programmes in South Africa to support emergent literacy.

## 1.5	METHOD

The research questions were addressed by means of a literature review and an empirical inquiry. Only a synopsis of the empirical inquiry is presented in this section. The full detail is presented in Chapter 4 of this study.

### 1.5.1	Literature review

A literature review was used to explore the concept of family literacy and how it supports emergent literacy in early childhood. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010:85) a literature review establishes important links between existing knowledge and the research problem being investigated. Almost every question about doing new research can be answered by knowing what others have done and reported. It is a critique of the status of knowledge of a carefully designed topic and enables a reader to:

- Refine the research problem;
- Establish a conceptual or theoretical framework;
- Establish how a meaningful contribution can be made to existing knowledge or practice;
- Identify methodological limitations;
- Identify contradictory findings;
- Inform the research design of the empirical study.

In order to achieve the above, the sources consulted included professional journals, reports, quarterly reviews, scholarly books, government documents, dissertations and thesis as well as electronic resources such as websites. This provided a framework for the ensuing empirical inquiry.

1.5.2   Empirical inquiry

The empirical inquiry followed an action research approach using qualitative methods of data gathering. McMillan and Schumacher (2010:478) define action research as systematic inquiry by practitioners aimed at gathering and using information that can be used to change practice, promote reflection, promote professional development and enhance decision-making. I deemed action research following an interpretivist approach most suitable for a study where I wished to use qualitative research principles as well as insights from the literature in order to provide information to teachers and families that they could use to improve aspects of their day-to-day practice in terms of family literacy aimed at supporting emergent literacy in young learners (McMillan & Schumacher 2010:478). More specifically, I chose action research for the following reasons:

- It is used in real situations, such as the actual implementation of a family literacy programme, since its primary focus is on solving real problems.
- It creates a holistic mind-set for school improvement and professional problem-solving.
- It allows participants (in this case, teachers, parents and the researcher) to collaborate with one other and to reflect meaningfully on why the results were obtained during the implementation of the family literacy programme and what these results mean for their practice.
- It promotes reflection and self-assessment and enhances decision making for all participants.
- It engages participants actively and empowers those who participate in the process.
- It impacts directly to improve practice and brings about change.
- It creates a more positive climate (at home and at school) where teaching and learning are foremost concerns.

Further, qualitative methods of sampling, data gathering and analysis (McMillan & Schumacher 2010:322;342) allowed me to gather data directly from purposefully selected participants in the natural setting with the aim of understanding participant experiences and meanings from the participants' own point of view. Qualitative methods enabled me to construct a rich narrative description of the family literacy programme as well as to obtain useful feedback which could be built into the family literacy programme as it progressed during implementation.

1.5.2.1   Selection of family literacy programme

After an investigation of selected family literacy programmes available in South Africa, I chose the Wordworks Home-School programme (Comrie 2012) for implementation in my study. The Wordworks Home-School Partnerships programme is aimed at empowering and equipping parents of children aged between four and seven years to support informal literacy learning in the home and incorporates training and on-going mentoring for the facilitators of the programme. The programme is flexible and easily contextualised. I modified the programme to suit the context of my study and, in addition, I developed a separate literacy component for young learners, which ran parallel to the parent training sessions over a six-week period. The structure and content of the Wordworks Home-School Partnerships programme and the modification is described in full in Chapter 4.

1.5.2.2   Selection of site and participants

A suitable site was selected through a combination of purposeful sampling and convenience sampling. A English medium, multicultural school (pseudonym: Rising Rainbow) situated in Pretoria East, Gauteng accepted the invitation to implement the modified Wordworks Home-School Partnerships programme during the second quarter of 2014 with a view to improving family literacy and building staff and parental capacity in this regard. The school offers pre-primary and primary education, Grade R through Grade 2, and is located within easy distance from my home and workplace, which allowed me to carry out intensive fieldwork over an eight week period. These features made it an appropriate choice for the study.

The school principal, five teachers (teaching Gr R, 1 and 2) and seven families and their children (n = 7) participated in the study. Criteria for family inclusion in the programme was

that the participating families should have a child enrolled in Grade R and that at least one parent should be able to attend the full six-week duration of the modified Wordworks School-Family Partnerships programme. These criteria were later modified to include the participation of families with young children ranging from age three to age eight (pre-school through Grade 2) in order not to exclude any family which voluntarily accepted the invitation to participate. Procedures for selecting the site and participants are described in full in Chapter 4.

1.5.2.3   Data gathering and analysis

Data was gathered from parents, children and teacher-facilitators through multiple techniques: audio-recorded semi-structured interviews; a family journal; a researcher journal and field notes; audio-recordings of both parent and children's literacy sessions, reflective feedback sessions with parents and teacher-facilitators; artefacts and documents and guided observation. The researcher position which I assumed throughout the study was that of observer-participant. All data gathering techniques are discussed in full in Chapter 4.

Verbatim transcripts of all recordings, journals and researcher field notes, the observation schedule and artefacts formed the raw data. Transcripts and summaries of field notes, journal entries and observation notes were coded by action codes. Thereafter, focused coding was done, where each coded incident, such as event, issue, process or relationship was compared with similar coded incidents in order to develop categories, sub-categories and links from the raw data. Memo writing accompanied the entire analytical process. Analysis was part of an on-going cycle that continued while the programme was being implemented. In this way feedback from participants and my own reflections could be built into the programme immediately. Measures to ensure trustworthiness of the data were also implemented. Data gathering and analysis are described in full in Chapter 4. Finally, the findings were presented as a rich narrative divided into four sections and substantiated by artefacts, direct quotations from participants and reference to relevant literature. The findings are described in full in Chapter 5.

1.5.3   Ethical issues

I ensured that participation did not involve risks to participants; participation was voluntary; all information was confidential; privacy and anonymity were ensured by the use of pseudonyms; and participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any point without

being penalized. I also informed participants that the results of the study would be shared with the school and the families after the successful conclusion of the study. Formal written permission was obtained from:

- The Ethics Committee, College of Education, University of South Africa (cf. Appendix E).
- The director of WordWorks for use and modification of the Home-School Partnership programme (cf. Appendix D).
- The School Governing Body of Rising Rainbow (cf. Appendix A).
- Teachers (cf. Appendix B).
- Parents and children (cf. Appendix C).

1.6   CLARIFICATION OF TERMS

Key terms used in the study are defined in this section. A fuller discussion of these terms is included in the literature study (Chapters 2 and 3).

1.6.1   Family

The term family is used here in the broadest sense of the word. Family can mean the traditional mother, father, and one or more children. Family can also mean a grandmother or grandfather, and his or her grandchildren, a single mom or dad and children, a foster family, or any number of familial combination and structures. A parent is anyone who provides children with basic care, direction, support, protection, and guidance (Edwards 2004:11).

1.6.2   Family involvement

Family involvement is a process of helping parents use their abilities to benefit themselves, their children, and the educators. It is a developmental process that is built over a period of time through intentional planning and effort of every team member (Edwards 2004:13).

1.6.3   Literacy

Traditionally literacy has been commonly defined as the ability to read and write at a level of proficiency that is adequate for communication. More recently literacy has taken on several meanings. Definitions of literacy include using the basic cognitive skills required by reading and writing in ways that contribute to socio-economic development and to developing the capacity for social awareness and critical reflection as a basis for personal and social change (UNESCO 2006:147). A definition of literacy includes technological literacy, information literacy, mathematical literacy, scientific literacy and visual literacy. These are just a few examples (UNESCO 2006:150).

Thus, views of literacy have shifted from a narrow focus on reading and writing toward a more encompassing definition that seeks to capture literacy's social and cultural aspects, individual characteristics and immediate contexts. Taking into account the evolving debates, critiques and approaches to literacy, literature makes reference to four discrete understandings of literacy:

- Literacy as an autonomous set of skills. The most common understanding of literacy is that it is a set of tangible skills, particularly the cognitive skills of reading and writing, that are independent of the context in which they are acquired and the background of the person who acquires them. Scholars continue to disagree on the best way to acquire literacy (UNESCO 2006:148).

- Literacy as applied, practiced and situated. This understanding evolved as scholars argued that the ways in which literacy is practised vary by social and cultural context (UNESCO 2006:151). Wasik and Hermann (2004:4) describe literacy as both a natural or informal occurrence seen in everyday situations and experienced in home, family and community life, and (the more common view) as a formal occurrence in the context of organized instruction in educational settings.

- Literacy as a learning process. According to this approach literacy is seen as an active and broad-based learning process, rather than as a product of a more limited and focused educational intervention (UNESCO 2006:151). According to Wasik (Wasik & Hermann 2004:4) people adopt "ways with printed words" within different socio-cultural practices for different purposes and functions and that these "ways

with printed words" are always integrally and inextricably integrated with ways of talking, thinking, believing, knowing, acting, interacting, valuing and feeling.

- Literacy as text. A fourth way to understand literacy is to look at it in terms of the "subject matter" and the nature of the texts that are produced and consumed by literate individuals (UNESCO 2006:148).

In this study, reference to literacy includes all four understandings.

1.6.4   Family literacy

In general, family literacy is a concept that encompasses the ways that people learn and use literacy in their home and community lives and the ways in which parents impact and assist the literacy learning of their children (Crawford & Zygouris-Coe 2006:261).

Family literacy is concerned with literacy activities involving at least two generations. According to Train (2007:292) a family literacy programme will in general have three components: literacy for children, literacy for parents, and guidance for adults on how to encourage the literacy skills of their children or young relatives.

1.6.5   Emergent literacy

Emergent literacy can be described as a set of beliefs about how children read and write before receiving formal instruction. Emergent literacy encompasses the skills, knowledge and attitudes believed to be the developmental precursors to reading and writing. Whereas the earlier concept of 'reading readiness' suggested a discrete maturational point in time when children were ready to learn to read and write, emergent literacy proposes a smooth and continuous progression in children's literacy development between the early behaviour children displayed when interacting with print materials, and those displayed later once children could read independently.

Rather than seeing schools as the first or sole setting for children's literacy development, emergent literacy skills are developed during the pre-school years, influenced by both the home literacy environment and parent-child interactions. Emergent literacy is also based on the assumption that learning to read and write is a social and cultural process as well as a cognitive

one. The notion of emergent literacy has significant implications for all early childhood educators, including those working with learners with disabilities or who are at risk. Rather than waiting for some sort of 'readiness' to emerge in young learners before considering reading instruction, contemporary early childhood professionals seek to provide experiences along a literacy continuum, planning and structuring children's interactions with text and pictures from an early point. These experiences form the foundation for subsequent reading skills (Parette *et al*. 2009:356).

1.6.6   Early childhood

Education White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Development (DBE 2001a:5-7) defines early childhood development as an umbrella term that applies to the processes by which children from birth to at least 9 years grow and thrive physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, morally and socially. Reference to early childhood in this study implies a child within this age range, and therefore includes Grade 1 and Grade 2.

1.6.7   Young learners

In the context of this study young learners refer to 5-8 year olds who are enrolled in pre-school, Grade R, Grade 1 or Grade 2 in the South African schooling system. Grade R refers to the year before formal school and is not compulsory. The minimum admission age to Grade R is described in Article 5 of the South African Schools Act no 84 of 1966 as age 4 turning 5 by June 30 (RSA 1996b). Grade 1 refers to the first year of formal schooling and is compulsory. A child who is 5 years old may be admitted to Grade 1 provided he/she turns 6 before 30th June (RSA 1996b).

1.7   CHAPTER OUTLINE

The study is organised according to the following chapters:

Chapter 1 provides an overview and introduction to the study by identifying the problem and the goal of the study, as well as the research design.

Chapter 2 will give an overview of the theoretical frameworks important to literacy education and outlined the role of the family in literacy acquisition in historical and current context. The chapter further investigates barriers to participation in family literacy programmes, benefits of parent involvement in family literacy programmes and how family literacy can be incorporated into a comprehensive programme of parent involvement.

Chapter 3 will explore family structures and how family life impacts on home literacy practices and the state of literacy of South African families. I will also investigate literacy in formal education and existing family literacy programmes currently being used in South Africa.

Chapter 4 will articulate in detail the design of the study, which has been informed by an action research paradigm. It will also explain the measures and procedures that were chosen to collect the data, including sampling, data gathering and data analysis.

Chapter 5 integrates and presents the findings of the investigation.

Finally, an overview of the pertinent points of the study is given in chapter 6. Guidelines are suggested for the improvement of the tutor-mentor programme based on literature- and empirical studies. Final conclusions are drawn and recommendations made for improvement of practice and for further study.

1.8   SUMMARY

As the development of literacy starts at birth, the development thereof cannot be left to schools alone. Family literacy programmes are vehicles for educators and families to come together for the purpose of better understanding, supporting, and joyfully celebrating the literacy development of the children in their lives. It is as simple as schools and families working together for the best education of children. This chapter has introduced a study aimed at examining the role of family literacy programmes in support of emergent literacy in young learners. The research questions and aims have been formulated, a synopsis of the method used in the empirical inquiry has been outlines, key terms have been clarified and an overview given of the organisation of the thesis.

Chapter 2 presents selected theories and literature dealing with family literacy which informs the empirical inquiry.

CHAPTER 2
AN OVERVIEW OF FAMILY LITERACY AND FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAMMES

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to provide a literature review to inform the empirical inquiry into the implementation of a family literacy programme for young learners. The first section provides an introduction to relevant theories which have implications for early literacy acquisition in order to provide a general theoretical framework for the study. Thereafter, the evolving role of the family in the child's literacy acquisition is traced according to broad historical periods with special reference to developments in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This is followed by a discussion of the function of family literacy programmes, dominant approaches and the benefits to children, families, schools and communities. The barriers to effective participation by family and school in family literacy programmes are identified and discussed. Finally, attention is given to Epstein's (1987) benchmark model of comprehensive school-family-partnership as a strategy for the implementation of family literacy initiatives.

2.2 SELECTED THEORIES AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR FAMILY LITERACY PRACTICES

Domains of study and practice in education are informed by both implicit and explicit theoretical frameworks. However, Anfara (2008:870) points out that defining the term theoretical framework is not easy; the term lacks a lucid and consistent definition and leading writers deal with this topic in a wide variety of ways. In an effort to find greater clarity and consensus on the term, Anfara and Mertz (2006:xiii) review a number of overlapping definitions of theory to produce their own working definition: a theory can be seen as a set of interrelated propositions to describe, explain or predict phenomena and thus provide a lens with which to view the world. Anfara (2008:6) goes on to describe a theoretical framework as "any empirical or quasi-empirical theory of social and or psychological processes at a variety of levels (e.g., grand, mid-range and explanatory) that can be applied to the understanding phenomena." The function of a theoretical framework is to allow scholars and researchers to organize and synthesize knowledge within a field and act to describe, explain and predict

behaviour and experience (Doolittle & Camp 1999:1). These frameworks may be found in a wide range of fields of study and disciplines in the social and natural sciences. In this study the theories of Piaget, Dewey, Vygotsky and Freire have been chosen for their contribution to family literacy. In addition, the contribution of ecological theories and the notion of social capital have been described in terms of their relevance to the topic.

2.2.1   Piaget's theory of cognitive development

Jean Piaget (1952; 1955), a leading Swiss developmental psychologist of the twentieth century, underscored the role of experience in shaping cognitive development. Piaget integrated elements of psychology, biology, philosophy and logic into a comprehensive explanation of how knowledge is acquired (Doyle 2012:86). He portrayed the young child as intrinsically motivated by curiosity to make meaning from experiences and as successful in constructing knowledge from these experiences. He saw the child as not only an active discoverer, but also an inventor and a problem solver (Lourenco 2014:624; Piaget 1929; 1952; 1964; 1966).

Piaget regarded cognitive development as taking place in stages, with each stage representing new and distinguishable forms of knowing. The stages are integrative in that a given stage always integrates its predecessor; and they are sequential with the lower stages occurring before the higher stages. The stages are also hierarchical and structural (Lourenco 2014:624). Cognitive development, according to Piaget, proceeds through four stages, namely the sensori-motor stage, the pre-operational stage, the stage of concrete operations and finally, the stage of formal operations.

In the sensori-motor stage, which spans birth to age 2, infants and toddlers understand things in terms of their senses and motor activity (Berns 2016:19,188; Piaget 1929; 1952; 1964; 1966). The majority of pre-schoolers (2 to 7 years) operate in what Piaget calls the pre-operational stage. At this stage the child is not yet capable of using a logical process of reasoning on the basis of concrete evidence. The pre-operational child is characterised by animism, egocentrism, transductive reasoning, syncretism, lack of decentring, lack of classification, lack of seriation and conservation skills, and, pertinent to this study, a rapid acquisition of language (Berns 2016:67,189). During this phase children begin to make use of symbols to represent objects. This is evident in their drawings and experimental writing.

In the concrete operational stage (7-10 years) the child is capable of using a logical process of reasoning on the basis of concrete evidence. The child can integrate conceptually separate experiences and draw a conclusion, and is confident of his conclusion (Berns 2016:189).

The formal operational stage is the fourth and final stage in cognitive development and is attained after the age of 12. According to Piaget this is the highest level of thinking attainable by man. At this level, a person is no longer restricted to reasoning based on concrete evidence, but is capable of going beyond concrete evidence as he uses his imagination. A person who has attained formal operations is able to concentrate his thought on things that have no existence except in his own mind. If children are to attain this stage, it is essential that they be provided with a suitable environment (Berns 2016:189; Piaget 1929; 1952, 1964; 1966).

In terms of **family literacy programmes**, young learners (5-7 years) are in the pre-operational stage, ready to move into the concrete operational stage. The egocentrism, animism and rapid acquisition of language that characterises children in this phase form a basis for their participation in family literacy programmes. Building on young children's lively imagination, a successful family literacy programme can make good use of stories portraying animals as beings able to speak. Further, Piaget proposed social interaction as a means to overcome egocentrism. Social interaction is fundamental to family literacy programmes in which children's literacy is encouraged within the immediate interaction of the family. The fact that children in this phase acquire language rapidly supports their active participation in family literacy programmes. Piaget believed that little restriction should be placed on spontaneous conversation during learning at this stage and this is encouraged during the implementation of family literacy programmes. Finally, Piaget's view that learning takes place through social interaction (including language) and human relationships, supports group discussions as an essential component in family literacy programmes as a means to facilitate opportunities to strengthen a young learner's language development and enrich his/her vocabulary.

2.2.2   Dewey's pragmatism

John Dewey is often seen as the great critic of traditionalism in schooling. He advocated a child-centred approach to learning and an active learning curriculum and school system. Dewey viewed the individual as part of a social whole and saw schooling as a powerful socialising experience that helps young people develop skills to participate in democratic life (Feinberg

2014:215). For Dewey, the individual and society need each other and make one another possible (Monchinski 2010:87). In his pedagogic creed, Dewey (1897) spoke of the individual as a "social individual", and society as "an organic union of individuals". Dewey affirmed that human beings, like other natural phenomena, are related and associated. According to him, society was not possible without individuals, and individuality is not possible without society. For Dewey, autonomy was grounded in group living. Dewey saw education as the means by which new members of a group are fitted to the group and thus the individual is fitted into the society (Dewey 1938).

Dewey found it reprehensible that the subject matter of schooling had little, if any, direct connection to children's lives and that when the child enters the school he has to put out of mind many ideas, interests, and activities that predominate in his home and neighbourhood (Monchinski 2010:91). Dewey also understood that forms of inquiry would change and evolve over time and that schooling would need to constantly adjust to the developmental needs of the learners and the forms of knowledge appropriate for a given time and place (Feinberg 2014:215). **Dewey alerts educators** to the fact that education is not consigned to schools only but constitutes all the relationships and interactions by which we learn how to live as individuals in association with others (Dewey 1938). Thus Dewey's approach to learning implies that literacy learning of the child cannot be separated from the home environment. Family literacy programmes are ideal to bridge the gap between home and school and ensure that literacy learning develop in real-life settings.

2.2.3   Vygotsky's social-constructivist theory

Lev Vygotsky was a celebrated Russian psychologist and is considered to be the father of the social-constructivist theory (Yasnitsky 2014:844). Vygotsky's social-constructivist theory emphasises the role of more capable others in scaffolding the learning of children (Berns 2016:243,323). Although Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development is similar to Piaget's in its emphasis on the active nature of the young learner, it underscores the social nature of learning (Doyle 2012:86). Vygotsky considered the role of language, both in thought and in social interaction, critical for mediating scaffolding, a process by which an adult or a more capable learner would work in the child's zone of proximal development to facilitate the child's new learning (Morrell 2008:4; Girolametto, Weitzman & Greenberg 2012:48; Vygotsky 1978). Vygotsky used the term 'zone of proximal development' to refer to the space between what

learners can do independently and what they can do while participating with more capable others (Berns 2016:243). Vygotsky also believed that we learn through both the cognitive and affective domains, and how we feel about what we are learning is just as important as how we are learning. He saw the adult's deliberate engagement and guided participation in supporting the child's learning as the most influential factor in the learning process (Doyle 2012:86).

Vygotsky's theory, amongst others, **resulted** in an increasing interest in the years before formal education that were hitherto regarded as a waiting period before the introduction of formal education. As Vygotsky's theory emphasises the role of more capable others in scaffolding the learning of children, family literacy programmes that support parents in mentoring their children are effective (Doyle & Zhang 2011:223; Vygotsky 1978). When applied to literacy interactions adults' talk about letter names and the sounds they make may help young learners understand that letters can be named, are associated with sounds, and can be combined in different ways to produce words that have meaning (Giromaletto *et al.* 2012:48). For example, in response to a child's request for assistance in writing the word *hen*, the educator may scaffold by pointing out an alphabet letter name ("That's a H"), drawing attention to the sound of the letter ("This letter says /h/"), or referring to the specific word (Let's write the word "*hen*"). As the child collaborates by responding, the educator may scaffold at a higher level by providing literacy feedback and questioning that promote further learning (e.g. "Hen starts with the sound /h/. What other words start with /h/?") Family literacy environments may provide a safe environment for parents to practice and to become more confident in employing these scaffolding skills to support their children's language acquisition.

2.2.4   Freire's socio-cultural perspective

Brazilian educator Paulo Freire is generally considered to be the most significant educationalist of the late twentieth century and made an authoritative contribution to the practice of literacy education (Beck & Purcell 2010:25; Glass 2014:336). A Freirean approach to education is underpinned by some basic assumptions as outlined in Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire 2006). Freire's understanding is that all social phenomena are produced by the complex interplay of opposing structural forces: labour/capital, rich/poor and oppressor/oppressed. This approach is neither one of empty theorising nor of meaningless action but a fusing of critical reflection on the world and action to change it, to humanise it, to make it more just. For Freire, dialogue lies at the heart of this process of humanisation (Morrell 2008:53).

According to Freire (2006) no education is neutral. It either domesticates and shapes people to fit in and function within the given social order, described by Freire as "banking education", or liberates, causing people to act for change through critical analysis described as "problem-posing" education (Freire 2006:72-86; Beck & Purcell 2010:27; Glass 2014:337). Some kind of education, Freire believed, mediates between who we innately are and who we should be (Glass 2014:336).

Freire (2006:85) believed it is extremely difficult for an educator to be aware of their own cultural assumptions and values which they unconsciously bring to their practice and impose on the people they work with. Freire describes this practice as cultural invasion. According to what Freire referred to as the "Banking System of Education", the teacher's task is "to fill" students with the contents of his narration (Monchinski 2010:30; Morrell 2008:54; Glass 2014:337; Freire 2006:86). In this approach, learners are conditioned to be silent and to rely on experts to make decisions for them, thus strengthening their powerlessness. According to Freire, systematic, or public education is indicative of a banking system of education, where the teacher occupies a superior position and the student an inferior one (Monchinski 2010:108). According to the "problem-posing approach" learners are required to play a reflective part in their own liberation. Freire's critical pedagogy seeks to develop critical consciousness in learners, a state where learners see themselves and their lives in the context of their social reality and become capable of acting to change (Beck & Purcell 2010:28; Glass 2014:338).

Freire believed that adults would ultimately be able to acquire dominant literacies if they were first taught by drawing on the language and experiences most meaningful to them. Dominant literacies can be seen as the kinds of literacy transmitted through official instruction in schools, often to the neglect of other forms of literacies based on, for example, social contexts and lived realities (UNESCO 2004:14). Freire cautioned that the experiences, which learners bring with them to the learning situation, are valuable and should not be ignored by the educator (Morrell 2008:54). Freire (2006) refers to this as 'funds of knowledge'. He insisted that teachers had a professional responsibility and expertise to construct meaningful learning environments in which learning can take place (Glass 2014:339).

Freire (2006) states that learning to read the written word is intertwined with the knowledge and meaning that is derived from reading one's world. Reading the world, according to Freire,

includes understanding how our lives are shaped by complex and multifaceted socio-cultural factors – our cultural identity, family history, employment, education, community and long-term (individual and collective) goals and dreams (Ordonez-Jasis & Ortiz 2006:42). These emerging understandings influence how we interpret and interact with text, which in turn greatly influences how we learn to reread or decode our worlds and everyday realities.

An important implication of Freire's approach to literacy acquisition is that when creating comprehensive and culturally relevant family literacy programmes, educators need to try to read the worlds of the children they teach, and that of their families. As teachers talk with families in order to understand their lives outside of school, they not only gain a better sense of families' socio-cultural contexts, but they also validate a wealth of stories, dispositions, motivations, and cultural information or "funds of knowledge" that become the building blocks for a comprehensive family literacy programme. Further, there is a critical link between family literacy, self-development and empowerment, for literacy enables transformative thought and social action. Family literacy programmes as a social and transformative act can help families reflect on, understand, and change their social conditions (Ordonez-Jasis & Ortiz 2006:46).

2.2.5 Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory

Developmental psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner (Berns 2016:19) looked beyond general developmental patterns and proposed various ecological settings in which the child participates, such as the family, to explain individual differences. Up until the twentieth century the home and school were largely seen as two separate entities. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory posited that the school and home cannot be separated, and influence each other reciprocally (Van Wyk 2010:204; Bronfenbrenner 1986:723; Berns 2016:20-31). Bronfenbrenner promoted a shift toward recognising the family itself as a more appropriate focus of intervention than the child, arguing that "the family seems to be the most effective and economic system for fostering and sustaining the child's development" (Wasik & Hermann 2004:10; Doyle 2012:89; Bronfenbrenner 1986:723). Viewing family literacy from an ecological perspective, Bronfenbrenner observed that although the family is the principal context in which human development takes place, it is but one of several settings in which developmental processes can and do occur. Moreover, the processes operating in different settings are not independent of each other. Events at home can affect the child's progress in school, and vice versa. Related to this is an understanding that schools are an inextricable part

of society, as well as of the community in which they belong. Schools are thus seen as social sub-systems, which cannot function in isolation of their social environment. Related to systems theory is Bronfenbrenner's theory of ecological systems (1979), which recognises the need to see learning as a social process affected by forces at many levels. Bronfenbrenner (1986:724) likens the complex setting in which children live, to an ecosystem – what happens in one part, will affect the other parts. Bronfenbrenner describes the ecological environment of the child as a macrostructure with four levels (see figure 2.1), with an underlying belief system (Swick & Williams 2006:371; Bronfenbrenner 1986:723).

Level 1, also referred to as the microsystem, is the child's immediate, primary setting (home, school etc.) (Berns 2016:21).

Level 2, the second basic structure also known as the mesosystem, is the interaction between two or more elements of a developing person's microsystem. Although the family is the principal context in which human development takes place, it is but one of several settings in which developmental processes can and do occur. The impact of mesosystems on the child depends on the number and quality of inter-relationships (Berns 2016:23).

Level 3, also known as the exosystem (exo meaning outside), involves settings beyond the child, such as the parent's workplace, the parents' social networks, and lastly the community influences on family functioning (Bronfenbrenner 1986:728). Available networks, (i.e. the parents' circle of friends and acquaintances, and influences in the community, such as the church), are also seen as a form of social capital (cf. 2.2.7 below). Parents' job situations, such as regular working hours, a stabilised income or unemployment also impacts on the family and eventually spills over to affect the child's performance at school (Berns 2016:24). It is also believed that the structure and content of activities in the parents' jobs can influence families' childrearing values. Work absorption implies that parents have little time left for non-work activities, including spending time with their children. Work absorption often tended to generate guilt and increased irritability and impatience in dealing with the child. Even the job of discipline often fell to the mothers (Bronfenbrenner 1986:729). With all these demands on parents, little time is left to support and enhance their children's developmental needs, and more specifically the emergent literacy needs of their children.

Level 4, the macrosystem includes a wide range of developmental influences such as race, ethnicity, religion, economics and political ideologies. Democracy is the basic belief system of South Africa and is considered a macrosystem. Democratic ideology affects school-family interactions, a mesosystem, in that schools must inform parents of policies and parents have the right to question those policies (Berns 2016:25).
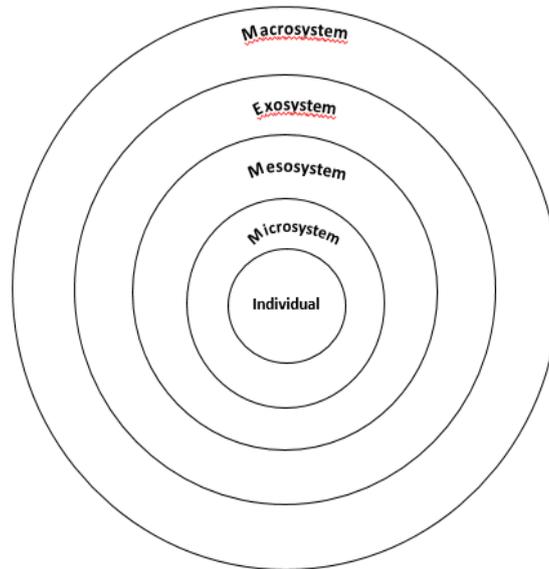
Figure 2.1 Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model of development
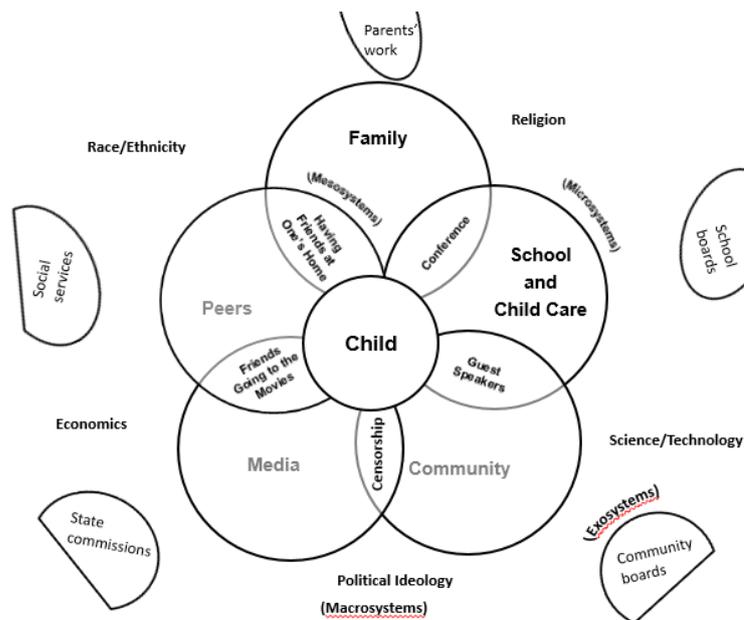
Figure 2.2 Bern's depiction of Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model of human development

Source: Berns 2016:26

Bronfenbrenner's systems model (see figure 2.2) provides **a helpful fostering framework** for interaction between families and schools since all of the abovementioned dynamic and interactive systems influence family functioning. Bronfenbrenner's model draws the attention to the real reasons and contexts which cause inequalities in children's knowledge and skills. In terms of literacy programmes, the ecological model stresses the powerful influences of family processes on a child's literacy development (Bronfenbrenner 1986:726). Moreover, implementers of family literacy programmes should understand the contexts in which families operate, inclusive of the cultural, social, economic and educational dynamics that are a part of families' various systems (Swick & Williams 2006:375). Further, family literacy programmes are based on the assumption that families provide the first context for meaningful literacy experiences; only after this do the school and the wider society take on a larger role as the children mature. In addition, by encouraging close interaction between parents and children while participating in literacy activities, family literacy programmes have the potential to assist parents in identifying and developing caring and loving microsystems. Through family literacy endeavours, many parents can also be empowered in their exosystemic relationships in the workplace and broader society by the development of their own literacy skills. In summary, family literacy programmes strengthen the micro-, meso- and exosystemic relationships of both parents and children.

2.2.6   Epstein's ecological theory of overlapping spheres

An influential model of family engagement in education with clear implications for family literacy is Joyce Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres, developed in the 1980's. (Epstein 1987; Epstein 1995b:214). Although Epstein does not openly acknowledge Bronfenbrenner, she developed an ecological theory that is also based on reciprocal interaction between different social spheres: the family, school and community. Epstein (1987; Epstein 1995b:214) holds the following underlying perspectives about relations between the family and the school: families and schools have separate responsibilities; families and schools have shared responsibilities; and families and schools have sequential responsibilities. Some schools stress the separate responsibilities of families and schools. According to this view, the distinct goals of parents and teachers are best achieved when teachers keep a professional distance from and equal standards for children in their classrooms, in contrast with parents who develop personal relationships with and individual expectations for their children at home. In contrast, the shared responsibilities of the school and home emphasise the coordination, cooperation and

complementary nature of schools and families and encourage collaboration between the two. In reality, schools and families share responsibilities for the socialisation of the child. These common goals for children are achieved most effectively when teachers and parents work together. According to this perspective an overlap of responsibilities between parents and teachers is expected. Finally, the sequential perspective stresses the critical stages of parents and teachers' contribution to child development. Parents teach needed skills to children until the time of their formal education around the ages of five or six. Then, teachers assume the primary responsibility for children's education (Epstein 1995a:701-702).

However, Epstein (1987) acknowledges that these perspectives on family-school relations do not explain motivations to reinforce or remove boundaries between schools and families nor change patterns in home-school relations. They also fail to explain the influence families and schools have on each other, nor take cognisance of learner development and the effect thereof on home-school relations. To address all the variables, Epstein (1987:126) proposed an integrated theory of family-school relations characterised by a set of overlapping spheres of influence that posited that the most effective families have overlapping shared goals and missions concerning children with school and society.

The model of overlapping spheres assumes that the mutual interests of families and schools can be successfully promoted by the policies and programmes of organisations and the actions of individuals in the organisations (Epstein 1987:130). The model recognises that, although some practices of families and schools are conducted independently, others reflect the shared responsibilities of parents and educators for children's learning. When teachers adhere to the perspective of separate responsibilities, they emphasise the specialised skills required by teachers for school training and by parents for home training. With specialisation comes a division of labour that pulls the spheres apart (Epstein 1995a:702). However, when teachers and parents emphasise their shared responsibilities, they support the generalisation of skills required by teachers and by parents to produce successful learners. Their combined endeavour pushes the spheres of family and school influence together, increases interaction between parents and school and creates school-like families and family-like schools.

A family-like school recognises each child's individuality and makes each child feel special and included. Such schools welcome all families, and not just those that are easy to reach (Epstein 1995a:702). A school-like family recognises that each child is also a learner and it

reinforces the importance of school, homework, and the activities that build academic skills and feelings of success (Epstein 1992:502). Later, Epstein (in Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders & Simon 1997) added the community as a third overlapping sphere of influence. This means that communities with groups of parents create school-like opportunities, events and programmes that reinforce, recognise, and reward learners for good progress, creativity and excellence. Communities also create family-like settings, services and events to enable families to better support their children. Community-minded families and learners help their neighbourhoods and other families (Epstein 1995a:702). Epstein's model is illustrated in Figure 2.3.
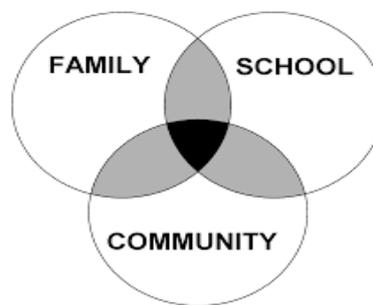
Figure 2.3 Epstein's model of overlapping spheres

Source: Adapted from Epstein (1987)

Because it is assumed that the child is the reason for the connections between home and school the model focusses on the key role of the child as learner in interactions between families and schools, parents and teachers, or the community. Learners are the key to successful school and family partnerships. Epstein (1995a:702) explains that learners are the main actors in their education, development, and success in school. However schools, family and community partnerships do not automatically produce successful learners. Rather, partnership activities should be intentionally designed to engage, guide and motivate learners to produce their own successes. According to Padak and Rasinski (2000:2) and Michael *et al.* (2012:59), if children feel cared for and are encouraged to work hard in the role of learner they are more likely to do their best academically and to remain in school (cf. 2.6.1 below).

Epstein's ecological theory of overlapping spheres **creates a framework for schools, family and communities to work together** to support the literacy development of learners. This is more fully explored in section 2.8.1.1 of this chapter.

2.2.7   Social capital theories

Broady (2014:101) defines 'social capital' as the potentially available assets ready to be activated when required. Berns (2016:57) used the term 'social capital' to refer to individual and communal time and energy (human resources) available for networking, personal recreation, community improvement, civic engagement and other activities that create social bonds between individuals and groups of people. For Parcel *et al.* (2010:830) the term social capital not only includes the resources and relationships between people, but also refers to the bonds between parents and children useful in promoting development, and as such the time and attention parents spend in interaction with their children in monitoring their activities. St. Clair (2008:84) defines social capital as the network of enabling social relationships widely accepted as a precursor of learning and poverty reduction. According to Beck and Purcell (2010:11) social capital refers to the name that is given to the networks that people belong to, along with the norms, relationships, values and informal sanctions that shape the nature and quantity of these interactions. Networks develop and are sustained if people trust each other and there is a feeling of reciprocity.

A significant amount of variance in children's achievement can be explained by social capital, which refers to the social networks, norms and trusts that facilitate educational achievements, particularly those established between parents, learners and schools (Van Wyk 2010:204; Parcel *et al.* 2010:828). Coleman, a sociologist and lead researcher at the Johns Hopkins University (Broady 2014:149,151), examined the relationship between school-based resources and learner achievement. Coleman's report offered an empirical approach to measure the types of inputs that were assumed to affect schooling outputs (Coleman 1988; 1990; 1994; cf. also Beck and Purcell 2010:11; Lukk & Veisson 2007:57). Scholars agree that social capital is not a single entity that families either have or don't have, but should rather be seen as multi-dimensional, existing on at least three dimensions. Drawing on the work of Coleman, Woolcock (2001:13) explained the dimensions as follows:

- Bonding: Bonding refers to homogeneous relationships or between people who have similarities (i.e. among family members, people of similar age or within ethnic groups). Bonding provides a sense of belonging and is critical to the sense of well-being of the members of families and groups.

30

- Bridging: Bridging refers to connections across different and diverse social groups (e.g. across ethnic groups), and includes relationships with more distant friends, relations and neighbours.
- Linking: Linking social capital provides opportunities of different groups with new contacts, often with individuals in positions of power. Linking provides families with access to advice, resources and information.

Where there are high levels of social capital, people feel that they are part of various communities, will participate in local networks and organisations, will help others in time of need, will welcome strangers, and will be willing to help out with something (but no one will do everything) (Woolcock 2001:15).

Coleman (1988; 1990; 1994) distinguishes between the different elements of social capital provided by the home and school in the socialisation of the child. One category of inputs, which are described as opportunities, demands and rewards, comes from the school. The second category of inputs, described as attitudes, effort, and conception of self, are instilled mainly by the social environment of the home. In other words, the learner's positive ideas about and attitudes towards the importance of education begin with high parental expectations and high levels of parent-child interaction. This means that financially poor families may still have high educational aspirations for their children, interact regularly with them and support educational pursuits (Van Wyk 2010:205). On the other hand, it is important to note that family break-up depletes social capital. Thus, many single-parent homes, or homes headed by grandparents or older siblings, are associated with limited social capital.

Often neither teachers nor families recognise the social capital that families bring to a partnership (cf. 2.5.1). For example, many families have family, friend and community networks in place that support their health and well-being. Families may have implemented many kinds of formal and informal networks with each other. Families also possess what Freire (2006) (cf. 2.2.4 above) referred to as 'funds of knowledge' that is, the household/community knowledge and skills that are essential for the functioning of the family (Longwell-Grice & McIntyre 2006:116).

Instead of seeing parents as a threat or a nuisance teachers should rather seek help from families if they are to achieve academic targets. Just as more information about the schools allows parents to assist their children better, the more information teachers have about the children's home environment the better equipped they will be to accommodate the needs of the parents and the children. Teachers should rather view parental involvement as a form of social capital (Lukk & Veisson 2007:56). Family literacy programmes may provide a platform for the establishment of networks that **will offer all participants** the opportunity to **be a resource to others**. Through the networking opportunities created by family literacy programmes parents will also be able to strengthen their network of social capital.

2.2.8   Conclusion

An overview of the theoretical frameworks confirmed once again how and why social contexts matter for children's literacy acquisition, and why it is so important for the home and the school to work together to achieve the desired literacy outcomes. Theoretical models that place education solutions solely in the hands of experts (educators) are not only inappropriate, but are less likely to be effective since they strip parents and families, as the first context of learning, of their self-confidence. Literacy skills can no longer be taught in isolation, but should be linked to real life situations where they are put to practice. Family literacy programmes can be used effectively as a vehicle to activate the family's funds of knowledge, and can bring together families and schools as interlocking and overlapping systems.

2.3   THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY IN LITERACY ACQUISITION IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The second millennial developmental goal is to achieve universal primary education, which implies the achievement of literacy for every child (UNESCO 2015). However, views of the family as primary learning context for literacy have evolved over time. This section traces the role of the family in the child's acquisition of literacy as expressed during different historical periods in order to understand current approaches to family literacy.

2.3.1   Antiquity

In the ancient world information was primarily passed from person to person by word of mouth, and teaching and learning took place in the open air. In Roman times only boys were taught to read and write. Access to print was limited to scarce and handwritten manuscripts which were owned only by the wealthy. Plato argued that education should be compulsory and should commence at the earliest age; he referred to the education of the unborn child as the "athletics of the embryo" (Monchinski 2010:165). In the 1st century AD the Roman rhetorician, Quintilian (ca.35 to ca.98 CE), challenged the existing views of the poets Hesiod and Erathosthenes, who believed that reading instruction should not begin until young boys reached their 7th year and had entered formal schooling. Quintilian argued that children younger than seven could profitably participate in literacy education provided that the instructor ensured that the studies were amusing and entertaining, such as playing with ivory letters to learn the alphabet (Bourelle 2014:684; Van Kleeck & Schuele 2010:342; Quintilian's institute of oratory 1856, chapter 1:30-37).

2.3.2   Middle Ages

During the Middle Ages the very notion of childhood was lost. The small child was dressed as an adult and took part in the activities of adults as soon as he was able to (Mook 2007:159-160). Children mainly grew up in a non-literate world where learning took place not through education, but through face-to-face relationships, apprenticeship and service. Formal learning was limited almost exclusively to boys. For the first millennium AD, Europe did not have any system of formal schooling until notions of individuality and childhood finally re-awoke in the Renaissance period. Even thereafter formal schooling and thus literacy learning was mainly limited to the members of the elite, and only to boys (Lowe 2009:22).

2.3.3   The Reformation and the Enlightenment

The Protestant Reformation in the 1500s introduced the call for universal literacy with the goal that everyone should become literate so that they could read the Scriptures in their own language (Spierling 2008). During this time literacy acquisition often had the Bible, prayer books, hymnbooks and other religious texts as the primary text of instruction (Barry 2008:33; Whitehead & Wilkinson 2008:9; Openjuru & Lyster 2007:99). In Europe and the colonies, the

Christian faith provided an impetus for many literacy activities (Openjuru & Lyster 2007:99), as the goal of reading instruction in the 1600s and 1700s was to read the Bible. Reading instruction typically started at a very young age, took place in the home, and used formal didactic techniques that were precursors to modern phonics approaches. The task of teaching reading and writing often rested with mothers, who were considered the best teachers for children from birth to age five. Thus, if children later attended formal schooling, they often had been taught to read and write at home (Van Kleeck & Schuele 2010:343).

Quintilian's idea that learning among very young children should be done in a fun manner resurfaced in the ideas of the British philosopher Lohn Locke (1632-1704). In 1693, Locke argued in '*Some thoughts concerning education*' that children are born *tabula rasa* (blank slates), that reading instruction should begin as soon as a child could talk, and should be carried out in play-like activities (Locke 2000; McNulty 2014:492; Berns 2016:138). Locke also believed that a child's education lay in the imitation of his/her parents, including the imitation of their literacy activities (McNulty 2014:494). Locke emphasized that the child's first academic education centred on the child learning to read, but that the child should not see reading as a task enforced on him. For this reason Locke viewed the teaching of grammar as inappropriate in teaching the child to become literate.

Locke's ideas contain some key tenets that are still discussed today, such as ensuring that literacy activities are engaging for young children and that these activities are adapted to individual learners (Van Kleeck & Schuele 2010:342; Halsall 1998). Locke proposed that a child should first be given one simple idea, and only upon mastery should be introduced to the next, more complex task. Locke viewed adults as "no longer blank slates", but with developed understandings, although likely to be flawed. People were advised to seek out other people to inform themselves of flawed reasoning. Although he believed that people gain knowledge by reading, he also believed that the reader's self-reliance cannot amount to full independence. He encouraged his readers to carefully reflect on their principles and examine themselves for any prejudices that might have influenced their judgement. Adults, according to Locke, should therefore be guided to improve their judgement and inform their decisions. Locke therefore recommended adults should only commit themselves to broad general reading and to conversations with person with notions different from their own. Ensuring that they interact with people with different views and expertise would give their reasoning skills more exercise (Locke 2000; McNulty 2014:492).

In 1762 the ideas of the French romantic philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) began to take root in Europe when his book *Emile, or On Education* was published (Oelkers 2014:720). The book, with a focus on child-centred learning, presented a radical departure from prevailing views about children's education and had a profound impact on the education of young children (Rousseau 1762). Rousseau, like Locke, believed that all education should take place in the home, not just that of very young children (Monchinski 2010:171,174). However, Rousseau had strong opinions of the different roles of men and women and maintained that education should not be in the hands of mothers but should be relegated to male tutors. Rousseau (1762; Oelkers 2014:722,723) went far beyond Locke's ideas that learning should be fun. He was against any form of formal, didactic teaching and advocated informal learning experiences, such as games that exercised the five senses and encouraged the exploration of the physical environment (Monchinski 2010:176). He departed dramatically from Locke regarding teaching reading and proposed that children should not be taught to read until they wanted to learn. Rousseau believed that children are innately good and need freedom to grow because insensitive caregivers might corrupt them (Berns 2016:138). Reading instruction for the imaginary 'Emile' of his book therefore did not commence until the age of 12 (Monchinski 2010:171).

Similar to the writings of Rousseau, the ideas presented in Maria and Richard Edgeworth's book *Practical Education*, published in England in 1798, are still evident today. A daughter and father team, the Edgeworths did not despise parents as early educators, particular mothers, as was found in Rousseau's writing. Instead they stressed the enduring effects of early education, recommending that reading instruction begin at age four. The Edgeworths claimed that children should read books or have books read to them that would cultivate the 'habit of reasoning' (Edgeworth & Edgeworth 1798:299). Similarly, today Van Kleeck and Schuele (2010:343) argue that middle-class parents who read to their young children should often engage them in higher level thinking requiring inferencing.

With the advent of industrialisation in the mid-1700s in England and other European countries, working-class mothers entered factories to work. Many young mothers were no longer available to make a contribution to education and particularly to reading instruction. During this time (1746-1827) Pestalozzi, a Swiss educator, represents a beginning point for early childhood education as he was the first to systemize the science of teaching (Smith 2014:601; Johann Pestalozzi 2015). Like Rousseau, Pestalozzi thought true education should be based on

nature. He made a distinction between socialisation and early education. However, he saw the family and home, not the wilds of nature, as the most natural environment for children, and emphasized the role of mothers in education. Pestalozzi's philosophy of education was based on the premise that learning occurs most effectively in an emotionally secure environment where knowledge is acquired by sensory perception (Smith 2014:601). He therefore did not recommend the use of books but relied on children's attentiveness, carefulness and reliability. Pestalozzi founded the first teachers' college and taught that no words should be used for instruction until after learners had engaged in a process of sense impression. He rejected the broadly held assumptions that the purpose of school was to teach the written word, and that children should be punished for not meeting academic expectations. The term *Anschauung* was defined by Pestalozzi as "things before words, concrete before abstract." Learners engaged in field trips where they collected objects. They closely examined the items, drawing and talking about their observations. Only then were they instructed to write about their objects and to read to others what they have written. Pestalozzi firmly believed in balanced instruction and included innovative activities such as drawing, singing and physical exercise (Smith 2014:601).

Froebel (1782-1852), a German educator and student of Pestalozzi, introduced the idea of kindergarten, the true beginning of modern pre-school education, with important implications for literacy learning (Hutchison 2004:2-3; Provenzo 2014:342). With Froebel preschool education begins as a planned, organised portion of the school system. He believed that children had unique needs and potential that required careful development and nurturing. According to Froebel children should begin to be educated shortly after birth. Play was the mode through which the child achieved equilibrium through harmonious development (Hutchison 2004:4).

2.3.4   The 18th and 19th century

The effects of the Industrial Revolution and ideas of organised care and education of children spread in Europe during the 1800s. In 1816 Robert Owen established the first 'infant school' in Scotland. Infant schools provided publicly funded education for children age five to seven and represented the first level of compulsory education in England. Not only had parenting became more child-centred (Berns 2016:138); even infant schools encouraged children's choice. For example, children typically choose where to sit and whether they would like to

work individually or with peers. Infant schools permitted freedom of movement and conversation, encouraging children's natural curiosity and exploratory tendencies. However, infant schools did not encourage the formal teaching of literacy (Infant schools in England 2015). In 1820 American educators also began experimenting with the idea of infant schools (Infant schools in England 2015). The influence of the emphasis on motor activities in early infant schools can be detected in the modern belief that various forms of play should dominate early childhood education and the kindergarten classroom. Until very recently infant school philosophy was influential in early childhood education; it was particularly reflected in the belief across most early childhood institutions that teaching the alphabet to children in the pre-school years was developmentally inappropriate (Wasik & Hermann 2004:6; Crawford & Zygouris-Coe 2006:262). Developmentally appropriate caregiving, according to Copple and Bredekamp (2009) and Berns (2016:197), involve observation, sensitivity to children's needs, and responsiveness. Teachers create a stimulating environment, plan engaging activities, enable children to initiate learning, and facilitate self-regulatory behaviour in children.

The introduction of infant schools influenced the care and education of older children as well. The implementation of compulsory schooling in formal institutions (which originated in Prussia in the late 18th century and was only introduced in England and Wales in the late 1800's) provided a context for older children to learn the 'mature ways of their community' since many parents no longer worked at home (Wasik & Hermann 2004:6). With the advent of compulsory education the responsibility for teaching reading fell to the schools, and the strong role of the family in teaching early literacy began to wane (Wasik & Hermann 2004:6). In the 1800's mothers were advised against teaching reading or other academic skills to children younger than six years old. It was believed that if all children were required to go to school, teaching them to read ahead of that time would usurp the role of the primary school teacher (Van Kleeck & Schuele 2010:343-344; Rogoff 2003:102). Schools, being age-graded by necessity so that compulsory attendance could be enforced, needed society's help in discouraging practices that would result in children of the same age having markedly different skill levels. These ideas can still be traced in modern society where most middle-class parents refrain from actually teaching their children to read. However, they frequently and typically teach their children letter names and sounds in playful fashion, but they are much less likely to teach them to write letters or to read or write words (Van Kleeck & Schuele 2010:344).

By the end of the 1800s and through most of the 1900s, ideas about the role of the family in early literacy development remained under the influence of romantic philosophy and progressive ideas about education. What children learned at home was best learned in a playful, enjoyable manner (Van Kleeck & Schuele 2010:344). In her book '*Eleanor learns to read*', Harriet Iredell (1898) proposed that, through activities such as book sharing and scribbling, young preliterate children were learning things about how print works and what it is useful for, and as such were taking their first steps in learning to read and write. In the early 1900's Edmund Huey (1870-1913), an educational psychologist (1908:143,336) dedicated a whole chapter in his book on learning to read at home and the benefits of natural literacy experiences at home; he argued that home experiences assist in preparing children for later literacy learning in school.

2.3.5   The 20th century

For much of the early 20th century the reading readiness perspective had a dominant influence on literacy instruction in preschool and the early school years. Initially the readiness view was solely maturational; it was argued that children could not perceive letters or words until they had reached a mental age of 6½ years (Wasik & Hermann 2004:6). Over time, the readiness view came to encompass the notion that teaching prerequisite skills could promote reading readiness. There was never unanimous agreement within the readiness perspective.

A substantial challenge to the readiness perspective began in the 1970's through the emergent literacy movement introduced by a New Zealander, Marie Clay (1977). The emergent literacy movement began attracting an increasing number of educators in other parts of the world during the 1980s (Van Kleeck & Schuele 2010:347). This movement stressed the concepts about literacy, and attitudes toward literacy, that pre-schoolers can develop as they engage in naturally occurring literacy activities in the course of their everyday interaction within their families and community. By the late 1980's research from the emergent literacy perspective had accumulated substantial research evidence regarding the specific activities and resultant skills and knowledge about literacy that young children can acquire in their home environments before they reach formal schooling (Hannon & Bird 2004:24). In the child's everyday informal interactions with the print used by adults in their environment, in the context of sharing books with adults and in their own early exploration with scribbling and writing, children become aware that print is meaningful and useful (Wasik & Hermann 2004:5). These attitudes and

beliefs lay important foundations for children's eventual transition to conventional reading and writing (Van Kleeck & Schuele 2010:344; Doyle 2012:87).

During the last decades of the twentieth century parent involvement in the teaching of literacy has emerged as an important parental task. At first parents were enjoined to support their children's school literacy learning through encouragement of, and demonstrating an interest in school practices. To this end parents were informed by schools and teachers about schools' literacy policies and practices. Parent involvement in education in general and in literacy in particular was often seen as a matter of visiting the school; the school, not home, was assumed to be the key site for literacy learning. Furthermore, reading was prioritised over writing (Hannon & Bird 2004:20).

2.3.6   Current views on family literacy

In the 21st century becoming literate is seen as a social process heavily influenced by a child's search for meaning. Sharing books with young pre-readers and reading aloud to children is singled out as the most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading. Doyle (2012:86) recommends that books should be shared in an interactive manner that encourages the child's verbal participation in the activity for the greatest benefit to the child. Current research in emergent literacy has penetrated education practice and many recommendations to encourage early literacy extend beyond book sharing to many other activities which apply to both what parents can do at home and what early childhood educators can do in the school (Doyle 2012:87). In this way the role of the home environment and appropriate practices for early childhood education are viewed as overlapping (cf. 2.2.6; 2.2.7). However, such recommendations may conflict with certain cultural practices in some families, and as such recommendations for families to encourage emergent literacy may need to be realigned with a range of families' cultural beliefs and practices (Van Kleeck & Schuele 2010: 344; McNaughton 2006:231-234).

Therefore, family involvement in literacy has been become more direct, with teachers encouraging and supporting parents of young children to 'hear' children read books aloud. In many schools in the United Kingdom, more prescriptive programmes have been developed to encourage emergent literacy, which give fairly explicit directions to parents with regard to their involvement and at home activities involving reading (Hannon & Bird 2004:26, 27). Certain

programmes go beyond book reading to children and encouraging appreciation of reading, to focus specifically on writing and oral reading. Today literacy programmes have evolved to include a wider concept of literacy for pre-school as well as school-aged children, and these programmes support a wider range of at-home as well as in-school activities. Where schools recommend such activities, they can be broadly conceptualised as family literacy programmes in that they recognise and make use of the learners' family relationships. However, such recommendations are mainly directed at families with young children. Furthermore, such programmes continue to focus primarily on families' engagement in school literacy practices rather than promoting parental engagement in family literacy practices (Nutbrown *et al.* 2005:25).

2.3.6.1   Emergent literacy

Today it is widely recognised that children do not have to wait until they go to school to engage with reading and writing. They can learn about reading and writing from a very young age as they observe other people reading and writing in their everyday lives (Wasik & Hermann 2004:5; Lonigan 2004:58). When children grow up surrounded by everyday uses of reading and writing they begin to understand these literacy practices and these become part of their lives. The understanding of the purposes of literacy is the beginning of the process of learning to read and write (Neaum 2012:116). The ability to read and write emerges gradually, with children acquiring knowledge, concepts and skill through, and about, communication almost from birth (Wasik & Hermann 2004:5). Careful observation of children's approximations, 'scribble' writing and pretend reading, demonstrate this process. Terms such as 'emergent literacy', 'emergent reading' and 'emergent writing' describe the process (Wasik & Hermann 2004:6). According to Lonigan (2004:58), there is no clear demarcation between reading and pre-reading.

Neaum (2012:139) suggests that there are four reasons for referring to this process as emergent. Firstly, emergence indicates that the development of a child as a literacy user comes from within the child. Children, supported by adults, are able to make sense of the print which surrounds them (Purcell-Gates 2004:113; Doyle 2012:87). Secondly, emergence implies a gradual process that takes place over time (Wasik & Hermann 2004:5). Thirdly, emergence focuses on the inherent abilities that children have to make sense of the world; it suggests that children are active in their learning rather than as passive recipients of knowledge (Powell

2004:160; Doyle 2012:85). Finally, literacy only emerges if the conditions are right (Lonigan 2004:59; Van der Berg, Girdwood, Shepherd, Van Wyk, Kruger, Viljoen, Ezeobi & Ntaka 2013:6;21). Thus there has to be meaningful engagement with print and the adults who support this for it to emerge. This also implies that the child's early attempts at reading and writing must be respected and accepted as they are indicative of an emergent capability and need to be encouraged.

Young children's engagement with literacy is observable in their pretend reading and writing, that is, reading and writing behaviours that appear in their play. Emergent literacy is a way of conceptualising these reading and writing behaviours that precede and develop into conventional literacy (Purcell-Gates 2004:102). It is important to realise that emergent literacy does not assume that children will just come to reading and writing without any adult intervention (Doyle 2012:87). Rather the tenets of emergent literacy rests on an understanding of the ways in which children progress from their earliest engagement with literacy practices to when they become conventionally literate (Sparling 2004:45). Emergent literacy articulates the socially embedded practices that influence children's growing awareness and use of literacy. Within these everyday social practices it is vital that adults mediate the learning by actively engaging with children in literacy practices, using the language of literacy and teaching them requisite skills (Neaum 2012:141). When this mediation process happens within a family, it is referred to family literacy.

2.3.6.2 Family Literacy

The term family literacy embraces more than the combination of the concepts of family and literacy. Firstly, it is a challenge to define *family*, because the traditional definitions of *parent* and *family* no longer fit contemporary society (Berns 2016:60). For much of the 20th century the term family referred to two parents and their children living in the same household (Wasik & Hermann 2004:6). Currently many families are headed by single parents (mostly women), while reconstituted family structures following divorce and remarriage are also common. Within the South African context the extended family plays an important role, as does the fact that many children are being raised by grandparents due to the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Further, in South Africa no one family form can clearly be identified, although the nuclear and extended family forms still predominate (Amoateng & Richter 2003:261; cf. chapter 3 for a full discussion). In this study on family literacy, the term *family* has been used

in the broadest sense of the word. *Family* can mean the traditional mother, father, and one or more children. *Family* may also refer to a grandmother or grandfather and his or her grandchildren, a single mom or dad and children, a foster family, a same sex family, a child-headed household or any other number of familial combination and structures. A *parent* is anyone who provides children with basic care, direction, support, protection, and guidance (Edwards 2004:11).

Against this discussion on diverse family types, similarly, many definitions of family literacy can be found in the literature. According to Jay and Rohl (2005:59) family literacy can be defined as the literacy events in which children are immersed outside the classroom. These events may include a range of reading, writing, speaking, listening, computer and viewing activities, with a range of people of different ages, either related or unrelated to the literacy learner, and will be shaped by the cultural environment in which the learner is located. Wasik (Wasik, Dobbins & Hermann 2001:445) defines family literacy is "a concept that includes naturally occurring literacy practices within the home, family and community and as a formal activity, exemplified by organised instruction usually linked with educational settings". The International Reading Association (in Morrow 1995:7-8; Wasik & Hermann 2004:7) takes a similar stance in defining family literacy as follows:

> *Family Literacy encompasses the ways parents, children, and extended family members use literacy at home and in their community. Sometimes, family literacy occurs naturally during the routines of daily living and helps adults and children "get things done". These events might include using drawing or writings to share ideas; composing notes or letters to communicate messages; making lists; reading and following directions; or sharing stories and ideas through conversation, reading and writing. Family literacy may be initiated purposefully by a parent or may occur spontaneously as parents and children go about the business of their daily lives.*

Literacy itself is no longer viewed as a simple process of acquiring basic cognitive skills, and definitions of literacy has expanded to also include using basic cognitive skills in ways that contribute to socio-economic development, and to developing the capacity for social awareness and critical reflection as a basis for personal and social change (UNESCO 2006:147).

Technological literacy, information literacy, mathematical literacy, scientific literacy and visual literacy are just a few examples (UNESCO 2006:150).

2.3.6.3   The literate environment

A literate environment is one in which there is high levels of talk, where people say more than is necessary, and where reading and writing are everyday purposeful activities (Neaum 2012:116).

A home literate environment includes:

- Talk as social interaction that goes beyond functional uses of language and includes discussion, explanation, questioning, pondering and language play (Neaum 2012:116; Sparling 2004:50,51; Jay & Rohl 2005:64);
- Reading and writing in support of household chores and routines: making lists, filling in forms, writing e-mails and short messaging (SMS), writing notes, reading labels and instruction manuals, reading and writing required by shopping, paying accounts or giving instructions to others (Neaum 2012:117; Jay & Rohl 2005:64);
- Reading and writing to communicate: texting, e-mails, cards, letters and social network sites (Neaum 2012:117; Powell 2004:160);
- Reading and writing for pleasure: books, magazines, newspapers, internet and social network sites (Neaum 2012:117; Powell 2004:160: Doyle 2012:87);
- Reading and writing associated with work done at home: reading non-fictional books, writing reports or strategic plans, preparing invoices, sending and receiving work-related e-mails (Neaum 2012:116-117; Sparling 2004:49-53).

In schools, a literate environment includes:

- Talk that goes beyond organisational talk and brief social interactions and actively engages children in talking through commentary, discussion, questioning, pondering, explanation and language play (Dickinson, St Pierre & Pettengill 2004:143);

- Use of reading and writing in routines: registration, name places, lists, naming paintings, labels on toy storage for "packing-away-time", letters send home;

- Reading and writing for pleasure: stories, poems, rhymes and songs (Powell 2004:160);

- Reading and writing around the setting: peg labels, display labels, directions, instructions, labels on toy storage;

- Observing and using emergent reading and writing during focussed activities. For example, the teacher writes the children's descriptions of projects or models and reads them out at group time to the other children before putting them on display; the teacher reads out instructions on the back of packets of seeds to explain how to plant them; the teacher uses an internet search engine such as Google, reads out and refers to a recipe on a website as part of a baking activity;

- Provision of resources so children can engage in emergent reading and writing during activities: books, pencils and paper, computers and tablets (Neaum 2012:117-118).

2.3.7   Conclusion

As access to literacy increased over the ages the families' role in the literacy development of their children changed as well. Where only the rich could afford tutors for their children during the ancient times and Middle Ages most children learned through apprenticeship and service in informal contexts. The Protestant Reformation had a profound impact on the importance of reading and the affordability and accessibility of printed materials. Literacy learning was mainly based on the Scriptures, started at a very young age, and took place in the home. With the Industrial Revolution many parents no longer worked at home and the teaching of literacy was increasingly handed over to formal institutions. Eventually the idea of organised care and compulsory education in formal institutions evolved. Parents were discouraged to formally teach their children to read, and were advised only to read to their children for fun. During the twentieth century the emergent literacy movement gradually began to change the attitudes of parents and educators towards literacy acquisition of children. Parent involvement in the teaching of literacy has emerged once again as an important role of parents. Figure 2.4 illustrates broad trends in the evolution of the family's role in the child's literacy acquisition.
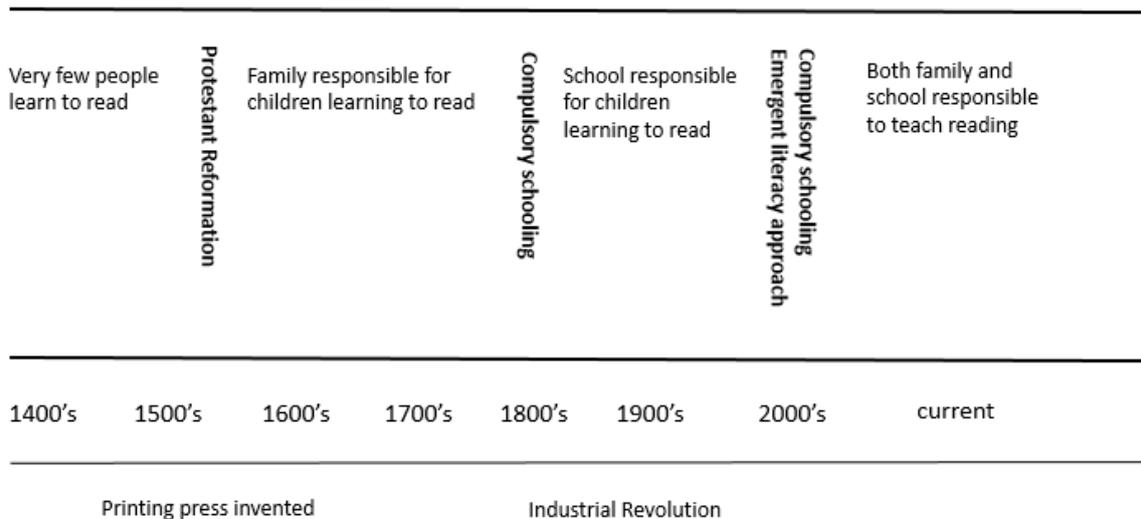
Figure 2.4: *Historical overview of the parent's role in literacy*

Source: Modified from Van Kleeck & Schuele (2010:342)

Most educators in the 21ˢᵗ century now recognise the value of the role of the family in the child's literacy acquisition and support formal programmes to support family literacy. Examples of such formal programmes will be discussed in detail in the ensuing section.

2.4   FAMILY LITERACY PROGAMMES

As has been outlined above, family literacy broadly comprises interrelated literacy practices within families (Nutbrown *et al.* 2005:19; Hannon & Bird 2004:24). Assumptions undergirding family literacy include: family members using literacy as part of their daily routines; children's understanding of literacy is learned socially and culturally within their family and community; the types of literacy experienced by children differ according to families' social and cultural practices (Morgan, Nutbrown & Hannon 2009:168; Wasik & Hermann 2004:7) and children's initiation into literacy practices is shaped by parents' and other family members' interests, attitudes, abilities and uses for written language (Doyle 2012:87).

Another important dimension to understanding the concept of family literacy is the acknowledgement of a wide range of literacy programmes involving families (Nutbrown *et al.* 2005:19; Hannon & Bird 2004:24). Not all family literacy programmes are alike. Family literacy programmes differ fundamentally in the groups they groups they target for change. Some programmes focus on children; some on adults; and some on both (Hannon and Bird

2004). Further, there are variations in whether programme input is to children, adults or both. If both, there may be separate inputs to each or they may be combined in shared activities. In addition the location of literacy work with families can vary (Wasik & Hermann 2004:8). In some programmes literacy work is carried out in families' homes; in others it is educational centres, schools, libraries, the workplaces or elsewhere in the community, such as in the church (Wasik & Hermann 2004:13).

2.4.1   Snow's model

Snow's home-school model of language and literacy development (Snow 1991:5-10) is most useful for understanding the intent of family literacy programmes and the nature of what actually takes place. Snow (1991:5-10) suggested that family literacy programmes that focus on child outcomes may differ according to five factors:

a)   the target of intervention (child, parent, teacher, or a combination thereof);

b)   the age of the child upon commencement of the programme (infant, pre-schooler, or school age);

c)   the participation structure, that is, who is in attendance in the programme (parent-child, facilitator-child, facilitator-parent, or a combination of models);

d)   the nature of evaluation (the extensiveness and chosen indicators as criteria for assessment, which includes cognitive, behavioural, or affective measures exclusively, or in conjunction with others);

e)   the conduit for training (the activities by which the learning takes place, which may include modelling strategies in workshops, the provision of informal information materials to parents, or the provision of educational materials for children, such as children's storybooks).

2.4.2   The ORIM model

Other influential models of family literacy illustrate the importance of the home (i.e., family) factor in school literacy achievement throughout all the years of schooling. One such programme is the ORIM (Opportunities, Recognition, Interaction, Model) conceptual framework developed by Morgan *et al.* (2009:171). The components of the ORIM model are illustrated in Figure 2.5.

STRANDS OF EARLY LITERACY EXPERIENCE

	Environmental print	Books	Writing	Oral language
Opportunities				
PARENTS CAN PROVIDE **Recognition**				
Interaction				
Model				

Figure 2.5: The ORIM framework for family literacy programmes

(Source: Morgan *et al.* 2009:171)

The ORIM framework distinguishes various strands of early literacy (environmental print, books, early writing and key aspects of oral language). The framework also identifies four key roles for parents whereby they can provide opportunities, recognition, interaction and a model of literacy for each strand of early literacy (Hannon & Bird 2004:30). The four parental roles are outlined as follows:

i)   Parents provide *opportunities* for literacy: giving children pens and paper, joining the library, making a space in the home where literacy can take place, placing books and writing equipment in an accessible place.

ii)   They can show *recognition* of the child's achievements: displaying some writing, discussing with the child what they have achieved, e.g. "You found all those letters yourself, didn't you?", and praise them.

iii)   Parents can share times of *interaction* with the child in literacy activities: reading a book together, playing an alphabet puzzle, writing a birthday card.

iv)   Finally and most important, parents can provide a *model* of a user of literacy in everyday life: reading a recipe, doing a crossword, completing a form, writing a note.

Further according to the ORIM model, four strands of literacy form the main focus of the literacy programme: environmental print, books, early writing, and aspects of oral language. Although many other strands of literacy could be considered, including techno- and multimedia literacy, the above four strands are important elements in children's literacy development (Nutbrown *et al.* 2005:50-51).

In the ensuing sections, the four strands of literacy are discussed in greater detail: environmental print (cf. 2.4.3), books (cf. 2.4.4), early writing (cf. 2.4.5), and aspects of oral language (cf. 2.4.6).

2.4.3   Environmental print

The early roots of literacy have their beginnings in the early experiences children encounter before school. These roots include a growing awareness of the forms and functions of print. Children begin to notice what written language look like and how it is used in everyday life. Children's earliest engagement with print is likely to be with environment print. Environment print is the print that children are surrounded by in their daily lives. Kassow (2006:1-2) and Vukelich, Christie and Enz (2008:7) define environmental print as surrounding non-continuous print, for example, words, letters, numerals and symbols that are encountered in a particular context and that fulfil real-life functions. It's often a combination of words, colours and images and can be found on packaging; as advertising, on household appliances and controls; as print on clothing, labels, branding of captions; through digital technology on phones, computers and other hand-held devices; as shop signs and logos. Horner (2005:114) classified environmental print into three categories: child logos (e.g. 'Barbie', 'Lego'), community logos (e.g. signs such as 'STOP', 'McDonalds') and household logos (e.g. 'Froot Loops', 'Keloggs'). This print becomes meaningful to the child as they see and use it in their everyday lives (Neaum 2012:142). Apart from the remotest, most rural and uncommercialised locations, print in young children's worlds is an unavoidable feature in their lives.

It has been suggested that reading begins the moment young children become aware of environmental print and many children develop a sense of such print awareness long before going to school (Nutbrown *et al.* 2005:39). They can recognise it and know that it carries a particular meaning but they are heavily dependent on the context of the print (Vukelich *et al.* 2008:10). Children can most often recognise words when they are in their usual context, for

example, on a slogan on a particular item of clothing or the name of a product on a package, but are not able to read the word without these contextual clues (Neumann, Hood, Ford & Neumann 2011:233,236). Some researchers (Kassow 2006:5; Ehri & Roberts 2006; Horner 2005:113) have suggested that being able to identify the meaning of environmental print in context does not constitute conventional reading. However, scaffolded logographic reading can foster interactions between the child and those around them, and lead to discussions about the features of print. Neumann *et al.* (2011:232) also caution that mere exposure to environmental print may not be sufficient for it to benefit literacy development in young children. Although environmental print can help children learn early literacy skills, this learning has to be extended through scaffolding with an adult. Environmental print can stimulate talk about literacy as children ask questions such as "What does that say?" It also prompts children, at times, to pick out and identify from signs some letters that are familiar to them, perhaps in their own name. The important contextual development is that print carries meaning and by reading the print we can understand that meaning. Through socio-cultural experiences with environmental print, young children use it to fulfil real-life functions and achieve their individual goals and needs, such as knowing that a specific label on a box means that it contains their favourite food (Neumann *et al.* 2011:232). This conceptual development underpins learning to read. Environmental print can stimulate some children to write and children often imitate the writing they see, such as notices or notes left for others. Environmental print has a place in early literacy development and for most children this kind of reading material is part of their daily experience from birth (Nutbrown *et al.* 2005:41). Emergent literacy skills lead them to conventional reading ability (Neumann *et al.* 2011:250).

2.4.4   Books

Reading storybooks to children has consistently been found to be a strong predictor of later success in school, and confers on children numerous cognitive, linguistic and literate advantages (Pretorius & Machet 2008:262; Berns 2016:356). One of the most important ways in which children engage with, and learn about reading, is through storybooks. Learning to read and write occurs in a book-rich context (Morrow & Temlock-Fields 2004:83). Learning to read needs to be more than just learning the skill of decoding text – reading, in the fullest sense, is engagement with the purposes and pleasure of reading as well as developing the skills necessary to read. Children who are exposed to storybook reading in the pre-school years, tend to have larger vocabularies, greater background knowledge, and better language and conceptual

development that their peers who have not been exposed to books or storybook reading. They also learn to read and write more easily and more quickly (Pretorius & Machet 2008:262: Mol, Bus & de Jong 2009:979, 998). By listening to and discussing stories, children also become familiar with story language and story structure. Jay and Rohl's research (2005:64) found that many parents had firm ideas about why they read to their children, which included the provision of emotional comfort when a child was overactive, tired or upset, as part of a daily routine, for pleasure, entertainment, play between parent and child, educational purposes and to stimulate children's imagination. According to Morrow and Temlock-Fields (2004:84), the primary goal of storybook reading is the construction of meaning from the interactive process between and adult and child. During story reading, the adult should help the child understand and make sense of the text by interpreting written language based on experience, background and beliefs. Engagement with storybooks enables children to develop an understanding of the full range of knowledge, skills and affective aspects of reading. These include:

- A positive orientation to books and reading;
- An awareness of some of the functions, or purposes, of reading;
- An awareness of the forms of reading: book structure, page turning, top-to-bottom and left-to-right orientation; identification of print (Lonigan 2004:50; Ntuli & Pretorius 2005:93);
- An awareness of story structure and the language of stories (Ntuli & Pretorius 2005:93);
- The development of a language for reading: letter, word, sentence, story, character and event (Pretorius & Machet 2008:262);
- Knowledge of letters (graphemes) and letter sounds (phonemes) (Neaum 2012:142-143; Morrow & Temlock-Fields 2004:87,94);
- When books are introduced to babies, the book is the particular kind of tool for interaction, like the rattle or a soft toy, but with the added dimension of language.

Parents' reading aloud to their children is assumed to be a prerequisite for success at school. If a child comes from a reading family where books are a shared source of pleasure, he or she will have an understanding of the language of the literacy world and respond to the use of books in a classroom as a natural expansion of pleasant home experiences (Edwards 2004:50). According to Edwards (2004), book reading is a very simple teacher directive, but a very

complex and difficult task for some parents. Simply informing parents of the importance of reading to their children is not sufficient. Instead, educators must go beyond telling to showing lower socio-economic status parents how to participate in parent-child book reading interactions with their children and support their attempts to do so.

2.4.5 Early writing

According to Purcell-Gates (2004:102) emergent literacy is the development of the ability to read and write written texts. For Purcell-Gates (2004), emergent language knowledge is emergent knowledge of written language, not oral; written language experience is at the centre of the process of emergent literacy. According to Purcell-Gates (2004) and supported by Doyle (2012:87) knowledge of written language does not come from being read to, but from pretend reading and pretend writing. Emergent writing is the process of moving from early representation to conventional writing. Very young children need to be able to symbolise, that is, to use one thing to represent another, as this is the basis of writing. This begins with children being active and communicating their ideas through engagement in sensori-motor activity. This develops through gesture (a wave for bye-bye) and the symbolic use of objects in play (a stick for a sword, a piece of fabric as a cloak, a pencil as a wand). As children grow and develop, their ideas and thoughts begin to be communicated through drawing, modelling and mark-making. This representation is evidence of a child's ability to understand and use symbols. According to Yang and Noel (2006:146), children's drawing is closely linked to thinking, talking, reading and writing. Young children regard scribbling, drawing, or mark making as a media of communication and expression, and all types of symbolic representation play important roles in the development of literacy. The processes of emergent writing and drawing are thought to be inseparable. Drawing supports children's generation of ideas, which are later presented in sentences. In this way, drawing is regarded as a memory aid. Children can hold ideas in their minds while attempting to express themselves in written form (Yang & Noel 2006:147). Eventually, conventional letters and words begin to emerge in what children produce. This development is gradual and emerges through engagement with writing in everyday life and routines, and through authentic experiences of literacy in settings (Neaum 2012:144).

Emergent writing is predominantly concerned with the process and content of writing rather than handwriting. However, as mark-making emerges and children move toward using

conventional writing, it is important to teach children how to hold a pencil correctly and how to form letters correctly. When opportunities arise children can also be introduced to letter sounds (phonemes). All of this can be achieved through playing alongside children and modelling and teaching this within the context of the activity. Parents and teachers, as significant others of young children, play a role in shaping children's graphicacy (e.g. mark making, scribbling) toward socially accepted patterns of graphical representations by giving feedback to children's recognizable scribbles or mark making (Yang & Noel 2006:147).

2.4.5.1   Environmental print and mark-making

Children's writing also may facilitate their development of letter knowledge and phonological sensitivity (Lonigan 2004:69). According to Purcell-Gates (2004:112) it is the exposure to print and the use of print that allows children to construct critical emergent literacy concepts from which they can develop as effective readers and writers. Any form of phonetic writing requires knowledge of both letter sounds and phonological features of words. Through engagement with environmental print children become aware of letters and sounds. This requires that an adult mediate the learning by pointing out letters (graphemes) and letter sounds (phonemes) (Neumann *et al*. 2011:242). This is important in children's emergent writing because as they progress letters emerge in their writing. This may occur initially as a visual process, that is, they remember the shape of the letter, but they will eventually, with support, come to use conventional writing that makes use of patterns of letters and sounds (phonics) (Neaum 2012:144; Neuman & Dickenson 2011:234). Spelling words encourages children to analyse words into smaller units of sound and to link those sounds to letters (Lonigan 2004:69).

2.4.5.2   Stages of emergent writing

As with emergent reading, a pattern of progress in emergent writing can be observed. However, it is important to remember that development is unlikely to just happen on its own. It requires both the opportunity to rehearse emerging knowledge and skills, and adults to model, encourage and teach when appropriate and where necessary. Prior to children engaging in representation that approximates to conventional writing, they will need to have had sustained exposure to environmental print, and to have engaged in play-based activities to enable them to learn, develop and consolidate their ability to symbolise in concrete contexts.

Sulzby (Sulzby, Barhart & Hieshima 1988:2-10), (Yang & Noel 2006:148-149) developed 12 categories of "Forms of writing" based on a longitudinal study of kindergarten children's writing and rereading of their writing. In their study, children's writing samples were collected in group- and individual writing sessions through kindergarten and first grade. Important results from this study reveal that scribbling is used as a form of writing for an enduring period of time and invented spelling follows tentatively. Sulzby (Sulzby *et al.* 1988:27-29) identified 12 categories which include:

i)   Drawing: One picture is drawn for the entire composition or is embedded within other forms of writing.

ii)   Scribble-wavy: The continuous, curvy or pointed form has no differentiation of shapes.

iii)   Scribble-letter-like: Different forms within the scribble with some differentiated features of letters.

iv)   Letter-like units: These are not letters but are child created, letter-like forms, which are close to letter-like scribbles.

v)   Letters-random: Letters that appear to be generated at random with no letter-sound correspondence between the letters and the child's message.

vi)   Letter-patterns: Repeated patterns of letters.

vii)   Letter-name elements: Letters show repeated patterns or repeated letters from the child's name.

viii)   Copying: The words or letters are the result of copying from the environmental print.

ix)   Invented spelling- syllabic: Only one letter per syllable is used to represent the phonetic relationships between the sounds and the letters.

x)   Invented spelling- intermediate: All the invented spelling between syllabic and full.

xi)   Invented spelling- full: A letter for all or almost all of the spoken sounds is present.

xii)   Conventional: Conventional, correct, or dictionary spelling.

Edwards (2004:50) summarises the emergent writing process as follows:

Stages of emergent writing	
Scribbling	Emergent writing begins with first explorations in mark making, often for purposes other than representation. These are random scribbles or marks on a page, on steamy windows, in sand, or made in mud with sticks. Very young children will use the words "drawing" and "writing" interchangeably to describe the marks. Three-to-four-year-olds have usually begun to differentiate between the two.
Mock handwriting or wavy scribble	Children produce lines of wavy scribbles in imitation of adult writing. The writing often appears on a page with drawing. This pretend writing also often appears in children's role-play within an appropriate context, such as writing an appointment in a book. Children tend to do imitation writing in large amounts, sometimes covering a page.
Mock letters	Children attempt to form alphabetic letters. These tend to be letter-like shapes that resemble conventional letters. They appear in their writing and drawing. Research has shown that these scribbles and letter-like shapes take on the characteristics of the print of the child's culture – scribbles in Hebrew and Arabic, for example, look very different from scribbles in English.
Conventional letters	Children's mock letters gradually become more conventional and letters appear in what they produce. These early experiments with real letters are usually the letters in their names or close family members' names. Children often create strings of letters across a page and "read" them as a sentence or series of sentences. These letters appear on drawings as the child's signature or as a label for the drawing. Environmental print has a particular importance at this stage as children increasingly begin to notice the detail of letters and print.
Invented spelling	Once children are comfortable with writing conventional individual letters they begin to cluster them together to make word forms. These often do not look like or sound like "real" words. Children will often ask, "What did I write?"
Phonetic spelling	Children attempt to spell words based on their growing awareness of letter sounds (phonemes) and their sight vocabulary of words that they have seen repeatedly. These beginning words are often written in a random combination of upper and lower case letters, depending upon the child's knowledge and skill. Children move from spelling words using the beginning letter, to writing both beginning and final letters, to writing words with the appropriate beginning, middle and final letters.

Conventional spelling	Children's approximated spellings gradually become more and more conventional. The child's own name is usually written first.

Examining emergent writing has been reported to be a useful method for assessing potential reading problems and developmental delays in cognition and language (Haney 2002:102). Pre-school name writing abilities correspond to children's developmental maturity and a child's ability to write his/her name could be a good predictor of later reading ability (Yang & Noel 2006:149).

2.4.6   Oral language

For as long as literacy has been studied, interactions and relationships between children and adults have been recognised as the primary medium through which literacy is acquired. From birth, children engage in increasingly elaborated and symbolically mediated interactions with caregivers in which emotion, cognition and communication are intertwined and organised. The capacity, skill, and interest to read, understand and produce written language emerge out of this complex and dynamic process (Pianta 2004:175; Ntuli & Pretorius 2005:93). According to Lonigan (2004:60) reading is a process of translating visual codes into meaningful language. Children who have larger vocabularies and greater understanding of spoken language have an easier time reading. The level of vocabulary also has a significant impact on decoding skills very early in the process of learning to read. A child's semantic and syntactic abilities assume great importance later in the sequence of learning to read, when the child is reading for meaning. One specific oral language skill that should also receive special attention is complex, decontextualised language, which is language used to reason, imagine, pretend, solve problems, predict, or infer information that goes beyond the literal text of the story (Girolametto, Weitzman & Greenberg 2012:49). Decontextualised language has been associated with increased language skills in children, and is considered to be an important basis for the development of later reading comprehension.

Three aspects of oral language are key to children's literacy learning and development: phonological awareness, storytelling and talk about literacy (Nutbrown *et al*. 2005:47).

2.4.6.1 Phonological awareness

According to Lonigan (2004:62) and Baroody and Diamond (2012:79) phonological processing refers to activities that require sensitivity to, or manipulation of, the sounds in words independent of their meaning. Alcock, Ngorosho, Deus and Jukes (2010:55) define phonological awareness as the ability to reflect on phonological properties of words, that include some or all of: the ability to see similarities between words, including selecting or generating words that rhyme or share a common onset; the ability to manipulate words including forming new words from blends or other words and segmenting words into their constituent components (phonemes and syllables); and the awareness of the component part of words including phonemes and syllables. Nutbrown *et al*. (2005:48) suggested that the important thing for children to be aware of is what they call onset and rime in spoken words, "onset" being the beginning sound and "rime" being the end sound of a word. Words like "speak", "spot", "spike" and "spell" share the same onset and so they are said to alliterate. Words such as "think", "stink", "blink" and "link" share the same rime and can be said to rhyme. Nutbrown *et al*. (2005:48) present substantial evidence from the studies of pre-school children which suggest that children who are aware of onset and rime find learning to read easier. They show how pre-school tests of this kind of phonological awareness predict reading attainment later; and how pre-school "training" to help children notice onset and rime can enhance later reading attainment. One way in which children can become aware that words have different parts and that some share endings and/or beginnings is through nursery rhymes which repeat words with the same onset and/or rhymes. The obvious implication here is that encouraging parents and young children to share nursery rhymes at home could support children's early literacy development (Nutbrown *et al*. 2005:48). The ability to perform tasks of this type has been widely associated with reading ability, both in typically developing beginning readers and in children with poor reading skills. It seems that phonemic awareness is helpful in reading and spelling; however, phonemes are often difficult to spot and some debate has centred around the relationship between phonological awareness and literacy: either that earlier phonemic awareness is something which people acquire as a result of becoming literate rather than something which, once acquired helps us to become literate (Castles & Coltheart 2004:56).

2.4.6.2 Storytelling and talk about literacy

Children are natural storytellers from the time they can string together a few sentences. Children use oral tradition and the power of stories to recount life's experiences, to recast stories that have been told to them, and to share stories of wonderment. From the age of two children start "telling stories". There are two main types of stories that children learn to recount, namely personal event narratives (i.e. telling about a specific event that happened) and fictional stories (i.e. a fictional story derived from an oral or book story or story the child made up) (Ntuli & Pretorius 2005:95). Children use their knowledge of the world and their experiences to convey content knowledge as well as linguistic structure knowledge to recount the story. Engagement in storytelling lay the foundations for higher level language skills that rely on vocabulary and semantic-syntactic skills, including inferencing, narrative abilities, and familiarity with features of written language (Van Kleeck & Schuele 2010:348). According to Bloch (2005:8) telling and listening to stories is valuable because it exposes children to a rich and complex form of language. Through storytelling children also unconsciously acquire the discourse skills of how to tell a story, the notion of a story schema and how stories function in their particular culture (Ntuli & Pretorius 2005:95).

A typical literacy event in families is storytelling at bedtime or in other settings, usually involving a parent or adult and one or more children. Sometimes this activity is oral and book-anchored, and sometimes it is a book reading activity. Parents may invent stories (not commonly done), read a familiar or unfamiliar book, retell a well-known story or retell one which the child does not know. While engaged in this activity, parents may adhere to the text, may diverge from it, may enact the story or may engage in interactive reading/telling. The latter may take on different types of interactive patterns such as questions, statement completions, rhyming, guessing, and more (Stavans & Goldzweig 2008:234). Narrating events or telling stories are not only a language expression but also a socialising activity and require the deployment of linguistic, cognitive and cultural knowledge. According to St Amour (2003:47) stories are of particular importance, because humans learn in the form of stories, and the human brain is a story seeking, story creating instrument. Stories fit all ages, places, timeframes and circumstances. As teachers listen to children tell a story, they gain insight about the children's prior knowledge, creativity, language ability, and thinking processes while also serving to develop children's imagination and their ability to think creatively (Ntuli & Pretorius 2005:95).

Narrative abilities, particularly stories, are a natural vehicle for building on children's oral language skills to develop literacy with print (St. Amour 2003:47). Although African society is typically described as an oral culture, the rich forms of traditional storytelling are falling into disuse, especially in urban areas, where television viewing is replacing storytelling traditions (Pretorius & Machet 2008:265; Ntuli & Pretorius 2005:94). Machet (2002:5) describes the situation as follows:

> *Parents are too busy and too tired in the evenings to spend time telling young children stories...also, many parents feel that their oral culture of storytelling does not have value in today's highly technological world. Thus children are deprived of any form of storytelling. This has a serious effect as children start school without any story schema (i.e the conventional way in which a story is structured within a culture.)*

Some children's television programmes, such as *Takalani Sesami* and *Yo TV*, have introduced stimulating storytelling sessions that can help bridge the gap for many children. In more illiterate communities, oral communication and storytelling has been used successfully as a means of achieving competency in reading and writing. Oral language and storytelling build on their linguistic and literate histories and help to develop common classroom and home literacy practices (DaSilva Iddings 2009:304). Caregivers play a much broader and long standing role in these developmental mechanisms in terms of providing language stimulation and conversation, co-regulation of attention, arousal, interest, and emotional experience; and direct transmission of phonological information and content (Pianta 2004:175).

2.5   APPROACHES TO FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAMMES

There is some concern about the ideological stance on family literacy taken by educators and researchers. As beliefs about parents often impacts on the goals of family literacy programmes, it is crucial that researchers and educators must acknowledge the approaches that reflect the attitudes and effects of teachers.

2.5.1 Deficit approach

The term deficit approach is often used when schools do not value or are ignorant of the literacy practices and literacy skills families have (Nutbrown *et al.* 2005:25,169). According to Jay and Rohl (2005:59-60) educators sometimes regard families and their literacy knowledge and skills as inappropriate, because it differs from mainstream school-like literacy. The argument is that, if literacy activities, such as story reading that take place in certain homes and have been shown to have a relationship to literacy achievement, are seen to be desirable by schools and educational researchers, it follows that those families who do not engage in the 'desired' activities are seen as having a deficit that needs to be remediated. Quite often the families who are seen to need such 'remediation' are from low-income groups, minority groups and English second language groups. In these contexts the literacy practices primarily valued and advocated by schools may be inappropriate. Many low-income families do offer an environment that enhances literacy development, but in ways it is often not recognised as school-like learning. According to Longwell-Grice and McIntyre (2006:116) traditional views of family involvement in the work of schools seek to change families or to teach families that which they lack or what others assume they lack.

To reduce the negative impact of the deficit model, Keyser (2006:11) argues that the idea of family centred care should be based on the following assumptions:

- All people are basically good;
- All people have strengths;
- All people have different but equally important skills, abilities and knowledge;
- All people need support and encouragement;
- All families have hopes, dreams and wishes for their children;
- Families are resourceful, but all families do not have equal resources;
- Families should be assisted in ways that help them maintain their dignity and hope;
- Families should be equal partners in the relationship with service providers.

Without these assumptions many teachers find themselves "at odds" with parents and their literacy efforts, believing that parents are working against them or are ignorant.

2.5.2   The wealth approach

Viewing parents as equal partners includes the perspective that all families have valuable expertise, skills and resources and positive aspirations for their children (Lemmer 2013a:26; Keyser 2006:4). This approach, known as the wealth approach, requires family literacy educators and providers to identify which literacy patterns already exist within families and to build on those patterns, rather than to impose traditional, mainstream school-like activities on families. Unlike the deficit approach, the wealth approach suggests that the family literacy 'curriculum' should be based on the needs voiced by the family members themselves (Train 2007:293-294).

The wealth approach helps to reduce many negative feelings that families may hold about schools, which may hinder their involvement in literacy development. Like teachers, families have a range of feelings about their relationship with their children's teachers. Some families do not even consider that there could be a place for them at school; some would like to have a relationship with teachers but are uncertain about how to do it; some families have clear ideas of how they would like to be involved but perceive roadblocks in the communication; and some are actively frustrated with their interactions with teachers (Keyser 2006:3). A partnership is a relationship between equals; each person in a partnership is equally valued for his or her knowledge and contribution to the relationship (Lemmer 2013a). This does not mean that both partners bring exactly the same thing to the partnership. It means that each is respected for his or her unique contribution. In a partnership people are interested in understanding the other person's perspective, engaging in two-way communication consulting with each other on important decisions, and respecting and working through differences of opinion.

2.6   BENEFITS OF FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAMMES

The task of overcoming the barriers to parent involvement in family literacy programmes, as previously discussed, seems overwhelming. The question to be answered is whether the effects of improved parent involvement are worth the effort. Review of the literature indicates that participation in family literacy programmes benefit all role-players: parents, teachers, schools and the community as a whole.

2.6.1 Benefits for learners

Research indicated that children whose parents foster emergent literacy skills from an early age enjoy a range of benefits (Arnold, Zeljo, Doctoroff & Ortiz 2008:77; Gonzalez-DeHass & Willems 2003:86). Many family literacy programmes have shown cognitive gains for participating children immediately following programme participation compared with children who did not receive the intervention (Powell 2004:160; Padak & Rasinski 2000:2). Centre-based family literacy programmes starting in infancy have documented the largest effects on IQ (Fuligni & Brooks-Gunn 2004:117, 119).

Parents reading to their children also enhances the child's language, which in time may result in better reading comprehension (Beck & McKeown 2001:4). Book reading as early as kindergarten might also increase children's motivation to read, which in time will result in more frequent and fluent reading for pleasure (Sénéchal & Young 2008:21; Swain, Brooks & Bosley 2014:87).

Children from family literacy programmes generally are more ready to attend school. They have a better reading vocabulary and their phonemic awareness and decoding abilities were improved (Beck & McKeown 2001:9). By going to school better prepared, children coming from family literacy programmes have been found to be more successful at all grade levels, had better test scores and long term academic development, regardless of the educational background or social class of their parents (Mqota 2009:76; Padak & Rasinski 2000:2; Levine 2002:3).

Several studies link parent involvement in literacy programmes with children's improved social-emotional development, such as increased learner self-esteem, fewer behavioural problems and better school attendance (Michael, Wolhuter & Van Wyk 2012:59; Gonzalez-DeHass & Willems 2003:86-87; Mqota 2009:78; Arnold *et al* 2008:86; Padak & Rasinski 2000:2; Pahl & Kelly 2005:94). Learners' attitudes about themselves and their control over the environment are critical to achievement, whereas school inputs such as class size of teacher education have little effect. These attitudes are formed at home and are the product of myriad interactions between parents, children and the surrounding community. Parental involvement in their children's literacy development sends a positive message to children about the importance of their education. Changing the school climate and involving parents will

substantially raise not only the achievement of low-income, at-risk children but will change their self-concept and motivation as well (Mqota 2009:75; Van der Berg *et al*. 2013:20-21; Levine 2002:4). The fact that learners have more positive attitudes toward school; better homework habits; higher attendance; lower drop-out rates and improved behaviour is supported by Gonzalez-DeHass & Willems (2003:86-87) and Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009:15).

There are, however, limits to the extent of the advantages. Although meaningful parent involvement in literacy programmes is consistently effective in raising children's achievement scores, in poor districts parental support may encounter a ceiling effect. That is, parent involvement raises their children's achievement scores, but not the national average. Research often focus on time-limited programmes, where gains are recorded for the period of the intervention, but long-term structured modifications to maintain those gains for subsequent students are not made (Fuligni & Brooks-Gunn 2004:120). However, these barriers can be overcome most convincingly when family literacy programmes are integrated with a comprehensive plan for school improvement.

Research also indicates that there are subject-specific links between the involvement of families and increases in achievement by students (Mqota 2009:75, 78). Generally, teachers' practices to involve parents in learning activities at home are mainly limited to reading, English language studies, or related activities. The results consistently indicate improved reading scores (Fuligni & Brooks-Gunn 2004:122). These results suggest that specific practices of partnership may help to boost learner achievement in particular subjects. Research is needed to clarify whether family involvement with a child in one school subject transfers the benefits to other subjects over time.

2.6.2   Benefits for parents

Parent involvement in family literacy programmes increase parental interaction with their children at home and parents feel more positive about their own abilities to help their children (Mqota 2009:79; Padak & Rasinski 2000:3). Parents benefit by being alerted to different and more effective ways of creating or developing literacy learning opportunities and stimulating experiences for their children (Van Wyk & Lemmer 2009:16; Arnold *et al*. 2008:77). This may include reading of bedtime stories and creating own stories from personal experiences. However, most parents need help to know how to be productively involved in their children's

education at each grade level. In Grade 1, parents likely experience children's first homework assignments, report cards, parent-teacher nights, and an increased emphasis on academic development. Family literacy programmes can help parents better understand the education system and the curriculum requirements (Chance & Sheneman 2012:12; Swain *et al.* 2014:79; Learning literacy together 2009:9). These factors heighten the influence of parents' involvement in academic development, especially literacy development (Arnold *et al.* 2008:77).

Benefits of involvement in family literacy programmes include greater appreciation of their own important roles; strengthened social networks (Burningham & Dever 2005:88; Swain *et al.* 2014:79; Ordonez-Jasis & Ortiz 2006:46); access to information and materials; personal efficacy and motivation to continue their own education (Mqota 2009:79; Padak & Rasinski 2000:3). The contact with other parents experiencing comparable problems often decrease feelings of isolation (Padak & Rasinski 2000:3). Parents actively involved in their children's education, develop more positive attitudes about school and school personnel and can help gather support in the community to support and sustain family literacy programmes (Mqota 2009:79; Padak & Rasinski 2000:3). They become more active in community affairs and develop increased self-confidence (Swain *et al.* 2014:88). Family literacy programmes also increases parent's knowledge about parenting options and child development (Padak & Rasinski 2000:3). Mqota (2009:80) even reported that some parents expressed the pleasure of getting to know teachers as people and they found a new appreciation for the commitment and skill of teachers. Padak and Rasinski (2000:3) and Swain *et al.* (2014:88) reported that families learn to value education.

Family literacy programmes also help to improve communication between parent and child, and between parent, child and school (Swain *et al.* 2014:88). Families become emotionally closer, which creates more supportive home environments (Padak & Rasinski 2000:3). Collaboration between parents and children reduces the characteristic isolation of their roles. It is very reassuring for parents to know that teachers share their concerns about their children. In turn, it is comforting for teachers to know that a parent recognises the complexity of their role in the classroom. However, dialogue between parents and teachers also reveals differences, as well as unrealistic expectations on both sides. These differences can be resolved before possible conflict situations arise. Where inefficiencies are apparent on the side of the teachers, parents are in a position to criticise ideas and practice, because of their increased understanding

of what should be happening in schools. In this way, parents are able to play a meaningful role in their children's education.

For many low-literate families, family literacy programmes even enhanced their employment status (Padak & Rasinsiki 2000:3) which in turn positively influence broader economic and social issues (cf. 2.6.4 below).

2.6.3   Benefits for teachers and schools

Increased parent and community involvement in literacy programmes can also bring multiple benefits to teachers and schools. Simply put, parents' involvement in their children's literacy learning can help schools accomplish more (Levine 2002:4). But, in order to do so, schools will need to reject the family deficit model and move towards a view that includes parent participation and collaboration (Crawford & Zygouris-Coe 2006:262).

Schools can benefit from family literacy programmes through teachers' work being made more manageable; parents who are involved having more positive views of the teacher and the school, and the parents and others who are participating likely to be more supportive of the schools and less inclined to sabotage educational decisions (Van Wyk & Lemmer 2009:15). Parents rate teachers higher overall when they are involved with the school in any way. Moreover, teachers will come to know and understand parents better. This will obviously increases teachers' understanding of the children in the family and provides information which may be of value in the handling of specific children.

Teachers also report more positive feelings about teaching and about their school and show an increased commitment to teaching when there is more parent involvement at the school (Van Wyk & Lemmer 2009:15). Teachers are impressed by the mutuality of interests and find that collaboration both broadens their perspective and increases their sensitivity to varied parent circumstances. In other words, working with parents raises teachers' expectations and appreciation of parents as partners.

Teachers develop a more learner-orientated approach. In family literacy programmes where parents and teachers work successfully together, teachers experience support and appreciation

from parents and rekindling of their own enthusiasm for problem solving (Mqota 2009:82; Craword & Zygouris-Coe 2006:263).

Because family literacy programmes help parents better understand the education system and the curriculum requirements (Chance & Sheneman 2012:12; Swain *et al.* 2014:79; Learning literacy together 2009:9) parents can better support their children's literacy development and in doing so, lessen the teacher's workload. This is especially true when teaching at a school in a poor socio-economic community (Van Wyk & Lemmer 2009:16). Where parents are involved in their own children's literacy learning, the children's literacy skills will improve and the teacher will be able to spend less time on intervention in class.

Collaboration between the school and parents also increases the resources available to the school, for example, parents may contribute to schools as volunteers helping to facilitate family literacy programmes. Parents may also provide linkages to partnerships with businesses, agencies, cultural institutions, or other resources in the community to help fund family literacy programmes (Mqota 2009:81). Moreover, parents can be a political asset when they argue for the interests of children and schools at board meetings or in legislative sessions. Overall, involvement in family literacy programmes can improve the culture of learning and teaching in schools.

2.6.4   Benefits for the community

Family literacy programmes initiated by schools have been shown to have multiple positive results. As participation in literacy programmes often improves parents own literacy, it gives parents access to social activities such as reading the Bible, prayer books and hymn book, and serves as a channel for community announcements (Openjuru & Lyster 2007:101).

Because participation in family literacy programmes often result in better parenting skills and increases low-literate parents' literacy skills (cf. 2.6.2; 2.8.1.1), family literacy programmes therefore have the potential to positively affect several major social issues, such as, nutrition and health problems, low school achievement and high school dropout rates, teen parenting, joblessness and welfare dependency, social alienation and home and community violence (Padak & Rasinski 2000:4).

2.7 BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION IN FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAMMES

Involving families in schools, and particularly in family literacy programmes, has become a major goal of educational professionals, particularly those working with at-risk learners. According to Doyle and Zang (2011:224) little gain can be expected where uptake in family literacy programmes is minimal. It is therefore important to identify the barriers that impact on the relationship between participation and parents' motivations, expectations and persistence in family literacy programmes.

2.7.1 No perception of need

A very difficult barrier to overcome when recruiting participants for literacy programmes is a lack of perceived need (Pross & Barry n.d.:34). Promoting the benefits of family literacy programmes can be an effective way to convince parents to attend, especially if parents who had participated in previous programmes could promote the programme by word-of-mouth.

2.7.2 Limited knowledge and experience of parent involvement

The limited skills and knowledge of both educators and parents to interact effectively may be a reason for limited participation in family literacy programmes. Parents from minority groups often lack knowledge about school protocol, have had negative past experiences with schools and feel unwelcome at a middle-class institution (Gonzalez-DeHass & Willems 2003:90; Jay & Rohl 2005:73; Pross & Barry n.d.:33; Horvatin 2011:20). Moreover, the limited education of many disadvantaged parents and their lack of proficiency in English seriously handicaps their involvement in home-school partnership activities (Michael *et al*. 2012:71, Mqota 2009:84; Arnold *et al*. 2008:86). This impedes effective interaction with teachers, understanding of schoolwork and ability to assist children academically at home. In addition, the complex verbal constructions that come naturally to many educators further impede communication with disadvantaged parents. Although teachers speak of wanting parents to demonstrate a commitment to learning, they frequently fail to give parents the information they need to act. It would seem then, that the language of the school all too often remains exclusive to the professional (Lemmer & Van Wyk 2004:183).

Many parents, because of their own personal, family or cultural background, may not feel as confident as parents or as ready to be equal partners with teachers (Michael *et al*. 2012:71; Pross & Barry n.d:33,35,39). Some of these parents may feel they lack knowledge about children in the face of caregiver knowledge and expertise (Jay & Rohl 2005:71). Still other parents may believe it is disrespectful to tell the teacher how to do his or her job (Keyser 2006:13-14; Mqota 2009: 84). Parents may have learned to be deferential to the teacher out of respect and not feel able to express their own ideas, beliefs and expertise related to their children. They believe that running schools should be left up to educational professionals (Gonzalez-DeHass & Willems 2003:89; Arnold *et al*. 2008:86).

There are other challenges to empowerment of parents. Parents are more aware and educated about children than ever before, yet they are also more vulnerable than ever before. As research increasingly shows the importance of children's development in the first few years (including before they are born) (Arnold *et al*. 2008:75) parents are faced with a more complex job. Not only are they responsible for keeping their children safe and happy, they are also responsible for brain development and the social, emotional, physical, and language development of their children. Today, parents must make many more decisions than previous generations of parents had to make, and the pressure may simply be overwhelming.

Teachers of young children are expected to have broader and more complex skills than ever before. Not only are they supposed to provide excellent care and education to children who are facing multiple stressors. They are also expected to be culturally and linguistically competent to teach children from many different languages and cultures. Teachers are expected to build effective partnerships with and provide referrals and services to families under stress. Yet, teachers get little help in developing their skills and knowledge for collaborating with parents. Few receive training in parent involvement in the course of their college preparation, and teachers have not been taught how to deal with diversity (Michael *et al*. 2012:71). This lack of initial training is not compensated for by in-service training, thus most teachers must rely on their accumulated experience in dealing with parents.

2.7.3   Differing understanding of parental involvement

An important barrier to family involvement in literacy programmes is the shifting definition of parent involvement. Family involvement may easily have different meanings for individuals and groups. Figure 2.3 illustrates these different meanings.
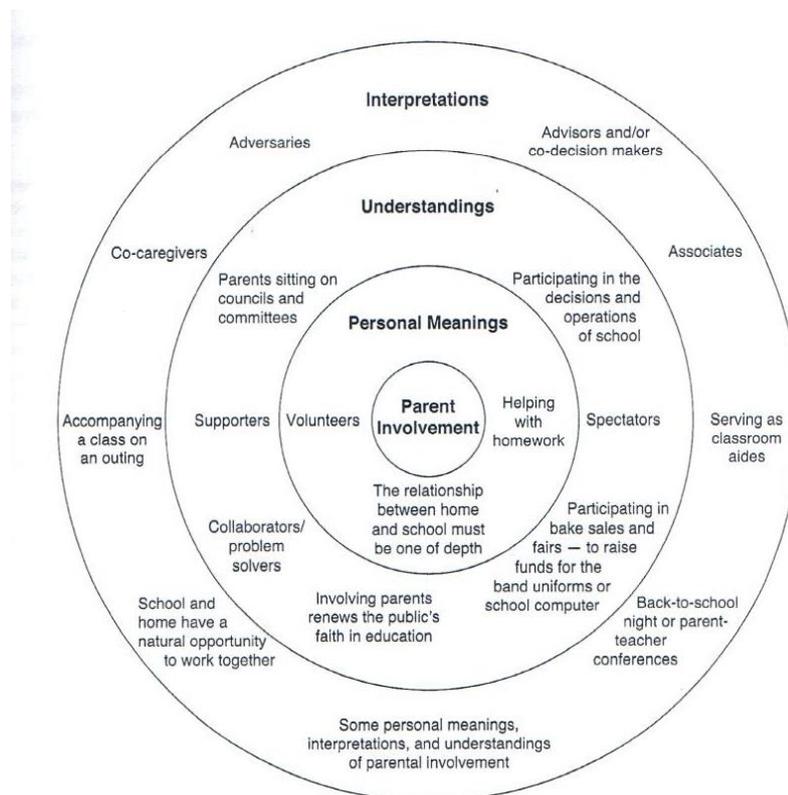
Figure 2.6: Personal meanings, interpretations and understandings associated with parent involvement

(Source: Edwards 2004:45)

Some parents feel that if they simply send their children to school that they have fulfilled their responsibility. After sending them to school they do not want to become involved in their children's school lives and particularly in family literacy programmes. They feel that it is the school's responsibility to teach literacy (Edwards 2004:42: Burningham & Dever 2005:88; Parry, Kirabo & Nakyato 2014:3). While schools tend to see parent involvement in literacy as defined in terms of participation in organized activities at the school, parents see their involvement in more informal activities that can take place outside the school such as providing nurturance, talking with their children, instilling cultural values and checking homework

(Gonzalez-DeHass & Willems 2003:93). Parents are eager to play all roles at schools, from tutor to classroom assistant to decision maker. However, professional educators tend to consider only the most traditional roles, such as supporter of school programmes or audience at school functions (Michael *et al*. 2012:67; Gonzalez-De Hass & Willems 2003:93). This means that educators tend to relegate parents to the less substantial roles, leaving parents feeling frustrated, belittled and neglected. The most effective forms of parental involvement are those that engage parents in working directly with their children on learning activities at home (Mqota 2009:77). Family literacy programmes which comprise direct parent-child interaction at home are the most effective type of family literacy programme. However, such programmes must be carefully designed and structured to meet this purpose (Doyle & Zhang 2011:230).

2.7.4 Differing perspectives on the child

Differing perspectives on the child also creates a barrier for both parents and teachers to engage in family literacy programmes. Like families, teachers bring significant expertise into the family-teacher partnership. While the parents' focus is on their own child, teachers' experience has given them the opportunity to see many different children over time and this experience informs them about the wide continuum of children's behaviour, temperament and development in general, and literacy development in particular. A teacher would typically focus on children's development of literacy skills, guided by objective national and local standards, while a parent is more concerned about their child's inner feelings and self-esteem. While parents know the most about their individual children, teachers know the most about children in general (Keyser 2006:60). These different focuses often create tension between teachers and parents.

2.7.5 Time constraints

Time constraints on the part of parents and teachers is a formidable barrier to the success of family literacy programmes (Long 2002; Pross & Barry n.d. 32; Levine 2002:5). Parent and teachers must also contend with other demands on their time (Arnold *et al*. 2008:78). More parents work outside the home than in past generations. The financial health of many families depends on the income of two working people, both because the cost of raising families is at an all-time high and people's basic standards of living have risen. In many families, both

parents work outside the home, making it difficult if not impossible to attend school conferences, meetings and programmes scheduled during the day (Michael *et al*. 2012: 70; Horvatin 2011:12, 17; Pross & Barry n.d. 32). Single parents may find it extremely difficult to find the opportunity to meet with educators (Arnold *et al*. 2008:84; Mqota 2009:85). The intensity and duration of family literacy programmes are also often daunting for participants of family literacy programmes. Evening meetings can be a serious burden and concern for personal safety after dark in low-income areas, and this may make both staff and parents reluctant to attend evening meetings. Moreover, even the most convenient meeting times may still mean that families need transportation to the school. Although parents may be concerned and interested in family literacy programmes, problems of survival may demand primary attention (Britto, Fuligni & Brooks-Gunn 2006:315).

2.7.6   An uninviting atmosphere

In many schools an uninviting atmosphere causes parents to not always feel as if they belong or that the teachers care (Horvatin 2011:17). Parents may feel intimidated and may mistrust schools because of their own childhood experiences with teachers and schools, not expecting them to help their children to succeed (Pross & Barry n.d.:33; Horvatin 2011:18). In addition, schools tend to communicate with parents mainly when the children's literacy learning are falling behind (Michael *et al*. 2012:68). What communication there is between school and the family is therefore mostly of a negative nature (Gonzalez-DeHass & Willems 2003:88; Crawford & Zygouris-Coe 2006:263). The frequent educational difficulties of disadvantaged children and predominance bad news from schools only reinforce parents' anxiety and defensiveness when dealing with the school (Horvatin 2011:20).

In some schools, teachers' attitudes towards parents range from disinterest in encouraging parent involvement to outright hostility (Gonzalez-De Hass & Willems 2003:90; Pross & Barry n.d.:24). According to Lemmer and van Wyk (2004:183) teachers often regard themselves as somewhat superior to parents due to their professional expertise. Frequently, educators view parents as problems that are best kept at a safe distance from the genuine work of the schools. Even if teachers thought that it made practical sense to invite parent input, they fear that doing so will take away from their authority as a teacher or will bring parental criticism of their instructional methods, curricular decisions and classroom management techniques. According to Gonzalez-DeHass & Willems (2003:90) many teachers felt that parents did not respect them

and unnecessarily question their authority. Some teachers may prefer to avoid contact with parents because it reduces the chances of having a confrontation. Teachers should be called on to examine and reflect on their own beliefs, especially any preconceived notions that may be detrimental to encouraging uptake in family literacy programmes.

2.7.7 Psychological barriers

Psychological barriers such as parents and teachers' misperceptions and misunderstandings, negative expectations, stereotypes, intimidation and distrust affect participation in family literacy (Pross & Barry n.d 33-35; Horvatin 2011:18). Many teachers and schools express a standardised view of the proper role of parents in schooling and a conventional middle-class model of what constitutes "good" families and "proper" child rearing (cf. 2.5.1) (Longwell-Grice & McIntyre 2006:125). Often parents find themselves "at odds" with schools simply because schools fail to recognise the ways in which families support their children looks different from school-like learning. If families' skills and knowledge differ from those of the dominant mainstream, schools view these skills and knowledge as deficient (deficit approach) and needs to be remediated (Longwell-Grice & McIntyre 2006:116; Jay & Rohl 2005:59-60). Contrary to the expectations of educators, Doyle and Zhang (2011:230) found that most parents participation in family literacy programmes were motivated by a common underlying goal – supporting their children's literacy development (Swain *et al.* 2014:87). Many parents talk of the importance of schools and how they would like to be involved in their children's literacy development, but do not know how to assist their children (Lukk & Veisson 2007:55). The barrier to more parent involvement is not parent apathy, but lack of support from educators. Teachers tend to see disadvantaged parents as overwhelmed with problems and they have little faith in these parents' ability to follow instructions and take action on problems (Gonzalez-De Hass & Willems 2003:92). Michael *et al*. (2012:71) and Meier, Lemmer and Van Wyk (2006:5) also maintain that, in many instances, administrators and teachers' low expectations for and negative attitudes toward low-income, English second language children and their parents prevented the development and implementation of well-designed family literacy programmes.

2.7.8 Cultural and social barriers

Cultural and social barriers are very powerful threats to parent involvement (Horvatin 2011:18). Every aspect of how parents and teachers care for, educate and think about young

children is embedded with cultural perspectives and beliefs (Gonzalez-DeHass & Willems 2003:91). Everyday exchanges in families are embedded in a context of literacy provisions and parental beliefs that support or limit the development of children's language and literacy competence (Powell 2004:160; Kajee 2011:436). According to Levine (2002:5) parents may feel uneasy if their cultural style or socio-economic level differs from those of the teachers. Further, particularly if teachers have not had many chances to meet people outside of their own culture, they may believe that their way of doing things is the only way or the best way (Keyser 2006:19). When teachers encounter diversity in thinking about and caring for children, they may experience shock and a sense of being threatened.

Teachers and parents may both be victims of cultural barriers caused by differences in language, values, goals, methods of education, and definition of appropriate roles. Many teachers express a deficit view (cf. 2.5.1) of low income families and their communities (Ordonez-Jasis & Ortiz 2006:43). Teachers frequently refer to family and community conditions such as crime, alcoholism, drug abuse, child abuse and poor housing conditions but they seldom remark on the strengths that the families or communities may have (Horvatin 2011:15). Suspicion and misunderstanding may affect both parents and school staff (Chavkin 1993:34). The staff may periodically feel overwhelmed by a sense of futility regarding the limitations of disadvantaged parents; the parents, in turn, are resentful of schools depriving their children of a quality education. Furthermore, educators believe that children from families with certain dysfunctional characteristics are unable and unmotivated to learn and cannot succeed in school (Gonzalez-De Hass & Willems 2003:94). These beliefs are particularly strong about single parent families and those from minority backgrounds (Van Wyk & Lemmer 2009:180). Educators further assume that poor, less-educated, and culturally different parents are neither able nor willing to become involved in their children's education (Michael *et al*. 2012:71; Cucchiara & Horvat 2009:976; Gonzalez-De Hass & Willems 2003:94; Ordonez-Jasis & Ortiz 2006:43). On the other hand, upwardly mobile minority parents are often maligned as pushy, demanding, and unrealistically ambitious for their children. Regardless of ethnicity, low-income parents, in general, have been condemned as unresponsive (Gonzalez-DeHass & Willems 2003:89).

2.7.9   Racial differences

Racial-ethnic differences may also impose barriers to participation in family literacy particularly where disadvantaged or minority parents are involved. Cultural and social groups often have different views on the best approaches to literacy and value patterns regarding achievement. When teachers differ culturally and educationally from their learners, they often do not have high expectations from their learners. Educators sometimes regard families and their literacy knowledge and skills as inappropriate, because it differs from mainstream school-like literacy and culture (Jay and Rohl 2005:59-60). As a result teachers are therefore more likely to believe that parents are disinterested or uninvolved in literacy (Michael *et al*. 2012:71) (cf. 2.5.1 above).

When working with racially diverse families, schools often fail to recognise the home literacies and prior experiences of these families. Instead of strengthening racially diverse families' funds of knowledge, schools employ the banking model of education (cf. 2.2.4). As schools fail to embrace diversity as a resource (Souto-Manning 2009:58), they instead keep on alienating and isolating racially diverse families.

2.7.10   Phases of schooling

The level of schooling of the child correlates strongly with all measures of involvement of parents. Parents of children in the primary school are more involved than parents in the secondary school (Gonzalez-DeHass & Willems 2003:86, 88; DePlanty, Coulter-Kern & Duchane 2007:361). As children mature, parents are gradually excluded from the life of the school. According to Stelmack (n.d. 1) and Horvatin (2011:18), a reason for this declining pattern is parents' lack of familiarity with the curriculum in the higher grades. In addition, minority parents, like majority parents, may distance themselves from their adolescent youth's school affairs in response to the child's bid for autonomy (Gonzalez-DeHass & Willems 2003:94; DePlanty *et al*. 2007:362; Stelmack n.d. 2). Independent of children's age, all analyses show that parents were more involved in their children's education if the children were better learners. Parents whose children are doing well or who are doing better in school are more likely to do more to ensure their children's continued success. Family literacy programmes are so successful because they capitalize on the fact that parents' involvement is

highest in the lower grades (Gonzalez-DeHass & Willems 2003:86, 88; DePlanty *et al*. 2007:361).

2.7.11 Lack of school policy and practice of parent involvement

School policy often provides for the use of traditional methods such as open days, conferences, volunteer programmes, fund raisers and parent-teacher organisations to involve parents in school-like activities (Gonzalez-De Hass & Willems 2003:89). Many parents, especially single and dual-income parents, do not participate in these activities, yet they want to help their children succeed at school (Gonzalez-De Hass & Willems 2003:94). Parents want the school to suggest activities they can pursue at home in the limited time they have together. Yet, schools efforts to involve and support parents in their children's literacy learning too often only include motivation to monitor their children's reading homework (Stelmack n.d. 2). Most of the efforts so far have been directed at "fixing" parents rather than altering school structures and practices (Michael *et al*. 2012:72). Schools need to purposefully design comprehensive programmes to ensure that parents become an integral part of the curriculum and not just be limited to volunteering and attending parent-teacher nights (Crawford & Zygouris-Coe 2006:262). Family literacy programmes are the ideal vehicle to achieve this goal.

2.8 FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAMMES AS A STRATEGIC COMPONENT OF A HOME-SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

The success of any family literacy programme depends on how well it matches up with parent's needs. The secret is to know who a child's parents are, to understand the circumstances under which they live, and to have in a school's repertoire as many strategies for involvement as possible (Michael *et al*. 2012:59-60). According to Sénéchal and Young (2008:1) parents can be involved in their children's literacy in a number of ways. Parents listening to their child read is often the most recommended parent-child activity. Crawford & Zygouris-Coe (2006:263-266) proposes a number of activities such as family literacy text sets, take-home book programmes, literacy learning kits, journaling and projects such as photo projects and cooking. Another activity related to literacy acquisition that schools often discourage parents to use, is direct teaching. Family literacy programmes can be tailored to include all three types of activities to strengthen children's literacy learning. In the ensuing section I will outline the

elements of successful home-school partnerships and illustrate how Epstein's very influential partnership programme can be tailored to promote family literacy.

2.8.1 Home-school partnerships

According to Lukk and Veisson (2007:55-56) two main strands of research have influenced current discussions about home-school partnerships: family learning environments that positively affect learners' school achievement; and school initiatives to involve parents in schooling. Research on family practices and school based parent involvement research coincided with research investigating characteristics of effective schools. The resulting body of findings succeeded in establishing a link between effective schools, family practices and school-based parent involvement programmes (Sailors, Hoffman & Matthee 2007:367-368). According to (Arnold *et al.* 2008:87) effective partnership models demonstrate certain common themes: They

- are school based and school driven,
- conceptualise the family and community very broadly and flexibly,
- allow for a continuum of involvement; from very active, complex school-based activities with maximum face to face parent-teacher interaction to supportive, simpler home-based activities with little, if any, face to face parent-teacher interaction, and
- form part of a school improvement plan linked to specific outcomes.

In addition to these common themes, Michael *et al.* (2012:60) stated that the following seven elements should be an integral part of parental involvement programmes:

- Written policies that specify areas for parent involvement,
- Administrative support (resources such as a meeting venue and duplicating facilities, funds and personnel),
- Continuous training of teachers and of parents in elements of parent involvement,
- Partnership approaches in curricular, management and non-curricular matters which help parents and teachers develop an attitude of ownership towards the school and take pride in it,

- Two-way communication, i.e. regular communication between parents and school, e.g. newsletters, personal visits and telephone calls should exist,
- Liaisons with the school with regard to parental involvement programmes, helping participants to benefit from each other's experience,
- Continuous evaluation of the school's parent evaluation programme.

2.8.1.1 Epstein's typology of home-school partnerships

A home-school-community partnership model that fulfils the above-mentioned criteria and that is used throughout the world is found in Joyce Epstein's typology of home-school-community partnerships (cf. 2.2.6). The Epstein typology of parent involvement is extensively referred to in the literature and is not only implemented in schools in the United States (US), Europe and Hong Kong, but has also been implemented with success in South African schools (Lemmer 2011; Van Wyk 2010:215).

Epstein's (2001:408-410; Epstein *et al.* 1997) framework of six major types of involvement that fall within the areas of overlapping spheres follows. The six types of family-school-community involvement are discussed and the application to family literacy programmes is highlighted.

a) Type 1: Parenting

In supporting parenting, the goal is to help families to establish home environments to support their children's development and growth. Family programmes supporting parenting skills often include themes such as good nutrition, health and hygiene, the emotional and psychological development of the child and special needs such as information about substance abuse, family counselling and HIV/Aids. In order to support parenting needs, schools can create platforms for families to share information about their needs with the school, their cultural backgrounds and the strengths and needs of their children. It is important for the school to make sure that all information for parents is clear, practical and linked to the child's success at school (Epstein *et al.* 1997).

Application to family literacy: Although the focus of family literacy programmes is on how families can support children's literacy acquisition through a variety of literacy activities, activities most often will include information on parenting and parenting skills. Family literacy programmes will not only include information on child development, but will also focus on language development, and development stages in drawing and emergent writing and how to support the child during each phase of development. This may include aspects of scaffolding (cf. 2.2.3) as well as self-esteem, resilience, the importance of setting goals and discipline. In setting time apart for literacy activities, families will have to reflect on their routines at home. Families have the responsibility to guide and monitor their children's homework and have to make sure that they have all the materials needed to do so.

b)   Type 2: Communication

Programmes aimed at strengthening communication focus on designing effective school-to-home and home-to-school channels of communication to share information of school programmes and the children's progress. The extent to which the school communicates with parents will determine their level of involvement (Epstein *et al*. 1997).

When communicating with families about school programmes and learner progress through school-to-home and home-to-school communication by means of printed and non-printed communications, schools should take into account parents who do not speak English (or whatever is the language of the school) or who are illiterate (Horvatin 2011:16). Parents' language difficulties could result in them not understanding the participation opportunities given to them, which often lead to teachers labelling such parents as "uninterested". Possible means of communicating with parents include letters, written reports/profiles, parent evenings and home visitation. Examples of good communication also include: regular examples of learners' work sent home for review, effective delivery of report cards as well as meetings to explain the curriculum and suggest ways to improve grades, clear information about choosing subjects, extramural activities and careers; clear communication of school policies and regulations (Epstein *et al*. 1997).

As some parents may have had negative experiences when they were students themselves and as a consequence distrust schools (Horvatin 2011:18-20; Pross & Barry, n.d. 33), it is particularly important to create common ground and avoid making negative assumptions about

their educational values and expectations. Teachers often regard themselves as somewhat superior to parents due to their professional expertise and the nature of home-school communication tends to reflect this situation. Therefore home-school communication should strive to give parents a voice and avoid patronising parents. Most importantly, schools should not do all the talking. Most communication between home and school tends to be one-way; from the school to the home. Schools must ensure that structures and opportunities exist for parents to contact the school, share their views and express their opinions.

Application to family literacy programmes: If schools are to support family literacy through formal and informal programmes, they need to be able to connect (communicate) with the home. Family literacy programmes create the space where schools and families set some time apart to communicate. Family literacy programmes create the platform where schools can share information on curriculum requirements regarding literacy, and parents can talk about their children's needs. It provides an opportunity where the separate and shared roles and responsibilities of both the home and the school in the child's literacy learning can be cleared.

c)   Type 3: Volunteering

Volunteering focusses on how the school recruits and organises parent's help and support. This includes the design of a programme in which parent volunteers are recruited, trained and organised for a variety of activities aimed at meeting the needs of the school (Epstein *et al.* 1997). Examples of volunteering are: parents as classroom volunteers to assist teachers with routine tasks; a parent room in the school, which can be used for volunteer work and meetings, an annual survey of parents to determine parent talents, interests and resources, parent patrols to assist with the safety and operation of school programmes; parents as peer mentors to other parents. To get a strong volunteering programme on its feet, schools should recruit parent volunteers widely so that all families know that their talents are useful and appreciated. Schools should make the programmes for volunteers flexible so that working parents can also participate. An effective volunteering programme means that learners gain new respect for their parents when they see their contribution to the school. Parents gain a better understanding of the teacher's job and they become more comfortable on the school premises. They develop self-confidence and new skills and the latter can lead to their participation in more formal educational programmes (Epstein *et al.* 1997).

Application to family literacy programmes: In seeing teachers as valuable partners in literacy development, schools can involve families in new ways. Parent volunteers could be trained to assist as co-facilitators in family literacy programmes. Teachers can gain much insight in families' existing skills and knowledge from the presence of volunteers. Volunteer parents can also assist with literacy activities and projects in the class during teaching. In doing so, teachers will be able to provide greater individual attention to learners. A volunteer assisting in the school's family literacy programme can also serve on the school's action team.

d)   Type 4: Learning at home

Learning at home entails the provision of information and ideas to families about how to help learners with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning. Schools should also explain homework policies and how to monitor and support homework on an annual basis. They must give families a regular schedule of homework early in the year. They should also give information about the new skills that children are learning and how to support the mastery of those skills at home. Regular information about homework makes both learners and parents aware of homework assignments and the learner's responsibility to complete homework on time. The learner develops respect for the parents' knowledge and experience. Parents learn how to assist their children at home wisely without taking over the responsibility for homework and learning. Furthermore, parents get to know the curriculum and the relevance of the subjects of the subjects to various careers. Teachers are greatly assisted when parents are involved in learning at home (Epstein *et al*. 1997).

Application to family literacy programmes: Family literacy programmes are a particularly efficient vehicle to support learning at home. Schools that value parents as educators and homes as learning environments have great potential for encouraging children's progress (Burningham & Dever 2005:87). Yet, many parents may feel that they do not have the skills and knowledge of the reading process needed to work with their children at home. Schools play a crucial role in educating parents who may not know how to create a rich literacy environment at home. Telling a parent to read to his or her child is insufficient guidance for many parents. Literacy programmes need to provide concrete instruction on how to support literacy development through joint book reading and other related activities. One example is coaching parents on how to orally label objects, hold a child's attention, ask questions, interact with text-specific comments, and provide feedback to the child (Powell 2004:162). A second example is

teaching parents how to expand on the child's telling of a story from a book. A child's engagement with a book is encouraged through the adult's seeking questions, adding information and expanding on the child's description. Providing specific information and explicit feedback to parents regarding their child's literacy development is beneficial. Family literacy bags containing books, some activities and a parent guide-book with information about ways to read and discuss the books with the children is one example of how parents' involvement in literacy activities can be strengthened. At home parents provide the necessary support and encouragement and continuously compliment their children on their efforts. Parents can show off children's drawings and artwork by putting it on the fridge or display it where it can be seen and appreciated.

e)   Type 5: Decision-making

This type of involvement focusses on including parents in school decisions and developing parent leaders and representatives. Other examples of these practices include active parent committees for each grade level or for various activities in the school, the statutory participation of parents on the school governing body, and the training of parent leaders through workshops and talks. Schools should give parents information about elections for school representatives, new educational policy and legislation. All parents should be given information so that they can connect and communicate with the parent leaders and governors. Family literacy programmes can play a role in establishing parent networks that can make decisions that improve schooling. Schools are challenged by this type of involvement to include parent leaders from all racial, ethnic and socio-economic groups. Training should be offered to parents who are inexperienced in management and leadership so that they too can aspire to positions of leadership. The benefits of involving parents in decision-making are far reaching. Parent leaders can provide input into school policies on both local and national levels. They develop a sense of ownership in the school and in the decisions taken by the school. They become aware of meeting procedures, budgeting and legal requirements, and develop their civic responsibility. Teachers in turn are made aware of parent opinions regarding school policy and education reform. Finally, when parents and teachers share leadership, the status of the parent representatives on committees and governance structures is enhanced (Epstein *et al*. 1997).

Application to family literacy programmes: If a school is to focus on family literacy, they will need support and financial support of parent leaders, such as members of the school

governing body. To sustain family literacy programmes, support material in the form of reading books and writing material is often needed. Therefore a member of the school governing body should also serve on the action team driving family literacy programmes of the school. In this way schools will be able to plan for the activities of the family literacy programme. By involving decision-making structures, awareness of the family literacy programme can be created in the community.

f)   Type 6: Collaboration with the community

Strong community partnerships are a benchmark of successful family programmes. Collaboration entails the identification and integration of resources and services from the community to strengthen school programmes, family practices and learner learning and development. This may include making use of community expertise in matters such as health, culture, business and recreation. Examples of community collaboration are giving parents information about community health, developing cultural, recreational and social programmes and providing services. It includes information about learning opportunities for parents and learners in the community, and links families with counselling programmes, family-oriented organisations, safety and security structures in the community and businesses. Moreover, schools, families and learners can participate in community projects such as caring for the aged, recycling and clean-up programmes, and projects to enhance neighbourhood safety. The challenge in this regard is to inform all families of community resources and to link families in need with the specialised assistance available in the community. It is also important to encourage families and learners from all backgrounds to make a contribution to the life of the community by offering their time, talents and expertise to the community.

The benefits of collaborating with the community are varied. Learners find that they can develop their talents by participating in community clubs and organisations. They become aware of other occupations and careers within the community, and are put into contact with professional community help and services where necessary. Parents are also linked to services which they may need and they find ways to contribute to the community. Teachers become aware of the many hidden resources in the community, which can be used to enhance their teaching task. They may discover mentors, business partners and community volunteers who can contribute to teaching and learning by sharing their expertise. Finally, teachers are often

faced with social problems which they cannot address. They learn to whom and how to refer parents and children in need to get specialised help (Epstein *et al*. 1997).

Application to family literacy programmes: Literacy is a social construct and cannot be separated from the social and cultural context it develops within (cf. 1.6.3). As participation in literacy programmes often improves parents' own literacy, it gives parents access to social activities (Openjuru & Lyster 2007:101).

Because participation in family literacy programmes often result in better parenting skills and increases low-literate parents' literacy skills (cf. 2.6.2), family literacy programmes therefore have the potential to positively affect several major social issues, such as, nutrition and health problems, low school achievement and high school dropout rates, teen parenting, joblessness and welfare dependency, social alienation and home and community violence (Padak & Rasinski 2000:4).

As family literacy programmes benefits the community, the community should in return support, promote and engage in activities that strengthen families. Community advocates can provide funding, resources, training, facilities and other supports to enhance the family literacy effort. The community can also create strong literacy systems within the fabric of daily living such as libraries and health clinics (Swick 2009:404).

2.8.2.2   Epstein's action team and its application to family literacy

Although a principal or a teacher may be a leader in working with some families or with groups in the community, one person cannot create a lasting, comprehensive programme that involves all families as their children progress through the grades (Epstein *et al*. 1997:13). Epstein therefore proposes, along with clear policies, an action team comprising parents and teachers to guide the development of a comprehensive program of partnerships. The purpose of the action team is to design programmes including all six types of involvement, and integrate all family and community connections within a single, unified plan and program.

According to Epstein *et al.* (1997:12), good programmes to implement parent involvement will look different in each site, as individual schools tailor their practices to meet the specific needs of learners and their families. There are, however, some commonalities across successful

programmes at all grade levels. These include a recognition of the overlapping spheres of influence on learner development; attention to various types of involvement that promote a variety of opportunities for schools, families and communities to work together; and an organisational structure (the action team) for school, family and community partnerships to coordinate each school's work and progress.

Epstein proposes the following steps:

- **Create the team.** The establishment of an action team may be initiated by the governing body of the school together with staff and interested parents. It could also be launched at a general parent meeting after the matter has been discussed. Whatever the method used, Epstein proposes the action team should consist of at least three teachers and three parents. Furthermore, it should also include two learners (in the case of a secondary school), a member of the administrative staff, a school social worker, school nurse or any member of the public willing to serve on the team. In a school that has little help in the form of social workers or nurses, the number of teachers and parents on the team can be increased. A diverse membership for the action team will ensure that partnership activities continue to consider the various needs, interests and talents of teachers, parents, learners and the community. The chairperson of the action team may be any member who enjoys the respect of the other members, who has good communication skills and an understanding of the partnership approach. It is advisable that one member should also serve on the school governing body to ensure cooperation between these two bodies.

  The organisation and functioning of the action team is essential to running and sustaining parent involvement in the six areas in a school (Van Wyk & Lemmer 2009:30). Once the action team has been established, one or more members of the team should be assigned to each of the six types of parent involvement. This means that there will be six subcommittees dealing with the following: parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and community collaboration (Van Wyk & Lemmer 2009:139). Even if the action team is smaller than the 12 members as proposed by Epstein, it could still effectively drive a few carefully selected family programmes.

- **Obtain the funds needed.**
- **Identify the starting points.** It is advisable to start off with a small, but effective action team that drives one programme effectively, rather than having a larger team struggling to coordinate many programmes. The action team could always grow as successfully implemented family programmes pave the way for more family programmes. Schools can apply a Swot-analysis to determine their strengths and weaknesses in terms of the six types of involvement and to determine their immediate need. Each new project must be carefully reviewed and continuously improved before adding new ones.
- **Develop a three-year outline and a one-year action plan.** The minimum time required for an action team to implement and complete a number of projects is three years. Continue implementation in three-year cycles.

2.9   SUMMARY

Literacy development is a major goal of education and one of the fundamental prerequisites for academic success and participation in modern society (Van Steensel, McElvany, Kurvers & Herppich (2011:69). The crucial role of parents in supporting and improving their children's literacy development has been well documented.

In this chapter I provided an overview of relevant theories which have implications for early literacy acquisition. That enabled me to provide a general theoretical framework for the study. I traced the evolving role of the family in the child's literacy acquisition throughout broad historical periods, and outlined the developments in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The function of family literacy programmes and the dominant approaches as well as the benefits of family literacy programmes were also discussed. I also highlighted possible barriers impacting on the participation of family literacy programmes. In closure, I investigated how family literacy programmes may possibly be incorporated into Epstein's framework of six types of involvement.

Chapter 3 will focus on family literacy in the South African context.

CHAPTER 3
AN OVERVIEW OF LITERACY PRACTICES IN SOUTH AFRICA

3.1   INTRODUCTION

Chapter 3 presents an overview of literacy practices in South Africa with special reference to family literacy. Firstly an overview is given of the family in the South African context and the implication thereof for family literacy. Thereafter follows a discussion of the contextual factors influencing literacy skills of the family with brief attention to adult literacy and general literacy practices. The ensuing discussion covers literacy acquisition in educational provision, with reference to literacy in Early Childhood Education (ECD), including Grade R and Grade 1, as well as the implications for family involvement and support of literacy. The chapter concludes with an overview of important educational programmes with a family literacy component available in South Africa and the constraints to their effective implementation.

3.2   THE FAMILY IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR FAMILY LITERACY

In an effort to understand literacy practices in South African homes and how it influences the emergent literacy of young children, a clear understanding of family life in South Africa is necessary. Although the Green Paper on Families (Department of Social Development 2011a:27) acknowledges that the way the family is defined will always differ from context to context, it defines the family as "a group of interacting persons who recognise a relationship with each other, based on a common parentage, marriage or adoption." Ziehl (2001; 2002) tries to avoid elevating the nuclear family above other family types and thus defines the family as a social organisation containing an ideological element and a concrete element, where the ideological element refers to marriage and residence, and the concrete element to the actual domestic arrangements of the people who live in it. Amoateng and Heaton (2007:14) define families as "social groups that are related by blood (kinship), marriage, adoption, or affiliation with close emotional attachments to each other that persists over time and go beyond a physical residence". The reason that definitions of family vary, is because the family is a vibrant non-static entity of socialisation progressively being transformed by changing patterns of socialisation and interaction (DSD 2011a:8; Amoateng 2006:5). The terms "family" and

"household", although being two conceptually distinct terms, are often used interchangeably. Although in this thesis family is generally not equated to household (cf. 1.6.1), in the ensuing section family and household have been used interchangeably according to the understanding of the different authors to whom reference is made.

3.2.1   Defining parents and parental responsibilities

The South African Schools Act (SASA) No.84 of 1996 (RSA 1996b) defines the concept of parent; describes basic parental duties; sets requirements for schools related to parents' right to information; and provides for parent and community representation in mandatory school governing bodies (SGB's). According to Chapter 1, definitions and applications of the Act (RSA 1996b), parents are defined as:

a)   The biological or adoptive parent or legal guardian of a learner,

b)   The person legally entitled to custody of a learner, or

c)   The person who undertakes to fulfil the obligations of person referred to in paragraphs (a) and (b) towards the learner's education at school.

This wide definition of parents which, considers among others, the impact of socio-economic conditions on families, implies that families can no longer be stereotyped in South Africa (Lyster, Desmond, Thornton & Dlamini 2007:39). Although marriage is recognised by the South Africa's Constitution, the Constitution also prohibits marriage discrimination on sexual orientation (Department of Social Development 2011a:32). This understanding accommodates a diversity of family types. Although marriage is important for family stability, the occurrence of marriages in South Africa is generally low compared to the rest of Africa (Amoateng 2006:4). Children are often raised by a single parent or by their grandparents (Budlender & Lund 2011:925-927). Programmes aimed at supporting parents should therefore not be limited to biological parents but should be applied widely particularly in extended and multigenerational families (Lyster *et al*. 2007:40).

The Children's Act (Act No 38 of 2005) (RSA 2005) and its amendments reinforce provisions in the Bill of Rights and provide details of the responsibilities of parents and guardians.

3.2.2　Family types

Not only does racial patterns reflect differences in marriage, divorce and childbearing, but economic and political changes has also led to changes in the family in the form of higher divorce rates, single-hood, childless marriages, postponement of marriage and cohabitation, gay marriages, single unmarried parents, extended multigenerational families and child-headed households (Budlender & Lund 2011:928-929; Amoateng 2007:32; Lyster *et al*. 2007:40). Some of the major patterns of family will briefly be discussed as well as the implications it has for family literacy.

3.2.2.1　Nuclear family

Although the nuclear family is the most common form of family (DSD 2011a:29), the Western concept of the nuclear family (a man, his wife and their dependent children) has never accurately captured the norm of all South African families (Budlender & Lund 2011:926). The Western isolated nuclear form of family is often idealised and African families are often seen as dysfunctional due to patterns of polygamy, extramarital sexual relations, illegitimacy, delayed marriage, teenage pregnancy and female-headed households (Amoateng 2007:33). Nuclear families as the largest family pattern comprise 23.25% of all families at national level, followed by single adult families (20.40%) and lastly three-generation families. It is most common among Indians (55.1%), followed by Whites (46.3%), then Coloureds (40.1%) and is least common among Blacks (36.9%). According to statistics (South Africa 2014a:6) marriage as a form of nuclear family is on the decline among all racial groups.

3.2.2.2　Extended multigenerational family

For Africans, who generally put a high premium on communal ethos, the extended multi-generational family is often seen as the norm. Challenging economic circumstances are often the reason for the prevalence of extended families since many African families are compelled to pool the little resources they have to make ends meet (Amoateng, Heaton & Kalule-Sabiti 2007:44, 48). Low rates of marriage and high rates of non-marital fertility, including out-of-wedlock births, have led to the co-residence of single parents with their mothers, leading to multigenerational living in African communities (Amoateng, Heaton & Kalule-Sabiti 2007:44,48). Higher mortality among the middle-adult age group due to the HIV/AIDS

pandemic has forced the elderly increasingly to play parental roles due to the increasing number of orphans. A higher percentage of African children live with their grandparents, compared to any other racial group. However, improvements in the standard of living, basic demographic changes, declining fertility levels and cultural changes may reduce the need for extended multigenerational families in future (Amoateng 2007:35). Extended multigenerational families are more predominant in poorer rural areas while nuclear family households are more predominant in urban areas. Many rural households are also female dominant, because the men work in the nearby towns and more distant cities, and usually come home for weekends once a month (Pretorius & Machet 2004:131).

3.2.2.3   Divorced parents

Despite the fact that South Africans strongly believe in the importance of marriage and monogamy, which is perceived to be associated with better living standards and emotional security, one out of every two marriages ends in divorce (Amoateng 2006:4). Statistics (Statistics South Africa 2014a:11) indicate that almost half of all marriages end up in divorce in the first 5 to 10 years of marriage. In 2012 54.9% of the divorces involved children younger than 18 years. Power and autonomy for woman that comes with paid employment is seen as a mechanism that destabilises marriage bonds, resulting in higher divorce rates. Higher education, better employment opportunities and a steady income gives women independence and the realisation that they can bring up a child without a husband and go on in life single (Russell 2012:23). The higher the job's ranking, the more negatively affected marriage stability becomes (Kalule-Sabiti, Palamuleni, Makiwane & Amoateng 2007:94).

3.2.2.4   Single unmarried parents

Although it is generally believed that marriage in Africa is a universal institution, marriage rates among the African and coloured population are generally low. The exorbitant increase in *lobola*, the age-old African custom that entails a gift in the form of cattle, or lately large sums of money from the bridegroom's family to the bride's family to symbolises commitment of the two families to the marriage, force many young couples into living together (Amoateng 2006:5; Kalule-Sabiti *et al.* 2007:89).   Childbearing before marriage in South Africa is also more prevalent among African and coloured people than their Asian and white counterparts (Willan 2013:47). Generally a young African woman in South Africa gain adult status by becoming a

mother rather than a wife or a cohabitant (Kalule-Sabiti *et al.* 2007:109). In 2012, 12% of births registered in South Africa occurred to mothers between 15 and 19 years (Statistics South Africa 2013:18). Almost 48.8% of mothers with young children were never married, and a further 18.3% were living with their partners as married (Statistics South Africa 2013:37). In 2012, 42.5% of children aged below five years lived with only their biological mother (Statistics South Africa 2013:25; 26). Females head 37.5 % of all households, with 54.3 % of these women older than 70 years (Statistics South Africa 2011). There were more than twice as many skip-generation families headed by females compared to those headed by males. The demands of having to provide and take care of the family is often much higher on single-parent families, having to work overtime or take additional jobs to meet the needs of the family (Kalule-Sabiti *et al.* 2007:110). This dramatically increases the vulnerability of young children growing up in single person households.

3.2.2.5   Child-headed households

The increasing morbidity and mortality rates among adults as a result of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, poverty, violence, crime and motor vehicle accidents have resulted in growing numbers of orphans and vulnerable children (Unisa 2008:18). The extremely rapid rate of orphanhood has led to the emergence of a new form of a family structure: a household headed by one of the affected children, or simply a child-headed household. According to the Children's Act (No 38 of 2005) (RSA 2005) a child is any person under the age of 18. A child-headed household, therefore, is a household where, in the absence of an adult, a child or youth has assumed the role of a primary caregiver in respect of another child or other children in the household by providing the basic needs such as food, clothing and psychological support (Unisa 2008:40). Child-headed families make up about 1% of families in South Africa (Statistics South Africa 2011:7). The main needs of the children in such households are listed as socio-economic needs, such as nutrition (food); safety and shelter in terms of housing and clothing; health; hygiene; education and learning and supervision and money. Psychosocial needs such as counselling following trauma and multiple loss including death of parents and dispersal of siblings were also mentioned even though these were not top in the list. The children required acknowledgement of their self-esteem, recognition, dignity and respect, hence the report especially from schools that these children did not avail themselves voluntarily for support because they did not want other children to know about their situation (Unisa 2008:24).

3.2.2.6   Orphanhood

In a 2011 study the South African Institute of Race Relations (Holborn & Eddy 2011:1) noted that family life in the conventional sense did not exist for many South African children; for example almost 25 % of the country's under-18s were growing up without their biological parents. The number of children who had lost one or both parents to AIDS stood at 1.4 million, more than in many African countries (Statistics South Africa 2011:20; Mathews, Jamieson, Lake, & Smith 2014:19). Whereas maternal orphanhood for children between 0-17 years was 7.1% in 2011, paternal orphanhood was much higher, at 15.4% (Statistics South Africa 2011:77). Males have a much higher proportion of deaths due to non-natural causes (14.9%) as compared to females (5.1%) deaths. As much as 12.3% of male non-natural deaths were the cause of assault, while 5.3% of female deaths were due to the same cause (Statistics South Africa 2014c:41). However, this alone cannot explain the high number of paternal orphans, some of whom may also be accounted for by children whose fathers have never been known. A study in Soweto and Johannesburg found that only 20% of fathers who were not married to their child's mother at the time of its birth were still in contact with their children by the time the children were 11 years old (Holborn & Eddy 2011:4). Orphaned children are at a significantly higher risk of missing out on schooling, living in households that have less food security, suffering from anxiety and depression, and being exposed to HIV infection. These risks are higher if a mother, rather than a father, died. A study by Arlington (2008:134) on the impact of orphanhood on school performance followed children over a number of years. It was found that those whose mother had died were less likely to be enrolled in school, had completed fewer years of education on average, and had less money spent on their education than children whose mothers were still alive. Families with adopted children comprised a very small percentage of families in South Africa, irrespective of whether the parents were a married couple or a single adult.

3.2.3   Implications of different family types for family literacy involvement

The status, well-being and development of children are usually contextualised within the family, the school and the relationship between the family and the school (Rama & Richter 2007:136). UNICEF (2007) has indicated that the first four years of life are a period of rapid physical, mental, emotional, social and moral growth and development and as such, every child must be ensured the best start in life. Children's experiences in these years have the biggest

impact on how their brains develop. It is also the period when children grasp the fundamental skills needed to do well in school and develop as happy and confident individuals. Young children spend most of their time at home and the social and physical environment in which they live has consequences for their current and future health and social development.

In the section above a detailed description was given as to how the erosion of the family environment as a safety net has left South African children vulnerable to all types of abuse, exploitation and neglect (Unisa 2008:41). Many children live in household that have no monthly income (Rama & Richter 2007:138) which impacts directly on their cognitive and social development trajectories. The amounts of time spent on reading or being read to, watching television, doing homework and studying, and doing household work is largely influenced by the family environment and available resources.

Having to prematurely take on adult responsibilities and household duties deprive vulnerable children of their rights to education, rest, play and recreation as outlined in terms of the Children's Act (No 38 of 2005) (RSA 2005). Denying children these basic rights eventually results high rates if illiteracy and a high dropout of the school system (Unisa 2008:49).

3.2.4   The family and policy on families

The Government of South Africa has a responsibility to ensure that children's rights are protected and to assist families to create environments where children can grow and reach their potential. South Africa has enacted a number of laws and regulations aimed at realising this goal.

The Green Paper on Families (DSD 2011a) was promulgated in 2011 with a view to provide guidelines and strategies for promoting family life and strengthen families. It was envisioned that these twin processes would help families to attain certain levels of well-being and help to prevent the family from further disintegration and vulnerability. It places the family at the centre of national policy discourse, development and implementation by advocating for rights-based policies and programmes which support family life and strengthen families in South Africa. The Green Paper is premised on an understanding that families must be supported where they are already thriving and strengthened where they are under threat. Family-strengthening programmes should focus on the most needy and vulnerable families; for

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example, well-implemented home-health visiting programmes and high-quality, comprehensive and holistic ECD initiatives can help improve outcomes for children where poverty and HIV are highly prevalent. Providing support to caregivers can also enhance the potential of families. Such programmes could alleviate the care burden of women and girls, and enable caregivers to take up other activities, such as income-generating initiatives, schooling and self-care. They can also be vehicles for the delivery of other services; for example, nutrition and healthcare programmes (DSD 2011a:54).

3.2.4.1 Implications for family literacy

Different policies and programmes often focus on the individual and rarely place them in the family context, and benefits for the family as a unit are hardly ever considered. As this Green paper advocates an integrated and coordinated approach, it begins to place the family in the national policy discourse and gives full recognition of family roles and functions (DSD 2011a:46). The Green Paper also aims to create avenues to support and enhance family support initiatives, programmes and systems (DSD 2011a:55).

3.2.5 The family and socio-economic conditions

Poverty greatly affects family life and exacerbates the impact of family breakdown on children. According to the Business Dictionary (BusinessDictionary.com 2015) poverty is a condition where the minimum criteria for a decent standard of living in terms of food, clothing and finance is not met. In 2011, 32.3% of the population or roughly 16.3 million South Africans were living in poverty (Statistics South Africa 2014b:12-13). Poverty in South Africa manifests in adverse factors such as ill health, undernourishment, deprivation of privileges, backlogs in education, unsupportive environment, communication and language deficiencies, limited social status and a negative view of the future. These adverse conditions are created by factors such as inadequate education, low wages and unemployment. In 2012, 24% of the population, or roughly 13.5 million people, were unemployed (Statistics South Africa 2014b:20).

In 2011 the average annual income per household was R103 204, with Black Africans only having earned an average annual income of R60 613 compared to the average annual income of Whites on R365 134 (Statistics South Africa 2012:42). A tenth of South Africans live in communities that are physically unsafe, threatened by crime and infested with rampant drug

use. Impoverished households are often undernourished and live under unhealthy conditions, with HIV/AIDS infection at phenomenal levels. According to the 2011 census (Statistics South Africa 2012:59-64) 13.6% South Africans live in informal dwellings, 8.8% have no access to piped water, and 5.2% indicated that they do not have toilets (2.1% still use the bucket system and 19.3% use pit toilets).

While the majority of households (65.4%) rely on employment earnings as their main source of income, a larger portion of households (42.3%) rely on state social assistance or grants in the form of the Social Assistance Programme (Casale & Desmond 2007:64; Statistics South Africa 2015:58) Grants are a form of non-contributory and unconditional cash transfers that aim to support the poor through a process of redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor (Budlender & Lund 2011:939-940). In 2011, some 15 million people received social grants in South Africa, which is more than a quarter of the population and over six times the number of grant beneficiaries in 1998. In addition, more than ten million people receive the Child Support Grant and nearly 440 000 caregivers receive Care Dependency or Foster Care Grants, while almost 2.6 million older persons receive a non-contributory pension (National Treasury 2011). Currently 60% of government's spending is allocated to the social wage, as expenditure on these services has more than doubled in real terms over the past decade (Statistics South Africa 2014b:8, 20).

3.2.5.1 Implications for family literacy

South Africans living in poverty are vulnerable, powerless and isolated. Malnutrition, an opportunity deprived existence, technological backwardness, overpopulation, disadvantageous surroundings, conflict, violence, crime, substance abuse, and psychological degradation threatens the sound early development of most South African children and reinforces an escalating cycle of deprivation (Prinsloo 2002:65). These poor socio-economic conditions often imply lack of early stimulation that compromises children's cognitive development and later school performance (Statistics South Africa 2013:14). Poor and vulnerable families have very little or no money for books or even newspapers (Mulgrew 2012; Pretorius & Machet 2008:265: Parry *et al.* 2014:3), and have little or no time to read. Chapter 2 (cf. 2.3.6.1) explained how the acquisition of literacy is embedded within the family and how emergent literacy is supported by having adults creating opportunities to engage in reading and writing activities and modelling reading and writing behaviours in the preschool years (Pretorius &

Machet 2008:262,263; Parry *et al.* 2014:1). Many children who come from disadvantaged environments are at a major disadvantage when they start school, as they have never encountered a book before and have no knowledge of how books work (Machet & Pretorius 2004:39). For many children from disadvantaged communities their early literacy experiences are only likely to occur in the context of child-care centres (Pretorius & Machet 2008:286). It is therefore important to create pathways and programmes that promote book-based activities.

3.2.6   The family in urban and rural environments

Urbanisation is a worldwide and ever intensifying phenomenon. A major problem facing South Africa is unplanned urbanisation in and around all major cities. Unplanned urbanisation has left many rural areas impoverished and isolated from social development processes. A lack of job opportunities drives people, many of whom are immigrants from other African countries, to South African cities (Prinsloo 2002:66).

According to the General Household Survey (GHS) 2014 (Statistics South Africa 2015:16), there were some 15.6 million households in South Africa. At the time, 8.5 million families were living in urban areas and 4.5 million in rural areas. The increase of unplanned informal settlements, the so-called squatter camps, has created inner city and adjacent areas in South Africa's major cities that are dangerous and unhealthy places to live in. High density living and the negative effects of squatter camp life threaten the health, personal safety and future prospects of the inhabitants of such areas. The deterioration of previously well-functioning infrastructures in many urban and semi urban areas is an aggravating factor in the endeavour to provide quality education and a healthy life style for all inhabitants. The culture of non-payment of bonds, loans and municipal accounts among city dwellers and the ever-increasing number of people in the cities are the most important reasons for this state of affairs (Prinsloo 2002:66). Social structures have undergone a radical change in terms of rapid urbanisation, a breakdown in family life, and a new permissiveness which has contributed to increased crime, violence, corruption and the HIV/AIDS pandemic (Prinsloo 2002:63).

In rural areas infrastructure declines because of the depopulation of these areas. People living in rural areas often also have little or no access to libraries and bookshops (Mulgrew 2012). Unemployment and poverty are particularly high in the rural areas bordering farms, as agriculture has become increasingly mechanised over the last two decades. Large numbers of

people eke out an existence in informal economic activities, most of which are limited and not sustainable. Many people engage in the same "survivalists" activities like sewing and vegetable gardening and the selling of produce. Goods are marketed to their own impoverished communities with little financial yield. The lack of affordable transport means that people seldom travel to more lucrative areas to sell their goods (Prinsloo 2002:67). For many rural families the nearest primary schools was, and is, far away from their homes, and small children make tiring journeys by foot each day to rural schools that are of poor quality. Government attempts to solve the problem include more than 50 government programmes, pilot projects and grants which seek to reduce poverty and inequality in both urban and rural areas. These include water and electricity provision, child welfare, education, adult literacy programmes and job creation (Prinsloo 2002:68).

3.2.6.1   Implications for family literacy

In rural African environments there is often little support for literacy: no television, few books or magazines in the homes, and there are hardly any written signs and environmental print to be found. Literacy is often only used to understand publicly posted notices or to read the Bible or other religious material (Parry *et al.* 2014:3). Reading for pleasure is definitely not understood, nor valued (Mulgrew 2012) and bridging the gap between the literacy practices of the home and the school is often a challenge in rural communities. Cultural accessibility of books may also pose a problem for rural communities. Machet and Pretorius (2004:42) illustrates the importance of cultural accessibility through an anecdote from one of their sites in rural KwaZulu Natal where they have supplied books. The book contained an illustration of a brown cow. The mothers in the family literacy programme objected to that saying that all the cows in their area were black and white and refused to read a book that "lied" with their children. Parents in rural communities are most likely to have lower literacy levels themselves and might feel intimidated by books. They may need to be trained on how to use the illustrations to "read" the story. Machet and Pretorius (2004:45) also found that donated books are often locked away to "keep them safe". By drawing families into "making" their own storybooks, the "throwaway" quality might, according to Bloch (2015:4) help bring people closer to storybooks as there needs to be no anxiety of "spoiling" or "dirtying" precious commodities.

3.2.7   The family and health issues

A number of factors affect the health of families in South Africa. Access to services, such as housing, piped water, sanitation, energy, transport and education, play a determining role in the welfare and health status of people (Casale & Desmond 2007:75). The association between health and water is particularly marked for children and inadequate physical environments are responsible for a very large number of deaths among children below age 5, mainly due to pneumonia and diarrhoeal diseases (Statistics South Africa 2013:14). Inadequate sanitation and drainage, a lack of clean water, uncollected waste, inadequate housing, toxic wastes and threats to safety all contribute to high level of child mortality and morbidity. Overcrowded living conditions and high levels of household air pollution through long periods of exposure to smoke from burning wood or straw to cook, increases the risk for lower respiratory tract illnesses such as pneumonia or tuberculosis. Burns, falls, traffic accidents, poisoning and drowning from exposure to heavy traffic, open fires, exposed heaters, unprotected stairways and heights, unfinished constructions, lack of safe storage for chemicals and poisons, and a scarcity of safe play spaces all contribute to mortality and morbidity among children (Statistics South Africa 2013:15).

Although the social grants to a great extent reduce the number of people who are vulnerable to hunger, the 2014 General Household Survey (Statistics South Africa 2015:59) indicates that 22.5% of households still have limited access to food. A lack of essential nutrients over a prolonged period of time not only impacts on children's physical development, but also on their cognitive development. Many South African children rely on the National Schools Nutrition Programme for at least one meal per day.

More risky sexual behaviour is one potential outcome of large numbers of unoccupied young people having grown up in dysfunctional families. Although the South African adolescent fertility rate is half of the average for sub-Saharan Africa, it is three times higher than the average rate in East Asia and four times the average European rate (Holborn & Eddy 2011:10). Statistics from the Department of Basic Education suggest that learner pregnancy in schools is becoming more of a problem. In 2014, 33.2% of females between 14 and 19 years old were pregnant (Statistics South Africa 2015:31). Future prospects for young people and their eventual children often result in poor educational opportunities and equally poor job prospects (Willan 2013:34, 46-48). Furthermore, the problems facing teenage parents are likely to be

passed on to their children, as women born to teenage mothers are twice as likely to have a child as a teenager themselves.

The HIV/AIDS epidemic in South Africa is the most recent in Africa and one of the most severe worldwide. The total number of people living with HIV/AIDS in South Africa increased from an estimated 4.09 million in 2002 to 5.51 million (10.2% of the population) in 2015 (Statistics South Africa 2014d:7). According to the South African Development Community (SADC), HIV/AIDS is potentially the biggest threat to the economy of South Africa and the rest of the African continent (SADC 2012).

3.2.7.1   Implications for family literacy

Poor nutrition, general health problems and HIV/AIDS impact families who are forced to function in survival mode. The school meals promote regular school attendance, help learners to be more attentive and thus boost academic performance. Family literacy programmes which cover health issues can contribute much to the well-being of families (cf. 2.8.1.1) and this has major implications for the design of relevant family literacy programmes.

3.2.8   The family and socio-cultural change

As already indicated in Chapter 2 (cf. 2.2.4) literacy is linked to people's political, social and cultural practices. Shirley Brice Heath's classic work (1983) revealed how literacy practices in linguistically and culturally diverse homes and communities differ from that of the dominant middle class. In South Africa, there are great differences in the daily life experiences in rural and urban contexts and contrasting language and cultural practices (Bloch 2000). Most young children in South Africa live a rural life, and English is often not used or heard by them and their families, nor is print necessarily useful for getting things done. Yet, in the context of paid development and modernisation, literacy has become an inevitable prerequisite. Many Black parents are of the opinion that sending their children to an English medium school is a way of providing them with a better quality education. School literacy practices are problematic because they tend to be very narrow and do not take cultural knowledge into account. The reality is that the curriculum is alienated from the cultural and social concerns of many children's lives (Bloch 2000). These families are then often blamed for their children's lack of success with reading and writing. Parents are often unable to challenge the authoritarian "do

what you are told to do" discourses of schools. They are further silenced by the power of English, in which they are expected to communicate (Dixon & Lewis 2008:46).

3.2.8.1 Implications for family literacy

Many children experience a conflict between their home literacy practices and the literacy demands placed on them by schools. Often there is little understanding of family and community practices. Schools often teach literacy skills in mechanistic ways and do not make productive use of children's prior experiences and understanding (Dixon & Lewis 2008:46). Home-school relations ought to take socio-cultural practices into account.

3.3 LITERACY IN SOUTH AFRICA

In the ensuing section, I will discuss the inception of literacy in South Africa and how the spread of literacy was influenced by social political issues since literacy was imported in the 16th century.

The political and economic circumstances under which groups of people first encounter literacy impact directly on how they assimilate literacy (Prinsloo 2005:80). The inception of literacy in South Africa is interwoven with the history of colonial conquest and missionary work, from the 17th through to the 20th century and the developments of the apartheid era.

Literacy in South Africa was imported from a European context where it had deep roots in established practices, social networks and material relations. Prinsloo (1999:1) points out that the Dutch settlement at the Cape of Good Hope was soon followed by religious and literacy instruction for the indigenous people and later for slaves. The motivation for these endeavours was to teach the language and religion of the white settlers to the indigenous peoples in their employ and to slaves. During the 18th and 19th centuries missionary endeavour from Britain, North American and from certain European countries carried the brunt of literacy endeavours including the codification of indigenous languages, translation of the Bible and compilation of dictionaries (Prinsloo 1999:2; Booyse & le Roux 2010:47). Today, the Bible and school textbooks are often the only books found in many African homes (Slonimsky & Stein 2005:28), and many African children's only exposure to print literacy is through Bible reading and Sunday school (Openjuru & Lyster 2007:97).

However, opposition to colonial conquest and political administration included rejection of the religion and schooling of the missionaries. Because of its first exposure to writing was deeply associated with Boer violence, the Africans resisted the notion of literacy from an early date (Prinsloo 1999:3).

Mission schools then became the sites for transformation of social identities and practice and gave rise to an African elite committed to literacy and learning in the English way (Booyse & le Roux 2010:49). Inevitably people began to customise their literacy, as their only motivation was to learn new oral forms of hymns and prayers.

As more black people became literate, White leaders became uneasy with the notion of a workforce becoming "unfit" for hard labour and advocated for "industrial training" and "manual training". During the first half of the twentieth century, segregated and differentiated schooling was well established (Prinsloo 1999:5; Booyse & le Roux 2010:50).

With the development of gold and diamond mining, black migrant workers from all over South Africa converged at mining sites. The majority of young African boys sought jobs as unskilled migrant workers. Young African girls left schooling early to enter in to arranged marriages. In the early 1920's, adult night schools emerged as a form of organised teaching of literacy skills to semi-literate or illiterate adults. Although education provision in South Africa was on a small scale for everyone well into the second half of the 19th century, with the inception of the apartheid period in the 1960's and 1970's any educational efforts for Blacks outside of state control was outlawed (Booyse & le Roux 2010:49). In the middle 1970's, as opposition to the apartheid state grew more visible, independent literacy projects inspired by the readings of Paulo Freire (cf. 2.2.4) became popular. By the end of 1980 several big literacy projects, particularly on the gold mines, were set up (Prinsloo 1999:6-8).

3.3.1   Adult literacy

With the changing political circumstances in 1990 to 1994, the African National Congress (ANC) established a task team to review adult literacy work up to that time (Booyse & le Roux 2010:51). Adult literacy classes were characterised by low attendance, high drop-out rates, poorly kept records of completion and evidence of low achievement (Prinsloo 1999:9). All efforts were re-organised under a state-led Adult Basic Education and Training system

(ABET). Within ABET, literacy was re-contextualised as basic skills acquisition falling within the parameters of the National Qualifications Framework. Within the NQF framework ABET occupies levels 1, 2 and 3 and serves as alternative entry point to basic schooling (Prinsloo 1999:10; DBE 2014a:23).

3.3.1.1   Reconceptualisation as ABET

A number of Acts and related programmes have been promulgated to eradicate illiteracy in South Africa. The *Kha Ri Gude* (Tshivenda for "let us learn") mass literacy campaign is one example of such a programme (DBE 2014a:23) designed to reach 4.7 million illiterate adults by 2015. The programme that was launched in 2008 caters for illiterate adults who are 15 years and above, and covers all 12 official languages in all nine provinces (South African Government 2015). The campaign specifically targets vulnerable groups. In 2011, 80% of the learners were women, 25% were youth and 20% were above the age of 60. The average completion rate of 89.8% is regarded as extraordinary high. Since the inception of the programme in March 2010, 1.5 million learners became literate. From 2010 to 2011, 609 199 learners successfully completed the programme (South African Government 2015).

3.3.1.2   2015 Statistics and brief comment on the stats

In 2013, 82% of adults aged 20 years and above had completed Grade 7 (DBE 2014a:23). This is illustrated per province in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Percentage of 20 year olds and above who have completed Grade 7 and above, 2013
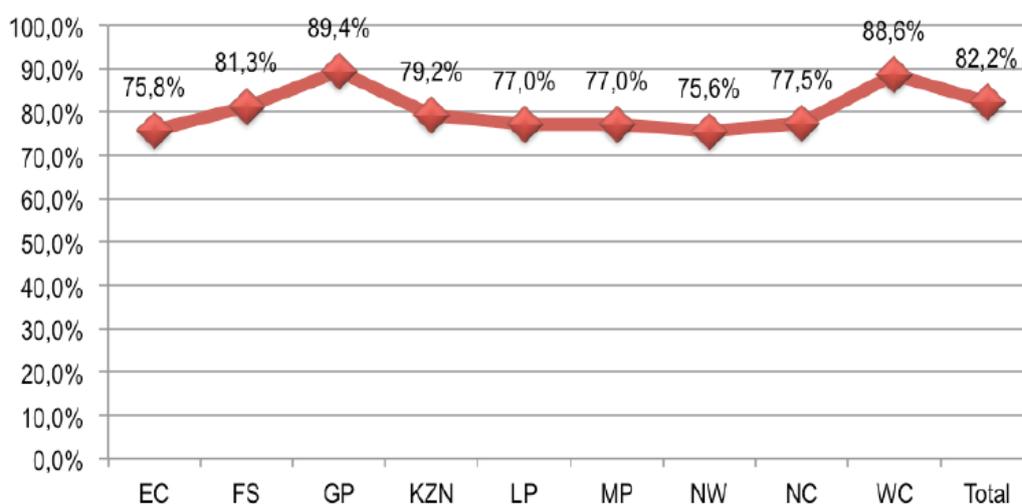
Source: Department of Basic Education 2014a:24

Table 3.1 indicates that the highest percentage of 20 year olds who have completed Grade 7 fall in Gauteng province and the Western Cape followed by the Free State. The percentage of adults aged 20 years and older who have some level of primary education decreased from 18% in 2012 to 11% in 2013. According to the Department of Basic Education (2014a:24), this may indicate that some adults have upgraded their education through adult training and literacy programmes.

3.3.2   General literacy practices

Unfortunately there is not much information on people's literacy practices in the South African context (Bloch 2006:17). Prinsloo (2002:63) argues that literacy practices, particularly amongst working class and poor people, are not performed by individuals acting in isolation. Instead they were carried out within social networks characterized by the exchange of resources (cf. 2.2.5; 2.2.7) (Bloch 2015:4). People with more exposure to schooling or with experientially-acquired specialist literacy skills, such as experience with filling-in or processing particular kinds of written applications, may at times share their technical expertise with members of their social network. Bloch (2015:2) refers to this practice of enticing people into behaviour and practices that they see as desirable, as "apprenticing". Sometimes such sharing would involve

relations of dependency, rather than reciprocity, but interdependent literacy mediation, in the sense used in these studies, refers to those occasions when people engage in literacy practices on behalf of others. According to Prinsloo and Baynham (2008:174), an important aspect of literacy mediation is that it often involves what he called *code-switching* (shifting from one language to another) and also *mode-switching* (typically, from activities involving reading and writing to talk about these activities, and back again). Mode-switching could also be about switching across written, visual, and other sign modalities besides the spoken word. Effective mediation was always context- and discourse specific and the possession of decontextualized 'literacy skills' was not, by itself, enough. Kvalsvig's (2005) study showed that Zulu and Sotho five year olds in urban and rural areas tended to get their information about schooling and literacy from older siblings rather than adults. Many of the adults in that study had not had much schooling themselves and gave out negative messages, probably derived from their own unpleasant experiences of harsh discipline and didactic teaching methods in school. This was unlikely to make the prospect of entering primary school attractive to five year olds. Out of a content analysis of family discussions it was evident that adults felt ill at ease in a situation where even very young children had the advantage of greater knowledge of school.

Gibson (1996:59) also found that literacy practices among workers on three farms in the Western Cape were embedded in relationships of power between worker and farmer and between men and women. "Farm" knowledge was often privileged by both farmer and workers, was inherently "male" and accessible only to male workers. In contrast, farm labourers associated "book" or "school" knowledge with women's activities unrelated to farm work. Female farm workers generally had more school education than male workers but were required to do menial work on the farm and almost never used literacy in the course of their work. Being "literate" was not perceived an important criterion for access to employment, power or training on a farm, though being male was. This patriarchal and paternalist discourse defined roles to everybody, from the farm-owner to the labourers' children, and strengthen the uneven divisions of labour and relations of power, access and influence. Despite women in this study on average having had more schooling than the men, they were excluded and marginalized because their literacy skills was not appreciated as "farm knowledge".

3.3.2.1   Reading habits

Reading is not a common and widespread leisure pastime in South Africa (Programmes to Increase Literacy in South Africa 2004; Mulgrew 2012). Most children in South Africa do not have books in their homes, and even if their families could afford it, few books are available in African languages (Thorton & Thornton 2008:65; Bloch 2000). According to the South African Book Development Council, a non-profit organisation aiming to make books affordable and available (sabookcouncil 2013), South Africans would rather read newspapers and magazines – more than two-thirds of South Africans regularly read print media, but they are not committed readers: only 1% of South Africans regularly buy books and only 14% are regular book readers (Mulgrew 2012).

A survey on the habits and perceptions of reading conducted in 2006 by the South African Book Development Council identified the cost of books as one of the main barriers restricting reading. The main reasons for high book prices in South Africa are large publishers' overreliance on bloated modes of distribution and a tiny market for most books, which necessitates smaller, more expensive print runs (Mulgrew 2012). According to Mulgrew millions of South Africans live in places where books are not readily available. According to the South African's Booksellers' Association (SA Booksellers Association n.d.), an association coordinating and promoting the interests of booksellers, there are about 1600 bookshops in South Africa. About one third are in rural areas. Most bookshops registered with the association are in Gauteng and the wealthy suburbs of large towns and cities.

Literacy is often most visible through church practices, where women often take the lead (Gibson 1996:60; Openjuru & Lyster 2007:97). Malan's study of Bellville South, a suburb of greater Cape Town, found that literacy was not easily noticeable on the streets and in the public spaces of this mostly working class residential area. At a domestic level Malan (1996:143) described literacy as "hidden" because it was mostly a practice of women in their homes. Men in the suburb, most of whom were unemployed, spent their time on the streets during the day, whereas women spent their time in their homes. Women's reading included magazines and romantic novels. This finding was corroborated by Gibson (1996:65) who found that at a local institutional level, literacy was part of pension pay-outs and church practices. Bloch (2015:5) concludes that literacy habits in South Africa are often restricted to certain groups of people and particular uses.

3.3.2.2 Libraries

Although South Africa has a network of about 1 200 public and mobile libraries, they are also inequitably distributed and resourced. Further exacerbating the issue is the 92% of public schools that do not have public libraries. To foster a love for reading and improve literacy, an operational school library or access to a public library is essential. In 2006 only 7.2% of South African state schools had functional libraries (Pretorius & Machet 2008:265). Pretorius and Machet's statistics was confirmed by the PIRLS 2011 study. Internationally 28% of learners were in schools with well-resourced libraries (5 000+ books). About 14% of learners are at schools with no library. In South Africa, more than half (59%) of South African Grade 4 learners were in schools without school libraries, and nearly a third (31%) of Grade 5 learners were in a similar position (Howie *et al.* 2012:89). Learners at schools with the most resourced libraries attained 585 points on the International Benchmark (500 points are considered to be the norm), which was comparable to the achievement of the top performing countries in PIRLS. In contrast, schools with no library resources achieved 430 points. At the Grade 5 level, this difference was 161 points. The learners from schools with well-resourced libraries attained 516 points compared to 355 points achieved by learners at schools with no libraries (Howie *et al.* 2012:91).

Black learners continue to lag significantly behind their "Coloured", Indian and White counterparts (Mqota 2009:1). The failure to achieve equally under conditions of "equality" is due to environmental factors rather than to innate inferiority. Poverty, especially amongst the previously disadvantaged groups in the rural areas, is indeed a factor which has seriously been hampering education. Although white people constitute only 8.9% of the South African population, many enjoy a life style equal to many Western Europeans, while the majority of the people of colour display the poverty patterns of the third world (Statistics South Africa 2011:17).

3.4 EDUCATIONAL PROVISION AND LITERACY ACQUISITION

Research into oral language learning of babies and young children influenced research into literacy acquisition (Bloch 2012:8). Babies learn oral language when they are exposed to language and given opportunities to interact with significant people. Motivation is high because

they learn that language helps them to get things done. Studies of children who have learned to read and write before formal schooling revealed that learning to read and write is very similar to oral language learning (Bloch 2012:8; 2015:2). For children to become readers and writers, the need to be in environments where people interact with them, encourage rich and creative language play and make them aware of the world of print. This means that children should be able to use their own language effectively, both orally and in print form.

3.4.1 Literacy acquisition in a multilingual setting

Language policy and practice in education is a central concern in any discussion of literacy in South Africa. South Africa is a multilingual society and the constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA 1996a) grants official status to eleven languages: English, Afrikaans, Sepedi, Tshivenda, Sesotho, Setswana, isiZulu, siSwati, Xitsonga, isiNdebele and isiXhosa Since South Africa became a democracy in 1994 English has strongly emerged as the preferred medium of instruction or language of teaching and learning (LoLT) in schooling (Alexander 2005). Consequently language related difficulties are often blamed for the general underachievement of black learners in South Africa in national school-leaving examinations (Postma & Postma 2011), Annual National Assessments (DBE 2014b) and international benchmarking assessments (Howie, Venter, Van Staden, Zimmermann, Long, Sherman & Archer 2007; Howie *et al.* 2012).

According to the recommendations of the Language in Education Policy (Department of Education 1997:108) the learner's home language should be used for learning and teaching where practicable, especially in the Foundation Phase (i.e., Grade R, Grade1 and 2) where first time literacy is acquired. It is further recommended that the transition to the additional language as LoLT at the end of the Foundation Phase should be carefully planned. It is recommended that the additional language should already be introduced as a subject in Grade 1 and that the home language be used alongside the additional language for as long as possible. General practice in schools serving a predominantly black learner population, such as township and urban schools, is the use of the home language in Grades 1 to 3 with English introduced as the first additional language in Grade 1. The transition to English as the LoLT thus takes place in Grade 4 (Lemmer 2010:233). The intention of the LiEP (Department of Education 1997) policy is to promote multilingualism through an additive bilingual approach; that is the

learner's acquisition of a second language while retaining proficiency in the home language (Plüddemann 1997:18).

The implication of abovementioned policy recommendations is that language practice in South African schools is diverse and complex. Because of the practical implications there is an increasing trend for parents to enrol their children in English medium schools as early as possible with a view to acquiring English proficiency irrespective of the learner's home language and a better quality education (Dixon & Lewis 2008:49). Further, many public schools decided to offer only English as LoLT from Grade 1, in spite of LiEP policy recommendations (Department of Education 1997). This means that many South African children acquire first time literacy in a language that is not their home language, namely English (Bloch 2015:3). Differences between LoLT and the language spoken at home add to the difficulties of building a reading culture. There are relatively few children's books printed in the African languages, and many of these tend to be translations of English children's fiction and not original stories for African children in their own languages (Pretorius & Machet 2008:265).

3.4.2   Early childhood education (ECD) and literacy approaches

Prior to the establishment of a democratic state in 1994 ECD in South Africa was characterised by unequal provision with regard to race, geographic location, gender, special needs and funding (Naicker 2010:184). No policies governed ECD provision; access to ECD for children of all racial groups was optional and limited and the system of ECD services was highly fragmented. Since 1994 ECD provision has been an integral part of social transformation (Ebrahim & Irvine 2012). The current legislative and regulatory framework for ECD has flowed from the ratification of international treaties, which endorsed the rights of the child, including their right to education. In 1995 South Africa ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UN 1990) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) (1999) in 2000. The Constitution of South Africa, Section 29 (RSA 1996a) also recognises the rights of children, including their right to basic education. The Children's Act, no. 38 of 2005 (RSA 2005) and the Children's Amendment Act, no. 41 of 2007 (RSA 2007) underpins provisions in the Bill of Rights in the Constitution and outlines the responsibilities of parents and guardians in recognising children's rights.

ECD in South Africa is an inter-sectoral responsibility, shared among the Department of Social Development (DSD), the Department of Health (DoH) and the Department of Basic Education (DBE), with the Ministry of Women, Children and People with Disabilities playing a monitoring role (DBE 2014a). The policy framework for a national ECD system of services is based on a series of white papers. The earliest of these white papers, the Interim Policy for Early Childhood Development (Department of Education 1996) established the broad framework for ECD. The Department of Social Development's White Paper (1997) addresses the provision of early childhood development and care services to children from birth to the age of nine. This policy takes a developmental approach and stresses the role of caregivers, social services professionals and parents in childcare. The Child Care Amendment Act, 1983 (Act 74 of 1983) (RSA 1983) regulates the operations of day-care facilities for children as well as the payment of subsidies to day-care facilities. The Children's Amendment Act, 2007 (Act 41 of 2007) (RSA 2007) extended regulations to include a range of child-care and protection services, such as partial care facilities (crèches and nursery schools), ECD programmes, prevention and early intervention services for vulnerable children and protection services for children who have suffered abuse, neglect, abandonment or exploitation. It also includes a protocol to identify, report, refer and support vulnerable children.

The seminal policy document at present, regarding Early Childhood Education in South Africa, remains the Education White Paper 5 (Department of Education 2001a). Education White Paper 5 (Department of Education 2001a:1) defines ECD as a comprehensive approach to policies and programmes for children from birth to nine years of age and promotes the active participation of their parents and caregivers (Naicker 2010:185). ECD is thus understood as an umbrella term referring to all services that promote or support the development of young children aged birth to nine years (DBE 2013). These services range from infrastructural provision, such as water and sanitation, social security, birth registration and health services to safe and affordable day-care, including learning opportunities in structured programmes that will prepare children for formal schooling. Richter (2012) defines Early Child Care and Education (ECCE) services as services and programmes that provide care and developmentally appropriate educational stimulation for groups of young children in centres and/or in community- or home-based programmes. Furthermore, the White Paper on Early Childhood Development no. 5 (Department of Education 2001a) aimed to enhance integration and collaboration between various government departments in the field of ECD over a five-year period spanning from 2005-2010. Its main policy priority was the establishment of a national

system of provision for Grade R (i.e., also known as the Reception Year, a voluntary year before primary school entry) (cf. 1.6.7 above) for children aged 5 - 6 years by 2010 (a goal not yet reached at time of writing).

The National Integrated Plan for ECD (NIPECD) (2005-2010) (DBE 2005) is the only inter-sectoral policy for ECD, and addresses programmes in health, nutrition, water and sanitation, early learning and psychosocial care. This plan aims to provide additional assistance to especially vulnerable children, such as orphans, children with disabilities, children in child-headed households, children affected by HIV and AIDS, and children from poor households and communities. The NIPECD recognises a variety of sites of care, allocating 50% of service delivery at the home level, 30% at community level and 20% in formal settings. The NIPECD has two important sub-components: the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) Social Sector Plan and the Massification of Early Childhood Development Concept Document. While the EPWP aims to train ECD practitioners including parents and caregivers, the Massification of ECD Concept Document proposes the use of unemployed youth with a tertiary qualification in social work, health or education to assist in the registration of ECD sites and in the expansion of ECD services with a view to support families at household level (RSA 2005b). The Department of Health provides for children in the age group birth to nine years by means of various policies and programmes which are not ECD-specific, but which address the general health needs of children (DBE 2013).

Financial provision to ECD is demonstrated by recently increased budgetary provision. Education spending in South Africa is the largest single item in the annual budget: 20 % of government expenditure for 2014/15 was earmarked for education, amounting to R254-billion, which represents roughly 6.5% of GDP (Gordhan 2014). However, South Africa's total expenditure on pre-primary education in 2006 for children aged 3 to 6 was only 0.4% of total education expenditure (OECD 2006).

3.4.2.1 Enrolment in ECD

South Africa has achieved considerable increases in participation rates in ECD since 2000: from approximately 7% of 0 to 4-year-olds attending education institutions in 2002 to 37% in 2012, with the highest concentration of this age group attending ECD in two of the nine provinces: Free State and Gauteng (47% and 46% respectively); KwaZulu-Natal and Northern

Cape had significantly lower attendance (28% and 27% respectively). In 2012, 85% of 5-year-olds attended an educational institution (Statistics South Africa 2013). Seventy-eight (78%) of these children were enrolled in Grade R (Richter 2012).

Compliance with ECD policy, standards and outcomes across the population of children in South Africa has been carefully monitored in the past decade. The Department of Education (2001b) conducted a national audit of ECD provisioning in 2000 to provide accurate information in four broad areas, namely sites, learners, practitioners and programmes. Findings indicated historical inequalities in ECD due to the previous policy of apartheid; provincial differences in coverage as well as poor quality of ECD programmes; the dominance of English as the language of instruction across sites and provinces, irrespective of children's home language; lack of adequately qualified, accredited and remunerated practitioners and ECD trainers and the impact of HIV/Aids on children in the sector. In 2009/2010 the report, *Tracking Public Expenditure and Assessing Service Quality in Early Childhood Development in South Africa* (Department of Basic Education, Department of Social Development /UNICEF 2011b) also identified infrastructural deficiencies and the lack of quality ECD programmes in institutions. In 2012 the ECD Diagnostic Review (Richter 2012) still indicated persistent fragmentation in legislative and policy frameworks, uncoordinated service delivery, limited access to ECD services, variable quality of ECD services and limited inter-sectorial coordination (Richter 2012).

3.4.2.2 Approaches to emergent literacy during ECD

In 2012 a draft National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for children from before birth to the age of four, which is focused on the care, developmental and learning needs of babies, toddlers and young children, was published for public comment (Ebrahim & Irvine 2012) This policy has since been implemented (DBE 2015a). The NCF is based on a holistic ECD vision with reference to the first 1000 days, which includes interventions before birth and the first two years of life; the third and fourth years of life as well as the time before the child enters primary school (age four to five). Six curriculum areas have been proposed: well-being, identity and belonging, communicating, exploring mathematics, creativity and knowledge and understanding of the world. The NCF forms part of broader curriculum initiatives, such as the Guidelines for Programme Development for Children Birth to Five (GPD) and National Early Learning Development Standards (NELDS) (DBE 2009).

3.4.2.3   Challenges to emergent literacy in ECD

Appraisals of literacy approaches in the ECD sector, however, are less encouraging. Prinsloo's study (2005) of low budget 'educare' and pre-school centres in urban townships found that such centres operate with very limited public funding and that professional practitioner training and support are generally poor. What was communicated to children in these institutions as literacy, was based mainly on what counts as school knowledge (cf. Chapter 2.5.1) (Prinsloo 2005:157). Teachers often presented reading and writing as isolated and disconnected from children's emergent meaning-making, language and literacy resources. Classroom practice drew on out-of-school resources of rhyme, narrative and performances and the focus was on recitation and repetition of teacher-led/initiated songs and hymns, with no attention to children's production or reflection on meaning-making. Children's own repertoires of songs (funds of knowledge, cf. 2.2.4; 2.2.7) were used only for filler exercises, to control talkative children or to get children's attention before moving on to what they see as the 'real stuff' of school learning (Bloch & Prinsloo 1999:23; Prinsloo & Bloch 1999; Prinsloo & Stein 2004:67-84). When the children were introduced to mainstream academic literacy through story reading and question and answer interchange, the practices lacked coherence and there was little opportunity offered for children to draw on their out-of-school resources for making sense of the school-based practices. In the schools that Prinsloo (2005) visited, there was no space at all, or very little, for interactivity and for child-initiated exchanges. They had no experience in analysing, synthesizing or constructing their own stories from available resources, no experience in composing as opposed to reproduction, or writing as opposed to copying. However, the children's skills in recall and reciting word-for-word may prepare them for rote learning and list-learning strategies that are characteristic in most non-elite schools in South Africa (Bloch & Prinsloo 1999; Prinsloo & Bloch 1999). While these children had gained knowledge of the alphabet and nursery rhymes and had learnt "how to listen", it is apparent that the particular kind of social interaction that the teachers promoted in these classrooms had also communicated particular attitudes to the social construction of knowledge. They would perform enthusiastically and well in rote learning exercises, and in choral singing activities, but they would not have had any school-based encounters with reading and writing as interpretative and meaning making activities. Instead, they would be likely to expect that school learning is about recitation and naming practices (Prinsloo 2005). Prinsloo (2005:150-151) also noted a connection between literacy, discipline and punishment aimed at producing "ready-made and prepared children". Pacifying the children with threats of punishment for being noisy

was a sustained activity (Prinsloo 2005:153). These processes of discipline and focusing the attention of the children provide the backdrop to their early literacy learning. To produce docile and passive children made up much of the teachers' concern with getting the children 'ready'. They encounter reading and writing as particular, school-based practices linked to certain kinds of performance and behaviours.

3.4.3   Grade R and preparation for school literacy development

Grade R is a single-year voluntary pre-school programme intended for children in the year before entering Grade 1. It is implemented at primary schools (both public and independent) or at community-based early childhood development (ECD) sites (Samuels, Taylor, Shepherd, van der Berg, Jacob, Deliwe & Mabogoane 2015). According to Atmore (2012) only a small portion of private community-based ECD sites offer Grade R. The White Paper on Early Childhood Development no. 5 (Department of Education 2001a) intended establishing a national system of provision for Grade R (i.e., also known as the Reception Year) for children aged 5 - 6 years by 2010 (a goal not yet reached at time of writing). Thus, the ECD sector in South Africa is divided into two phases: a prior schooling phase (birth to 4 years) and the schooling phase (5 to 9 years), also called the Foundation Phase (Gr R and Gr 1-3). The voluntary Grade R year, although part of formal schooling, has an informal approach (Ebrahim & Irvine 2014; DBE 2011:20).

3.4.3.1   Enrolment in Grade R

Enrolment in Gr R has more than doubled between 2003 and 2013, nearly reaching the goal of universal access. This dramatic increase was probably due to the deliberate roll-out and rapid expansion of the Grade R programme (Samuels *et al.* 2015:3). Based on an analysis of household survey data, it is estimated that the proportion of Grade 1 children who have previously attended Grade R is about 95%. Table 3.2 indicates the increase in enrolments over a ten-year period.

Table 3.2: Number of learners enrolled in Grade R in public ordinary schools, 2003-2013

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
EC	46 203	75 562	105 231	93 553	112 873	133 249	154 514	164 803	157 184	158 363	151 831
FS	16 300	16 482	18 449	20 072	22 429	23 699	23 767	27 209	28 627	30 639	32 170
GP	31 666	34 690	41 073	48 760	49 933	54 979	64 935	76 460	86 240	95 374	104 508
KZN	71 581	72 911	79 276	95 759	118 870	129 742	154 881	175 541	181 585	189 169	187 972
LP	89 921	86 108	98 273	90 521	94 677	98 963	97 570	113 432	117 279	117 950	120 029
MP	19 196	25 181	14 171	37 947	33 264	40 671	46 194	51 758	56 726	59 202	57 974
NW	4 325	5 284	9 737	13 677	15 758	22 294	30 174	42 010	42 937	44 489	47 744
NC	5 313	5 677	6 598	7 682	8 584	9 575	11 508	12 387	13 153	15 036	16 834
WC	31 581	28 374	32 389	33 650	30 834	30 627	37 270	43 603	50 923	57 643	60 308
National	**316 086**	**350 269**	**405 197**	**441 621**	**487 222**	**543 799**	**620 813**	**707 203**	**734 654**	**767 865**	**779 370**

Source: Department of Basic Education 2014:13

However, simply providing Grade R is not the answer. De Witt, Lessing and Lenyai (2006) found that 65% of Grade R learners do not meet the minimum criteria for early literacy development and will enter Grade 1 without the skills or concepts to master reading. It is strongly argued that Grade R should be aligned with ECD pedagogical practice and not become a "watered-down" Grade 1 (Samuels *et al*. 2015:4).

3.4.3.2   Grade R language curriculum

The National Curriculum and Assessment Policy statement (CAPS) is a single, comprehensive and concise document for all the subjects listed in the national Curriculum Statement Grades R-12 issued by the Department of Basic Education (2015b). The Home Language curriculum for Grade R is fixed in the CAPS document for the Foundation Phase (children aged 5-9) (DBE 2015b). A separate comprehensive document is provided for each of South African's eleven home languages: English, Afrikaans, Ndebele, Xhosa, Zulu, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda and Xitsonga (DBE 2015b).

The curriculum and assessment document for each respective language follows the same structure: approach, time allocation, assessment, listening and speaking; reading and writing focus time and writing. The ensuing synopsis is based on the English Home language curriculum for Grade R with special reference to reading and writing focus time (DBE 2011: 8-19).

Guiding principles for language learning in Grade R is integration and play-based learning in an environment that is not traditional, formal or rigidly structured. It is stressed that Grade R should not simply be a more elementary version of the Grade 1 classroom (DBE 2011:20). Language learning should take place spontaneously throughout the day's activities and the teacher should act as a mediator of learning who optimizes language learning and literacy situations throughout the day. The daily programme has three main sections: teacher-guided activities; routines and free-play. Teacher guided activities include ring time and news time; routines such as toilet time, eating time and tidy up time should be used for informal language learning. During free play either outside or in the classroom teachers should promote listening, speaking and vocabulary expansion. Assessment of language learning should be informal. A detailed daily programme is contained in the curriculum (DBE 2011:21-15). In addition, the curriculum statement provides the teacher with clear guidelines according to the four school terms with regard to emergent shared reading, shared reading and so called 'independent' reading where the child simulates reading while looking at books (DBE 2011:33). Similar clear guidelines are provided regarding emergent writing (DBE 2011:34). However, in this the potential role of family/home involvement is only mentioned once (cf. 3.3.2 above), and only in terms of supporting formal reading in Grade 1 (DBE 2011:14).

In conclusion, the CAPS curriculum (DBE 2011) supports the acquisition of emergent literacy in an informal environment (cf. 2.3.6.) and provides succinct but useful guidelines for teachers. These guidelines endorse sound principles and practical suggestions for supporting emergent literacy among Grade R learners and could easily be adapted for parents and used to design family literacy programmes or as hints for parents in a comprehensive parent involvement programme that targets learning at home as one of its focus areas (cf. 2.8.1.1).

3.4.4   Grade 1

As mentioned, the ECD sector in South Africa is divided into two phases: prior schooling (birth to 4 years) and the schooling phase (5 to 9 years) also called the Foundation Phase (Gr R and Gr 1-3). Grade 1 thus forms part of the Foundation Phase and is demarcated as the year in which the child turns 7 (cf. 1.6.7), however, according to article 5 of the amended South African Schools Act (amendment sec 38) 84 of 1966 (RSA 1996b) it also includes children aged 5 who would turn 6 on or before 30 June in their Grade 1 year. The Grade 1 learning programme is demarcated in the CAPS documents for the Foundation Phase (DBE 2015b).

3.4.4.1   Enrolment in Grade 1

The number of enrolments in Grade 1 have remained more or less stable over the past ten years, with 1 277 499 learners that was enrolled in 2003 (Department of Education 2005:8), and ten years later with 1 222 851 learners enrolled in 2013 (DBE 2015c:9). Statistics of the enrolment of learners between 2002 and 2013 in the age group 7 to 15 years also reflect a stable enrolment of primary school children over the past ten years as indicated in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3: Percentage of 7 to 15-year-old children attending educational institutions, 2002-2013

Province	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Eastern Cape	95.5	95.9	97.0	97.4	97.3	97.7	97.6	97.8	98.5	98.5	98.4	98.1
Free State	97.5	96.8	97.0	97.5	98.7	98.7	98.2	98.7	98.9	98.9	99.2	98.4
Gauteng	98.1	98.9	98.9	98.5	97.7	97.5	98.3	98.5	98.8	99.3	99.0	99.5
KwaZulu-Natal	94.8	96.4	97.0	97.7	97.2	97.5	97.9	98.0	98.2	98.7	98.8	98.6
Limpopo	97.4	98.0	98.8	99.0	98.9	98.5	98.2	98.8	99.1	99.1	99.2	99.2
Mpumalanga	97.2	98.1	98.6	97.9	98.1	97.9	98.2	98.3	99.1	99.0	99.0	99.2
North West	95.4	96.7	97.7	96.3	95.9	96.9	97.3	97.6	97.8	98.6	98.8	98.3
Northern Cape	93.6	95.7	96.6	97.5	97.6	97.5	97.5	98.5	98.2	98.6	98.6	98.9
Western Cape	97.3	97.1	98.1	98.2	97.6	98.2	97.0	98.1	99.1	97.9	98.2	98.1
National	**96.3**	**97.1**	**97.8**	**97.9**	**97.7**	**97.8**	**97.9**	**98.5**	**98.7**	**98.8**	**98.8**	**98.8**

Source: Department of Basic Education (2014:16)

Table 3.4 shows that, in 2013, the highest proportion of learners in ordinary schools was enrolled in Grade 1 (9.8%), while the lowest proportion was enrolled in Grade 12 (4.8%). The pattern of enrolment across grades reveals a steady decline in the proportion of learners from Grades 1 to 3. According to Samuels (Samuels *et al.* 2015:3) the developmental trajectory of most children is already well established at school entry and schooling simply reinforces the emerging developmental trends and usually widens the gap. Most low socio-economic status South African children are inadequately prepared for school and the gap between what they *should* know and what they *do* know continues to grow over time. As time goes by, they fall further and further behind and eventually drop out of the system.

Table 3.4: Percentage distribution of learners in ordinary schools by grade in 2013
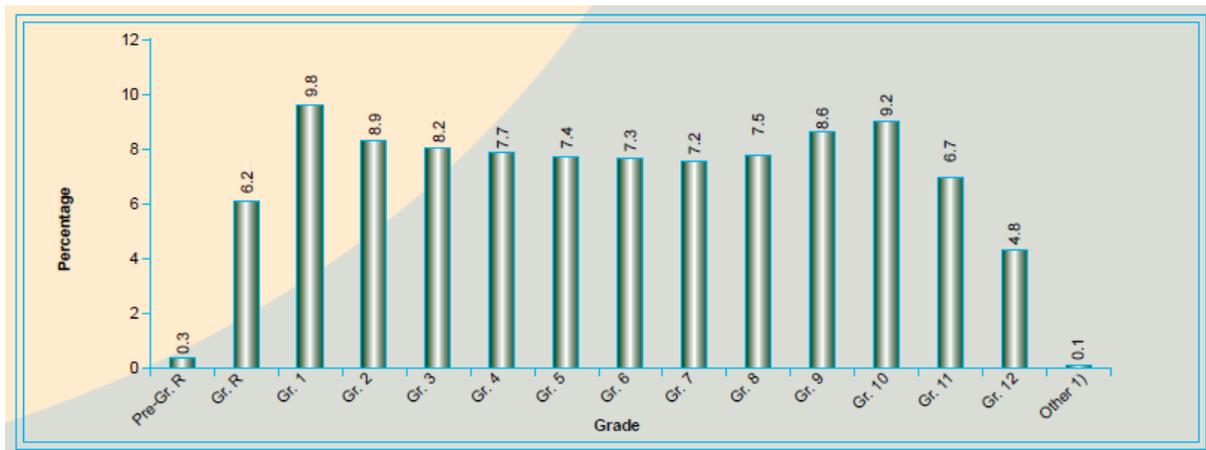
3.4.4.2 Grade 1 language curriculum

The curriculum for Grade 1 is fixed in the CAPS documents for the Foundation Phase (children aged 5-9) (DBE 2011). The curriculum and assessment policy for language for Grade 1 is provided according to two categories: Home Languages and First Additional Languages. In both categories a separate comprehensive document is provided for each of South African's eleven home languages: English, Afrikaans, Ndebele, Xhosa, Zulu, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda and Xitsonga (DBE 2015b).

The curriculum and assessment document for each language follows the same structure: approach, time allocation, assessment, listening and speaking, reading and writing focus time and writing. The ensuing synopsis is based on the English Home Language curriculum for Grade 1 (DBE 2011:8-19).

Although instructional time is allocated to Home Language and First Additional Language teaching language is used across the curriculum and should follow an integrated approach. Many language skills will be developed within Mathematics and Life Skills, which is made up of other subjects such as Creative arts and Beginning knowledge including Personal and Social Well-being, Natural Sciences and Technology and the Social Sciences (DBE 2011:8).

The instructional time allocated to listening and speaking activities should target specific skills at least twice a week. Reading and writing takes place in Reading and Writing focus time. Specific time is allocated for focused reading (shared reading, group guided reading, paired and independent reading and phonics), as well as writing (shared writing, group writing and individual writing, grammar and spelling activities). The curriculum document also very clearly spells out that the 5 main components of teaching reading, namely phonemic awareness, word recognition, comprehension, vocabulary and fluency should be taught explicitly on a daily basis. In addition the curriculum statement provides the teacher with clear guidelines according to the four school terms. Suggestions are also made in terms of informal and formal assessment tasks.

Reference to parent involvement in supporting their child's literacy learning are made only once by acknowledging that home reading done on a regular basis every day plays an important role in learning to read. Teachers are advised that home reading should consist of re-reading the group reading book or reading simple, 'fun' books. (DBE 2011:14). In conclusion, the curriculum guidelines as outlined in the Grade 1 year programme could easily be adapted to parents and used to design family literacy programmes or as hints for parents in a comprehensive parent involvement programme that targets learning at home as one of its focus areas (cf. 2.8.1.1).

3.4.5   International and national assessments of learners' literacy achievement

South Africa currently participates in a number of national and international assessments. The three main international tests of educational achievement in which South Africa participates are the TIMMS, PIRLS and SACMEQ. As only the PIRLS and SACMEQ assess literacy South Africa's performance in these two national assessments will be discussed in detail. A discussion of the Annual National Assessment (ANA) as a large-scale national assessment will follow thereafter. Although Grade R falls beyond the scope of the study (Grade 1 is included in the Annual National Assessments), they have been included as indicators of the problems around poor literacy acquisition, mainly caused, among others, by a poor foundation in early literacy.

3.4.5.1   The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)

The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) (Howie *et al*. 2007; 2012) was a project in which 20 000 South African learners participated. It was conducted by the Centre for Evaluation and Assessment (CEA) at the University of Pretoria, under the auspices of the International Association for the Evaluation for Educational Achievement (IEA). South African learners participated in the PIRLS in 2006 and 2011. In the PIRLS (Howie *et al*. 2007; 2012) the reading literacy of Grade 4 learners in 45 participating countries was tested. However, in South Africa Grade 5 learners were also tested in addition to Grade 4 learners as follows: the reading proficiency of 16 073 Grade 4 learners in 429 schools, and 14 657 Grade 5 learners in 397 schools. Of the 45 countries that participated, South Africa achieved the lowest score. The South African learners performed significantly below the learners from all the other countries.

The Low International Benchmark is set at 400 points on the PIRLS reading achievement scale and describes basic reading skills and strategies. At this level learners are able to recognise, locate and reproduce information that was explicitly stated in texts, especially if the information was placed at the beginning of the text. An average score of 550 points describes the High International Benchmark where learners are considered to be competent readers. Tasks learners can perform at this benchmark include the ability to retrieve significant details embedded across the text and the ability to provide text-based support for inferences. In terms of informational texts, learners are able to make inferences and connections and can navigate their way through text by making use of organisational features (Howie *et al*. 2007). For South African learners, the mean reading score for Grade 4 learners was 253 and for Grade 5 learners it was 302. Only 13% of the Grade 4 and 22% of the Grade 5 learners reached the low International Benchmark of 400. This is in stark contrast to the majority of the other participating countries. In half of the participating countries 94% of the learners reached this low International Benchmark. Accordingly, learners who were not able to demonstrate even the basic reading skills of the low International Benchmark by the fourth grade were considered at a serious risk of not learning how to read. Using this framework 87% of Grade 4 and 78% of Grade 5 learners in South Africa are deemed to be at a serious risk of not learning to read (Howie *et al*. 2007).

In 2011 the PIRLS tested learners in 49 countries. In South Africa the assessment focused on two purposes of reading, namely reading for literary experience and reading to acquire and use information. It assessed the reading literacy at Grade 4 level in the eleven official languages and at Grade 5 level in Afrikaans or English. At both levels the South African children achieved well below the International Centre Point. Most Grade 4 learners (71%) reached the Low International benchmark with 30% not able to attain more than the Low International benchmark. A very small number (6%) reached the Advanced International benchmark (Howie *et al.* 2012:46). The highest performing groups were those learners assessed in Afrikaans or English, very few of whom failed to reach the Low International benchmark, indicating that basic reading literacy is present in these languages. One out of five learners writing in English, and one out of about seven in Afrikaans also reached the Advanced level, the highest international benchmark (Howie *et al*. 2012:48). In contrast, across all those learners writing in the African languages, about one-quarter to one-half could not attain the Low International benchmark, indicating that a high percentage of learners in the African languages could not read. A small percentage (1%) of learners assessed in African languages reached the Advanced International benchmark.

Overall, 43% of the South African Grade 5 learners that participated in PIRLS 2011 did not attain the Low International benchmark, in contrast to 5% internationally. Almost 4% reached the Advanced International benchmark, compared to 8% internationally (Howie *et al*. 2012:50). A larger proportion of the learners assessed in Afrikaans reached the Low International benchmark (61%) compared to 55% of those who wrote in English. One possible explanation is that 70% of those tested in English were writing in a second language, whereas almost all learners writing in Afrikaans were doing so in their home language. The 61% figure is still well below the international figure of 95% who attained the Low International benchmark (Howie *et al*. 2012:50).

3.4.5.2   The Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ)

The Southern African Consortium on Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ), a consortium of education ministries, policy-makers and researchers who, in conjunction with UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), conducted three nationally representative school surveys in participating countries, specifically SACMEQ I (1996),

SACMEQ II (2000), and SACMEQ III (2007). The surveys test the Mathematics and Language skills of Grade 6 learners in each of the participating countries (Spaull & Taylor 2012:37). South Africa participated in SACMEQ II in 2000 and SACMEQ III in 2007. Of the 14 countries that participated in 2000 South Africa had the 9th highest Mathematics score and the 8th highest score in low-income countries such as Botswana, Swaziland and Kenya. In 2007, of the 15 countries that participated, South Africa came 10th in reading and 8th in Mathematics. Of the Grade 6 learners who were tested 27% were deemed to be functionally illiterate, while 40% were classified as functionally innumerate. It was further indicated that South Africa's educational performance is extremely weak, and that systemic differences between the schools serving different parts of the population remain exceedingly large. In support of the above statement Chisholm (2011:50) further highlights that, in comparison with other Southern and Eastern African countries, South Africa did well on gender achievement and the gradual reduction of its high repetition rates over the period, but it performed below the UNESCO and Southern African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ) mean in the Grade 6 literacy and numeracy assessments. Furthermore, Mbali and Douglas (2012:526) point out that the 2007 SAMEQ study, confined to countries in Southern and Eastern Africa, showed that the South African children's achievement levels have remained more or less the same in the past decade, in spite of increases in educational funding. South Africa also performed worse than other much poorer countries in the region, such as Swaziland and Tanzania.

3.4.5.3   National assessments

The National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (NEEDU) (NEEDU 2013) undertook an inquiry into the *State of Literacy Teaching and Learning in the Foundation Phase (Grades 1 and 2)* based on a 2012 survey in high growth areas in all nine provinces of South Africa. The report confirmed the complex linguistic composition of Foundation Phase classrooms and the learning difficulties faced by large numbers of children who do not receive the first two years of schooling in their HL due to the mismatch between LoLT and HL. The implication is that most learners in Grade R-3 do not acquire competency in the fundamental skills of reading, writing and mathematics due to language difficulties. An important contribution of this report is its analysis of the complexities of the HL and LoLT mismatch in African language medium classrooms ascribed to the dialectisation (the use of non-standard forms) of the African languages, including Afrikaans. This problematises the comprehension of written communication in standard form as found in textbooks used by learners as well as

creating difficulties encountered by teachers with curriculum documents which they struggle to understand, albeit provided in all eleven languages. Terminology used in mathematics teaching is an additional problem: teachers preferred to use English to teach maths even where African language terminology exists. The report concluded that if education authorities are committed to HL instruction in the Foundation Phase, the African languages should be standardised and a full set of learning materials developed for the first three years of schooling. The Report confirmed that Foundation Phase learners continue to fail to achieve proficiency in English as additional language and are thus hindered in their access to learning content presented in the Intermediate Phase. Although the CAPS curriculum (Department of Basic Education 2012) first introduced in 2011 encourages additive bilingualism, this goal has not been reached in schools.

A study entitled: *The role of language and literacy in preparing South African learners for educational success: lessons learnt from a classroom study in Limpopo province* (Prinsloo & Heugh 2013) carried out under the auspices of the HSRC and based on ethnographic research of twenty primary school classrooms in the rural province of Limpopo also underlines the dilemma of language in education practice. The main finding indicates that learners' HL development is abandoned prematurely in the interests of a new additional language.

a)   **The Annual National Assessments (ANA)**

Since 2011, Annual National Assessments (ANA) have been carried out by the Department of Basic Education (DBE 2014b) to test literacy and numeracy among primary school learners. The ANA's endeavour, focused on the performance of learners from Grades 1-6, and Grade 9, is the latest in a series of initiatives by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) which is aimed at measuring the learners' performance and identifying areas for improvement. The ANA are used to test the learners' skills in both Mathematics and Language. The Grades 1-3 ANA are available in each of the eleven languages, while in Grades 4-6 the ANA are only available in English or Afrikaans. The ANA are administered to learners in public schools, including special schools and state-funded independent primary schools (DBE 2014b:25).

GRADE	HOME LANGUAGE 2012	HOME LANGUAGE 2013	HOME LANGUAGE 2014
1	58	61	63
2	55	57	61
3	52	51	56
4	43	49	57
5	40	46	57
6	43	59	63
9	43	43	48

Source: Department of Basic Education (2014b:9)

Although the average mark for Grade 1 Home Language over the past four years seems to be at an acceptable level, it is important to note that the number and variety of questions in the ANA papers are limited and so were the learning outcomes that could be assessed (DBE 2014b:37; ANA Advisory Committee 2013:1). A diagnostic analysis, (DBE 2014b:11) indicating that many learners struggle to respond to questions that require the use of their own words, that is summarising a text using their own words, may be or more significance. The diagnostic analysis also reveals that learners are unable to interpret a sentence or give an opinion when required, and also lack the required editing skills. The current design of ANA is under much criticism (Gustafsson 2014; Spaull 2015; Taylor 2015), because the difficulty levels of the tests differ between years and across grades. Another criticism against the reliability and validity of the tests is that the ANA papers are set by teachers, administered, marked and moderated by teachers.

Pretorius' study (2014:61-70) confirmed that the current foundational literacy skills of Grade 4 learners, as acquired in the Foundation Phase, are not adequate to ensure academic success.

3.4.6 Conclusions on literacy and literacy achievement in educational provision

Schiefelbein (2008:1) and Feinstein (2003:29-30) indicate that if the problem of poor literacy is not addressed by the age of eight, the problem will persist in future. The above discussion indicates that family literacy in South Africa is needed to play an important supportive role in the development of literacy among young learners. The South African state education system does not promote family literacy.

3.5   FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAMMES IN SOUTH AFRICA

Family literacy as project work is still in its infancy in Africa in general and in South Africa in particular. Family literacy programmes are not a priority on most government policy agendas. These programmes lie on the border between literacy work for adults and literacy work for children and government funding is difficult to find (Desmond & Elfert 2008). In South Africa initiatives to support family literacy are also not well documented (Desmond 2012). Most family literacy programmes are run by non-governmental, non-profitable organisations and most form part of a literacy project's offerings rather than functioning as the main and definitive aim of the project (Desmond 2008). Many of the literacy projects focussed on NGO's, such as Khululeka Community Education Development Centre, the Siabonga Care Village, Sithanda Ukufunda Literacy Programme and Masiphumelele Corporation and Trusts. Abovementioned NGO's are linked to the sponsorship of the DG Murray Trust (DGMT 2015). The diversity of family literacy programmes and the way they vary in emphasis was also discussed in Chapter 2 (cf. 2.8 above). Certain programmes focus primarily on children; some on adults; and some on both (Hannon & Bird 2004; Desmond & Elfert 2008). If the focus is on both adult members of the family and children, the literacy inputs may be separate or they may be combined in shared family activities. The content may also vary from providing basic literacy to adults and children in a print-impoverished environment or literacy enrichment programmes which are aimed at further supporting an already existing print environment in a more middle class setting (Bloch 2006). In addition the location of literacy work with families can vary (Wasik & Hermann 2004:8). Literacy work may be carried out in families' homes, educational centres, schools, libraries, clinic, the workplace or elsewhere in the community, such as in the church. Some family literacy programmes are implemented in deep rural areas and some are located in urban areas. (Wasik & Hermann 2004:13).

Furthermore, many literacy programmes do not use the term "family literacy" in their nomenclature nor indicate "family literacy" as their mandate in spite of including a family literacy component (introduction in Desmond & Elfert 2008). This is true of several of the educational programmes which I have chosen to discuss in the ensuing section. The discussion commences with the largest organisation, READ. Secondly, I will discuss the Family Literacy Project (FLP) as the best researched family literacy project in the South African context. Thereafter, the Wordworks programme is discussed and a brief rationale for the choice of the Wordworks Home-School Partnership programme for the empirical inquiry is presented. Then

attention is given to the Run Home to Read programme of Project Literacy, the Family and Community Motivators' Programme of the Early Learning Resource Unit (ELRU) and the First Words in Print project of the Centre for the Book.

3.5.1 Read, Educate, Adjust, Develop (READ) Educational Trust

Read, Educate, Adjust, Develop (READ) Educational Trust (Read Educational Trust 2015), an independent non-profitable organisation based in Johannesburg, has one of the largest literacy programmes in South Africa, with 13 centres throughout the country and eight major projects. READ was established in 1979, and is funded by foreign donors and the private sector. Its basic aim is to improve the language competence and learning skills of disadvantaged learners by using a book-based approach (Elley, Cutting, Mangubhai & Hugo 1996:18). READ's mission is to develop the reading, writing, learning, information and communication skills of learners, and is also committed to helping develop the skills of teachers in the field of literacy and language communication. The organisation, in conjunction with Provincial Departments of Education, select schools to work in, while READ trainers distribute books and language based wall-charts, train teachers, principals and librarians in the selected schools and make regular monitoring visits to check on the implementation of the programmes.

3.5.1.1 Key projects

READ's eight key projects are as follows:

i)   Early Childhood Development: The goal of ECD caregiver's project is to implement training courses that would empower unqualified women to run their businesses with skills that would benefit the learners, the community and themselves. Through the Grade R programme, practitioners are taught how to teach the basic concepts of literacy and numeracy while the parents of the learners are engaged in workshops showing them how to participate in their children's education. The programme consists of seven modules. Classroom resources are provided and follow-up visits evaluate the efficacy of the programme and encourage the teacher. This is discussed in greater detail below.

ii)   Primary schools project: The Free State Literacy programme, the Accelerated Programme for Language, Literacy and Communication, and the Gauteng Primary

Literacy Strategy are all examples of programmes that use language specific resources to teach reading and writing.

iii) Read-a-thon: This advocacy campaign aims to promote the love for reading across South Africa, where 3000 red reading boxes are distributed to individual children.

iv) Rally to read: This project, funded by Bidvest, aims to supply resources to otherwise inaccessible and often neglected schools, and to supply their teachers with in-service training.

v) Learning for living: The Learning for living project, funded by the Business Trust, operates in 897 schools and reaches 382 837 learners and 11 341 teachers. The aim of the programme is to reduce the learner repeater rate by supplying schools with materials and training teachers.

vi) Sasol Science programme: Sasol provided funding to resource schools participating in the Rally to Read Project. The aim of the project is to enhance the teaching of science in rural schools and to ensure learners are scientifically literate when they leave school. The project concluded in September 2010.

vii) Sugar Association of South Africa: The programme aims to promote effective language, literacy and communication skills, and provide a link between language learning and science. It also aims to improve school management of High Schools in the area of the Sugar Association.

viii) Ithuba: The purpose of this three-year programme was to develop and distribute 600 000 copies of 120 titles written in all eleven official languages to schools in all nine provinces in South Africa.

My interest was in (i) the pre-primary schools project mentioned above. According to the READ programme developer, Riëtte Els (telephonic conversation, 13 October 2015), the programme was developed over a period of seven years. The programme arose to address parents' misplaced concerns (cf. 2.7.4) about children's play in pre-schools, because they did not understand the role of play in the learning process of the pre-school child (cf. 2.2.1). The outcome was a seven-module programme for parents: one module per term is presented to parents, thus the programme runs over two years. The course outline as follows covers the seven modules.

Module 1: How children learn and develop
Module 2: Playing

Module 3: What we want for our children, and children's rights

Module 4: What parents can give their children

Module 5: Emotions

Module 6: The family is a school

Module 7: Keeping your child safe

Discussions in each module are guided with a poster and the programme outline which complements the posters. Parents also receive a literacy pack with stationery, a booklet containing the posters used during the sessions, advertising brochures and a book in which the children can draw or write. Parents are encouraged to talk to their children about their drawings. The programme runs currently in 13 pre-schools in the Malemulele area; 23 pre-schools in the Giyani area as well as pre-schools in the Johannesburg inner-city. The programme in Malemulele and Giyani is funded by the Roger Federer Foundation (Els 2015).

3.5.1.2   Achievements

Since 1979, READ has worked with over 2000 schools, trained over 70 000 educators and distributed some 4 million books to their project schools. According to the organisation, learners in participating schools score on average as much as two grades higher in reading and writing than peers in schools that do not participate. Despite READ's success, the reason I did not choose the READ pre-primary schools project for my empirical inquiry was due to the time constraints as mentioned.

3.5.2   The Family Literacy Project

The Family Literacy Project (Family Literacy Project n.d.) is the longest running and also the best researched project in South Africa (Pretorius & Machet 2004; 2008; Ntuli & Pretorius 2005; Labuschagne 2001; 2002; Parry *et al.* 2014:3; Desmond 2008). It was established in March 2000 and operates in the disadvantaged, impoverished, deeply rural sites of the southern Drakensberg in KwaZulu Natal (Desmond 2004:350). The community experiences high levels of unemployment and as a result many of the households are female dominant because the men work in nearby towns or more distant cities. According to Desmond (2004:360; 2008; 2012:375) the project aims to address adult functional literacy needs, and through that help make reading something people want to do because it is enjoyable. When reading, adults also

provide a positive role model for young children. The FLP project defines family literacy as "intergenerational sharing in reading and writing activities" (Desmond 2008:33). The programme incorporates participatory activities and combines adult and early literacy skills development as well as health messages.

3.5.2.1   Key components

The following features are striking in the FLP project (Desmond 2012).

a)   REFLECT tool: The programme currently used by FLP follows the Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques (REFLECT), a participatory method of group work influenced by the Brazilian educationalist, Paulo Freire (cf. 2.2.4). The six or seven workshop topics chosen usually reflect the interests of the adults who participate, for example poverty, water, HIV/Aids, early childhood development and child protection (Desmond 2004:353; 2008:36). The REFLECT approach stimulates discussions and give group members opportunity to share what they already know, and to work towards problem solving.

b)   Early literacy: Adults in the adult learner groups are the main channel through which FLP works to achieve its primary objectives of enhancing the lives of children, families and communities. By enhancing the learning and literacy skills of adults, the FLP ensures that they are then more able and likely to read to children at home, engage them in literacy-related and other developmental play activities and help them with schoolwork. The adult programme includes discussions of ways in which group members are already helping their children through conversations, songs and storytelling. The adults also keep journals where they paste or draw a picture and then discuss it with their child. These discussions are used to build participants' confidence so that they could effectively play games and provide activities to help children develop skills such as matching, letter recognition, sequencing, and interpreting pictures (Desmond 2012:352; 2008:36-37)

c)   Adult literacy: In the groups adults improve their own literacy and language skills by working through six learning units. These units cover a range of topics, as indicated above. The literacy needs of the participating adults are very functional, such as to read road signs and street names, count money and their live stock, fill in forms at the bank, find their way at the clinic, and read where the taxis are going.

Functional literacy activities include journal keeping with the children, becoming penfriends with women in other groups, and borrowing books from the project libraries (Desmond 2008:37). Local women are trained as family literacy facilitators (Desmond 2012:353).

d) Home visits: Group members share their knowledge of early childhood development with neighbours through a home-visiting programme. Visits include sharing of activities to develop early literacy skills, but also include health messages on nutrition, safety in the home, common childhood illnesses and their danger signs (Desmond 2012:353-355). They also use parent and child journals to involve parents and children in conversation and writing together. Parents are given a book to use for the journal, and along with their child they draw or paste a picture in it, talk about it together and then the adult writes down the conversation in the journal (Desmond 2008:38).

e) Libraries: Very few homes have their own books (Kvalsvig 2005). As the communities also do not have access to community libraries, local libraries were established with the help of the Exclusive Book Trust. The FLP libraries are staffed by group members and are supported by project staff. The FLP libraries are open to the whole community and are well used by local school children. The FLP further supports shared book reading through box libraries, family literacy groups, and book clubs.

f) Children groups: Very young children are reached by the FLP through the adult groups, as parents engage in family literacy practices at home. Primary school children are invited to weekly child-to-child programmes. These sessions with Grades 1-3 learners aim to promote a love of reading, writing and drawing. The FLP facilitators do not teach the children to read, but they do read to the children and engage them in paired reading and drawing activities (Desmond 2012:353-355; Desmond 2008:38).

g) Publications: Because people in deep rural communities have few opportunities to practice their literacy skills, the FLP introduced initiatives such as newsletters and community libraries. The newsletter is a way of sharing project news and information, and group members are encouraged to write letters to the editor. Other publications in the local language, Zulu, include: Prepare your child to read; Parents and young children; You and your child; Stay healthy (on HIV/AIDS); and Help children be strong (on building resilience). Three books for young children have

been published together with audio tapes of the story, and accompanying songs (Desmond 2012:355).

3.5.2.2   Achievements

There are currently 15 FLP sites with groups started in three phases, in 2000, 2006 and 2010. In these sites FLP runs adult groups, child-to-child groups, young girl groups, teen groups and holiday programmes in the local library (Labuschagne 2001; Pretorius & Machet 2004:130; Ntuli & Pretorius 2005:96). The FLP has, according to external evaluations, provided evidence that the programme was successful in establishing a culture of reading among its members; that group members interact more fluently and frequently with their children; and that the reading, writing activities had improved the children's literacy skills (Desmond 2012:356).

Notwithstanding these remarkable achievements, this programme was not chosen for my study because the programme is primarily focussed on literacy learning in deep rural areas and the content of the programme is mainly directed at adults with poor literacy skills. This did not suit the context of my study which was in an urban area where the participating parents were expected to have more advanced levels of literacy.

3.5.3   Wordworks Home-School Partnership programme

Wordworks was established in 2005 as a non-governmental, non-profitable organisation that relies on donor funding to support and improve early language and literacy of children from disadvantaged communities in South Africa (Wordworks n.d.). Their office is in Cape Town, from where they serve peri-urban and urban areas in the Western Cape through four main programmes for pre-schools, schools, libraries and community organisations (Desmond 2012:376).

3.5.3.1   Key programmes

The four programmes are:

- Early Literacy programme: The focus of the Early Literacy Programme is on the training of volunteers to assist young children as they learn to read and write.

- Home-School Partnership programme: The aim is to empower parents to support informal learning in the home.
- Strengthening of Early Language and Literacy in Gr R (STELLAR): Provides training and resources for teachers to support learning in Grade R.
- Every Word Counts Programme: Give parents and caregivers of babies and young children ideas to build language

Information about these programmes, as well as learning aids, are available on the Wordworks website (Wordworks n.d).

My interest was in the Home-School Partnership programme. The main target group is parents and home- caregivers of children from 3 to 7 years of age. Wordworks offers training and ongoing mentoring to facilitators on how to run the seven-week course. Through the Early Literacy Programme, volunteers are trained to work with small groups of children to support their emergent reading and writing. The weekly lessons include reading a new book, emergent writing and drawing, and playing word games and sound games. This programme not only helps to foster a culture of learning among families, but also helps to build stronger relationships between pre-schools/ schools and the families they serve.

A brief description of the content of the Home-School Partnership programme is provided in Chapter 4 (cf. 4.3.1 below). The Wordworks programmes are monitored and evaluated in a number of ways:

a)   a register is kept for each session, and parents who attended five out of the seven sessions receive a certificate,
b)   facilitators are mentored,
c)   feedback forms are handed out and collated after each course, and
d)   sample testing is conducted at selected sites.

3.5.3.2   Achievements

In partnership with the Western Cape Education Department the three main programmes are running in over 28 schools and three libraries, reaching over 720 parents (Desmond 2012:377-379). Through another partnership the Home-School Partnership programme is running in eight

schools in the Eastern Cape. The organisation has two publications on their website, namely "Much more than counting: Mathematics development between birth and five years", and "Narrowing the literacy gap: Strengthening language and literacy development between birth and six years for children in South Africa", as well as a number of policy briefs. Wordworks has also established a partnership with REPSSI, a regional capacity building organisation working in Southern and Eastern Africa to enhance the psychosocial well-being of all children affected by HIV/AIDS, poverty and conflict (REPSSI 2015). Wordworks has helped adults find ways of supporting the early literacy development of their children Desmond 2012).

I chose the Wordworks Home-School Partnership programme for a number of reasons. First of all I found it to be a very comprehensive family literacy programme, with the focus on more than just supplying books and shared reading. Secondly the programme is aimed at working directly with parents with the aim to empower and equip parents of children aged between four and seven years to support informal learning in the home. Parents attend seven weekly two-hour workshops where they learn how to support their children's learning through practical activities and strategies, and are provided with fun and user-friendly resources that they can use in the home context. Thirdly, the content of the programme is focussed on improving the literacy learning of children in the families and not aimed at improving the literacy skills of low-literate parents. After evaluation I felt the programme best suited to use with parents from urban areas who have high levels of literacy and holds steady employment. The aim of the programme is also best aligned with the research aim of my study. The programme is accredited by the University of Cape Town as part of their short course programme.

3.5.4 Project Literacy's Run Home to Read Family Literacy programme

Project Literacy, established in 1973, is a non-governmental, non-profitable organisation in the field of adult literacy. With its headquarters in Pretoria, its training programmes reach adults across the country. Its family literacy programme, Run Home to Read (Project literacy 2015), currently operates in sixteen sites in the Eastern Cape, Free State, Limpopo Province and Gauteng (Desmond 2012:378). The Run Home to Read project is supposed to help the newly literate parents "gain confidence in their abilities and also realise they can play a valuable role in their children's education". It also helps the children to love reading, helping to create that very important reading culture.

The Run Home to Read programme was initiated by a joint partnership with the Children's Literature Research Unit in the Department of Information Science at the University of South Africa (Unisa) (Desmond 2012:378; Machet & Pretorius 2004:41). In 2002, the Literature Research Unit got funding from an American Foundation who requested to remain anonymous, to start a project that would motivate illiterate parents to read to their children. Initially the project started in four crèches in Gauteng and in the following year (2001) extended to three more sites in KwaZulu Natal. The project has now expanded to 16 sites in KwaZulu Natal, Eastern Cape, Free State, Limpopo Province and Gauteng. The aim of the project is to train illiterate and neo-literate (an adolescent or adult who could not make use of available educational opportunities at the time, and who, at a later stage, has completed basic literacy training) parents, and caregivers how to read storybooks to preschool children in order to help children develop the pre-literacy skills needed for school (Machet & Pretorius 2004:40; Desmond 2012:378-379). In addition to benefitting the children, it was hoped that by reading to preschool children adult new readers could also gain confidence in their skills and get much needed practice. Originally it was planned to implement the programme with people already in adult literacy classes and train them how to read to preschool children. As many of the adults in the project initially did not have a pre-school child living with them, it was decided to identify suitable crèches and invite the parents and/or caregivers to attend a training session on how to read to children. Parents had to attend only one session of four hours, where they had role-play and practiced reading to each other. If parents could not read, the text was covered with masking tape and they were encouraged to tell the story from the picture. A small library was then set up in the crèches so that the children and adults could borrow books on a regular basis (Machet & Pretorius 2004:41; Desmond 2012:378).

3.5.4.1 Key components

a)   The programme: Adult family members attend short courses on how to read to their children and engage them in stimulating activities to develop early literacy skills. The course is divided into five sections titled:

- Reading to children;
- What can we do to help our children learn?;
- The benefits of reading to children;

- Activities; and

- Reading a book.

A reading champion assists families by providing them with a reading pack with two activity books, six storybooks, a caregiver guide, a pack of crayons and a t-shirt (Desmond 2012:378-379). A reading champion visits families twice a week. Fieldworkers follow up on the visits every month and report to the Project Manager.

b) Get together and Library orientation: After each three-month long intervention period a one day Get Together for all families involved in the project for each intervention period is conducted. The Get Together is held at one of the local libraries where the families come to read stories, recite poems, and share their experiences reading as a family. No formal programme follows this three- month intervention period, although the reading champions maintain informal contact with the families.

c) The role of libraries: The programme promotes the use of local libraries. Before a reading champion moves on, families will be assisted on how to find and join the local library, and become familiar with borrowing books. In addition they help to establish libraries where no local libraries exist (Desmond 2012).

3.5.4.2 Achievements

Anecdotal feedback from local school principals indicated that children who have taken part in the Run Home to Read programme began Grade R better prepared for formal schooling than those who did not participated in the programme. They were reported to be more comfortable handling books, enjoy reading, and telling their own stories. Other benefits, as reported by Project Managers, is that caregivers are better able to read to their children regardless of their own literacy levels, have stronger relationships with their children, understand their role in their child's learning and have increased confidence in their own reading abilities. The Run Home to Read Programme received recognition at the Mail and Guardian Drivers of Change Award in 2009, and in 2010 won the Silver Award of the Impumelelo Innovations Award Trust. By the end of 2013 the Run Home to Read programme had reached 3 400 families.

As I was looking for a more comprehensive programme, I did not chose this project because it focussed only on reading to children and rely on the role of libraries in the provisioning of books. My primary focus also is not to improve the reading skills of illiterate parents.

3.5.5 The Family and Community Motivators programme

Early Learning Resource Unit (ELRU) (ELRU 2014) is a non-government and non-profit organisation whose mission includes "promoting and providing access to knowledge and skills" and "affirming and harnessing the potential of diversity". The Early Learning Resource Unit has developed a Family and Community Motivators programme which undertakes outreach work to the parents and caregivers of vulnerable young children and are being used by a number of organisations working in the field of early childhood development. The programme includes information on children's developmental needs, practical guidance and advice, suggestions for activities, and books on a range of topics to be used in conversations with parents, such as safety, health, a stimulating environment, access to social grants, etc. Through the programme parents are supported through home visits, toys, cluster workshops and playgroups. Vulnerable families are visited twice a month, with each visit about 2 hours long. There is no research available on the programme.

I did not chose this programme, as it involved home visits and covered more general needs of vulnerable families, and did not focus on literacy skills as such.

3.5.6 First Words in Print

Centre for the book (National Library of South Africa 2012) is an outreach unit of the National Library of South Africa. The Centre for the book is housed in Cape Town and is open for the public on week days. Its broader mission is to promote reading, writing and publishing in all eleven official languages.

3.5.6.1 Key programmes

The Centre for the book runs five projects (National Library of South Africa 2012):

i)   First words in print (FWIP): The aim of the FWIP project is to get books into the hands of children ages 3 to 9 years old. In April 2003, phase 1 of the project was deployed in all 9 provinces. Two thousand five hundred sets of books were distributed through Early Childhood Development Centres, libraries, and Health Services. Each set contained four books written by South African authors in English and mother tongues. Phase 2 was deployed in 2005.

ii)   Children's Literature Network: This literature network is an online forum.

iii)   Community Publishing: NB Publishers train small publishers in marketing, distribution, and other business issues, in hoping that books that previously would not have been looked at by big publishers will get a chance of being published.

iv)   Writer development: Workshops and courses for writers are offered on a regular basis.

v)   World Book Day: each year, only the First Words in Print (FWIP) project covers schools in all provinces of South Africa.

3.5.6.2   Achievements

Highlights of the Centre for the Book were (National Library of South Africa 2012):

- Thousands of children owned a book for the first time.
- Many children were spotted reading books on their own, for fun, some even after three months.

A concern raised about the project is that caregivers need to be trained that reading can be fun and not just for learning. This was a very important criticism, as research has pointed out that the mere availability of books does not lead to reading improvement. It is for this reason that I did not consider the programme. The projects lack a comprehensive programme aimed at direct teaching of literacy skills.

3.5.7   Resource based endeavours

The focus of the programmes on inputs to both parents and children, as well as the context in which they are implemented, influenced this overview of family literacy programmes. Programmes primarily directed at parents as illiterate adults have not been included in the

ensuing discussion. Furthermore, programmes aimed at improving literacy skills mainly by supplying books and other resources have not been included, with two exceptions. The Centre for Adult Education, University of KwaZulu Natal (University of KwaZulu Natal n.d), have produced a DVD entitled "Family literacy: Bringing literacy home" which shows actual South African families enjoying books and literacy activities in their homes. The film includes footage of children using reading and writing in play, with parents joining in, highlighting the kind of literacy practices that can enrich family life and help children develop a love for reading and books.

The Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa (PRAESA) is an independently funded research institution, which has as its mandate all aspects of language policy, planning and implementation of multilingual education in South Africa and Africa (Bloch 2006). PRAESA has produced a short film called "Feeling at home with literacy" (also available in Afrikaans and IsiXhosa) in which a young girl who is just starting to read and write is followed for a day. The DVD explores the literacy stimuli that are all around her and how her mother and teachers can use all of the language present in the classroom as a resource. Currently PRAESA also drives the Nal'ibali reading-for-enjoyment campaign (Bloch 2015:2), which was initiated in 2012 jointly with the DG Murray Trust. Nal'ibali aims to re-ignite a passion for storytelling and reading among adults and children to transform children's opportunities for becoming readers and writers. Nal'ibali collaborates with libraries on events, training and support for reading clubs and offers materials as part of the campaign (Bloch 2015:1).

3.5.8 Challenges to the provision of family literacy programmes in South Africa

Learning from the work of abovementioned programmes and the context in which they operate, several considerations are important to optimise the impact of future work. Rule and Lyster (2005) list some aspects that should be considered.

Lack of a workable organisational structure: Family literacy programmes are by definition more complex than single focus interventions with adults or children. However, the constraints under which many programmes operate require simple, workable structures which do not place unrealistic demands on programme managers and educators (Rule & Lyster 2005).

Lack of funding: A key problem faced by many family literacy programmes is funding. Family literacy is not yet seen as a mainstream activity by government programmes (possibly because it does not fit neatly into the various government directorates (ABET, ECD, etc.) but by its very nature it requires integration and co-operation. Many family literacy programmes therefore rely on donor funding, which is withering in the face of bilateral inter-government agreements and bursts of campaign fervour on the part of government for short-lived literacy initiatives (Rule & Lyster 2005).

Practitioner development: ABET and ECD are both under-resourced and under-funded areas in relation to school education. This impacts directly on the quality and quantity of practitioner development in both these fields. Very often, because of the low status of these fields, educators are not required to have high levels of education and receive very short and often inadequate training. Family literacy requires a sophisticated understanding of how literacy develops and how learning happens but often practitioner training courses in ECD and ABET do not even touch on these more complex areas (Rule & Lyster 2005). Changing attitudes towards reading: South Africa does not have a strong reading culture. There are numerous reasons for this but the general result is that reading is not widely regarded as pleasurable or essential. In most people's minds it is functional, instrumental and most importantly school-based. The idea of reading to children at home is foreign to many parents who cannot separate reading from direct instruction. The high correlation between low educational levels, poverty, overcrowding, poor lighting, lack of access to books and so on, makes it very difficult to change attitudes to reading and yet, unless attitudes are changed, all other interventions appear doomed to failure (Rule & Lyster 2005).

Multilingualism: Despite South Africa's constitution, which equally validates all eleven official languages, the fact remains that English is the dominant language of the country. This has resulted in negative attitudes towards reading in African languages (the mother tongue of the vast majority of the population) and the publication of relatively few books in African languages. These attitudes persist despite the fact that it is indisputable that learning to read and being read to in one's mother tongue are most advantageous to the acquisition of literacy in both first and subsequent languages as well as to general learning in all areas (Rule & Lyster 2005).

Lack of advocacy: Family literacy as project work is still in its infancy in South Africa. Aside from a few pioneering and exemplary projects, it is seen as an add-on or a "nice to have" rather than as a potent tool in breaking the cycles of poverty and disadvantage in the country (Rule & Lyster 2005).

3.6 FINAL CONCLUSION

Chapter 3 presented an overview of the family in the South African context and the implication thereof for family literacy. The discussion of the contextual factors influencing literacy skills revealed that all forms of family in South Africa are under great pressure from social and economic problems. The chapter explained the various implications it has on family literacy. Although there are high literacy levels among adults, a lack of a real culture of reading impacts severely on children and families. An overview of important educational programmes with a family literacy component available in South Africa had indicated that there is a lack of focus on family literacy. The few family literacy programmes currently available are run by non-governmental organisations, are diverse and are mainly aimed at vulnerable families and focus on basic adult literacy levels. The few available South African studies have shown the benefits of such programmes on the literacy development of families and have indicated the need for focussed research in this field. Chapter 4 will discuss in detail the design of my own research study, the data collection methods and data analysis.

CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1   INTRODUCTION

Chapter 4 articulates the design of the study, which has been informed by the literature study completed in chapters 2 and 3, in detail. This chapter explains why action research, using qualitative methods of data gathering, was the chosen approach for the empirical inquiry and describes the design of the study, the choice of a family literacy programme, the selection of a site and participants, the detailed plan for the implementation of the home-school programme and how the programme was modified and extended as part of the action research process. Data collection methods, data analysis, steps taken to ensure trustworthiness of data and to meet ethical requirements have all been explained. The chapter concludes with a discussion on how the study design thus described reflects the key tenets of action research.

4.2   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study of an implementation of a family literacy programme followed an action research approach following an interpretivist approach, using qualitative methods of data gathering and analysis. Kurt Lewin, originator of the term *action research*, believed that knowledge should be created from problem solving in real-life situations (cited in Anderson, Herr & Nihlen 2007:19). Lewin (cited in Reason & Bradbury 2008:4) and Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon (2014:25) believe that action research allows both critical reflection and theory to go hand in hand with practice. They argue that action without reflection and understanding was blind; theory without action was meaningless. Herr and Anderson (2005:84) describe action research as a methodological process in which iterative cycles of plan-act-observe-reflect occur in relation to the literature in a way that assists to illuminate the findings, to deepen insight and direct the next phase or cycle of the action. In action research the researcher's increasing observations and data are in dialogue with what researchers have studied about similar research questions, problems and contexts. The end result is that data analysis is 'pushed' by relevant literature and the literature is extended through the contribution of the action research. Figure 4.1 illustrates this process with reference to six implementation sessions as used in this study according to the structure of the family literacy programme (cf. 4.3 below).
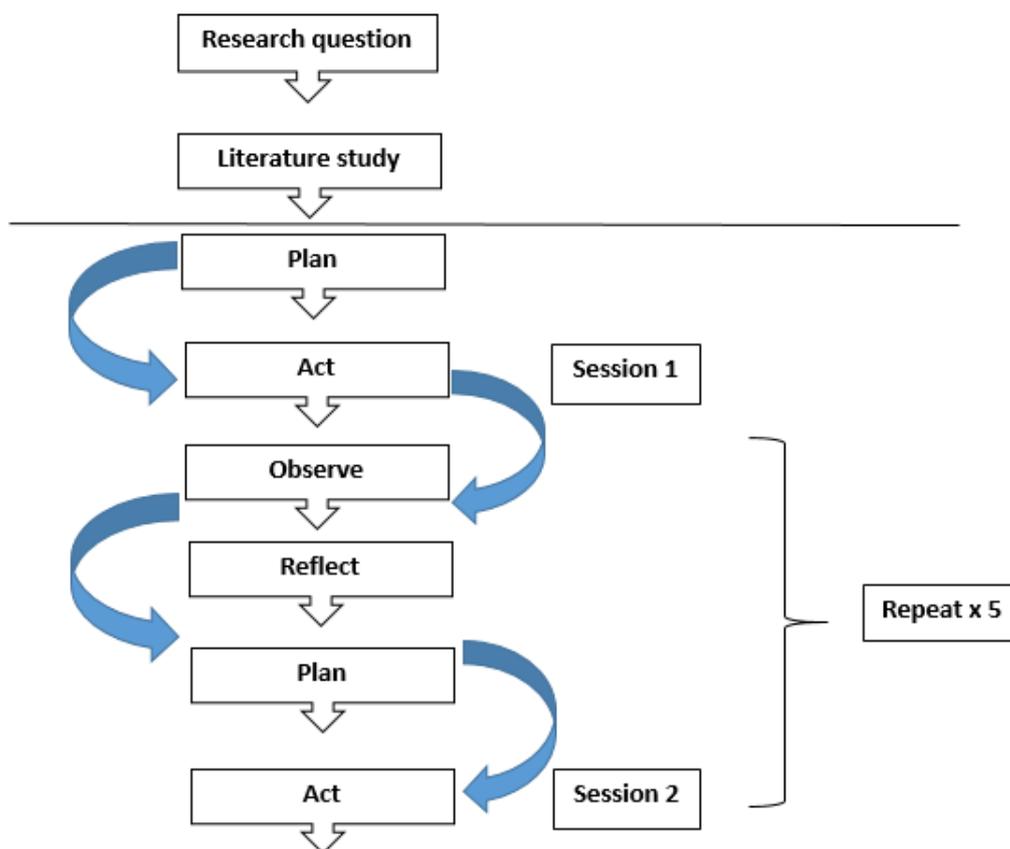
Figure 4.1: The action research process followed in this study

I deemed this approach the most suitable for a study where I wished to use research principles as well as insights from the literature in order to provide information to teachers and families that they could use to improve aspects of day-to-day practice in terms of family literacy (McMillan & Schumacher 2010:478). In this study I embraced the following features of action research (Anderson *et al*. 2007; Kemmis *et al.* 2014):

a)   **Collaborative model:** As action research is a systematic approach to help professionals change practice, it usually uses a collaborative model that includes several individuals (Anderson *et al.* 2007). Action research in education is usually completed in terms of using a collaborative model with parts of or entire school communities. In this study I engaged in collaborative action research with teachers and a group of families (Grade R parents and their children) during the implementation of a family literacy programme.

b)   **Active engagement of participants**: Action research calls for the full and active engagement of the researcher as well as all participants with a view to effecting change. In this study I created the opportunity for the participants (parents, teachers children and myself as observer-participant) to be actively involved in the activities of the family literacy programme both at school and at-home. Feedback discussions contributed to a critical reflection of the programme. Throughout the implementation I also engaged in critical reflection of the relevant literature (Chapters 2 and 3) and used my insights to build into the family literacy programme as it proceeded (Anderson *et al.* 2007).

c)   **Researcher collaboration**: Action research may involve outsiders to the setting who collaborate with insiders; or they can be insiders, such as a team of teachers, working in collaboration with others (Anderson *et al.* 2007:1). In this study I acted as an observer-participant (an outsider) who worked in collaboration with teachers and parents. I trained teachers to function as facilitators of the programme and acted unobtrusively as a facilitator aid rather than an expert (Anderson *et al.* 2007).

d)   **Praxis orientation**: Action research is aimed at fostering positive social change; it is praxis orientated and geared at the empowerment of participants. It may also be aimed at obtaining a "political understanding of schooling" and the development of "voice" among participants that is necessary for social change. This stance supports action research as social justice research or emancipatory action research and participatory action research (Klein 2012:2). This label was given after Freire and a group of Chilean literacy educators who began a series of "thematic research" projects to help participants acquire literacy, and to help them engage in social critique and social action (Anderson *et al.* 2007:24).

In this study the principal of the school and the School Governing Body regarded the implementation of the family literacy programme as an opportunity to foster positive change in the school, to empower interested parents with the skills to foster family literacy and to equip teacher-facilitators with the knowledge and skills to train parents which may be utilized in future parent involvement programmes at the school. Further, the structure and content of the family literacy programme generated many opportunities for all participants (teacher-facilitators, parents and even

children) to contribute to the programme's success and gave them 'voice' to express their own ideas and opinions about the effectiveness of the programme, as Freire and his collaborators pioneered (cf. 2.2).

e)   **Ongoing change and improvement**: Action research allows for immediate changes in a specific setting as a result of systematic examination of practice, critical reflection and examination of practices and beliefs in the light of relevant literature. This is done by the implementation of cycles or phases of action research: problem identification, planning, implementation, data collection, reflection and analysis and repetition (Glanz 2003; Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtle 2010:322). The number and sequence of these cycles are, however, flexible and context bound. In this study the structure and content of the family literacy programme chosen was appropriate for ongoing planning of the training sessions, implementation during training and at home, continual collection of new data, critical reflection on the effectiveness of each session and the repetition of the training sessions and at-home family literacy activities which incorporated new and ongoing insights. The action research design also, as Koshy (2005:3) proposed, simultaneously enhanced the professional skills of the participating teachers, advanced my knowledge on the research question, and improved educational processes and outcomes for the participating families. Educators involved in the study developed personal knowledge and sensitivity about their own practices. Reason and Bradbury (2008:16) state that in action research, we "make the road while walking it."

f)   **Agency of participants**: Another characteristic of action research, as described by Herr and Anderson (2005:3), is that action research as an inquiry is done by or with insiders of an organisation or community, but never to or on them. In this study the action research design allowed the participating teacher-facilitators and the parent participants to take an active part in the research and legitimised their role as experts in learning practice. This was especially valuable to me, as I realised that I, as an outsider, could not acquire the tactical knowledge of the school and family setting except from those insiders who must function daily within that setting. The teacher-facilitators enriched my knowledge and understanding of the relationship and the exchange of knowledge between themselves as educators and the parents. In addition, and equally important, the action research design validated the knowledge

and contributions that parents provide with regard to their children and their children's literacy development. According to Herr and Anderson (2005:36) collaboration in action research is democratic in that participants are co-agents in the research. The action research design thus allowed for equal participation and shared value of contributions for both the participating teachers and families, respecting both parties as valuable co-participants and knowledge co-constructors. In the spirit of an action research approach, the teachers and parents in this study were not "passive participants" but rather were involved in on-going reflection about the practices they have engaged in as they provided input into the design of these activities that constituted the end product. Action research provided participants a mechanism for transformation in their thinking and understanding of the concepts of literacy and parental involvement and also provided them with a better understanding and appreciation of the other's role and responsibilities within the educational process.

In summary, consideration of these characteristics of the action research design and its 'fit' with my research topic: *The role of family literacy programmes to support emergent literacy of young learners,* persuaded me that it would be an especially appropriate methodology to involve teachers and parents in co-constructing a working understanding of family literacy, in examining and exploring different strategies and approaches to enhance emergent literacy development of young children and in supporting literacy learning in families.

4.2.1   Critique of action research

According to Atkins and Wallace (2012:140) criticism is largely focused around the rigour and the lack of training of those who undertake action research. Criticism around the lack of training tends to focus on the fact that few practitioners have undertaken formal research training. This implies that there are likely to be methodological or analytical weaknesses or errors in the study, with possible negative consequences for the participants. In this case my research is part of a formal Unisa postgraduate qualification; I have already completed research as part of a master's degree as well as courses in research methodology and all steps of the research process were guided by my supervisor.

Lytle (2000:694) and Anderson *et al*. (2007:8) critique action research as a mechanism to address larger institutional and societal goals. Their concern is that the purposes of action research are then moving away from locally determined improvement initiatives. The danger is that action research is seen as the engine of large scale and top-down improvement, coupled with improvement targets as clear, measurable performance standards. However, in this case my study is small scale, collaborative and designed only to improve family literacy endeavours in a single school.

Newton and Burgess (2008:20) further caution against action research when employed primarily as a form of in-service training or staff development. They view the instrumental uses of action research as problematic: "Seeing action research as a means for professional development raises a complex set of questions related to issues of power: Who and what is being 'developed' and by whom, and, most important, in whose interests?" The collaborative nature of action research, as well as the validity measure I had built into the research design helped me to avoid the abovementioned issues of power. My intention was equally to equip parents and teachers with new knowledge and skills, which could be implemented in the immediate context. In all cases I made the overt purpose of the study (to obtain a postgraduate qualification) and the outcomes of the study (a thesis) clear to all participants. At the same time I provided the school with the family literacy programme, all the materials as well as the expanded version of the programme which could be used time and again in similar family literacy endeavours to the benefit of the school community.

Action research has also been subject to criticism for the lack of objectivity arising from the practitioner's role as insider researcher. It may be argued that all qualitative research is subjective, particularly in education, irrespective of whether it is done using an action research approach or not. "This is because our research interests and the approaches we use are influenced by our values and beliefs which in turn are influenced by our life experiences, cultural and religious beliefs and practices", explain Atkins and Wallace (2012:140). To avoid the risk of such criticism, it was necessary for me to acknowledge my own values and beliefs, but I also had to question my own assumptions and behaviour at each point in the process in order to achieve a degree of reflexivity, or introspection and self-examination. The degree of participation I chose as well as the validity measures also served as a safeguard against this criticism.

Finally, Newton and Burgess (2008:20) also question the critical nature of approaches such as action research. For them such an approach "has the potential to lead not to the unlocking of complexity but to the elucidation of rigid preconceptions which serve only to confirm injustices of the 'found' world. Hitherto action research has assumed a reality which can be uncovered and then altered in some way or improved upon for emancipatory purposes." They raise the key question about where our ideas of what counts as "improvement" come from. How can the researcher both "observe" reality as well as being part of it and thus be implicated in its continual creation and recreation? These issues are much more complex than action research has acknowledged so far. Only the participants can contest to the degree of improvement, and verified it through the process of member checking. I tell their stories in chapter 5.

4.3   CHOICE AND MODIFICATION OF A FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAMME

The range of family literacy programmes available in South Africa is limited as has been indicated in the discussion in Chapter 3 (cf. 3.5). In my search to identify an appropriate programme for this study I investigated the Wordworks' range of projects designed to support early literacy among children in depth (Desmond 2012; O'Carroll & Hickman 2012; cf. 3.5.3).

I chose the Wordworks Home-School Partnerships programme (cf. 3.5.3) because it presented a thorough but flexible design that could be implemented in a range of school and family contexts.   After my choice was made I sought and obtained permission to use the Wordworks Home-School Partnerships programme from Wordworks and also to make modifications to suit the context of my study (see Appendix D).

The ensuing sections describe the programme's content and structure, modifications made for this study, the development of a children's literacy component to complement the parent training component and the arrangements for facilitator training.

4.3.1   Wordworks Home-School Partnerships programme

The Wordworks Home-School Partnerships programme is aimed at: empowering and equipping all parents (also caregivers or grandparents) of children aged between four and seven years to support informal learning in the home; to build a sense of community among parents; and to provide a positive space for parents to share ideas and ask questions about children's language and literacy development in the early years (O'Carroll 2012). The programme is specifically not designed as a remedial course for parents of children which are struggling academically, and is applicable across diverse cultural contexts. The course structure is flexible so that it could easily be contextualised to the needs of a particular school. According to the author of the course, Brigid Comrie (2012:1), the programme's guidelines do not aim to impose a set of ideals or an educational framework on communities, but rather seek to inspire parents and caregivers to support children in fulfilling their true learning potential. The programme simply aims to give parents what they need to close the literacy gap between home and school (O'Carroll & Hickman 2012).

The Wordworks Home-School Partnerships programme is based on a comprehensive facilitators' guide for facilitators who wish to run a family literacy training programme for parents. The facilitator's guide comprises the course content in book format and a resource file (Comrie 2012). The resource file contains: i) handouts for parents (e.g., photocopiable Little Books, a handbook entitled *Supporting learning at home* and games); and ii) charts for course presentations. The programme is available only in English; however, the parent handbook, *Supporting learning at home*, and optional resources (alphabet charts and story booklets) are also available in isiXhosa and isiZulu (Comrie 2012:10, 97).

The recommended course structure entails seven weekly training sessions for parents: one session per week, supported by handouts and take-home literacy activities for implementation with children at home (Comrie 2012). The expected duration of the sessions are 2-3 hours in length. The recommended seven session course outline for parents (Comrie 2012) is as follows:

Session 1: Parents as first educators
- Getting to know each other and the programme;
- Feeling good about yourself and your child;

- Explaining and exploring "learning events" at home – what families are already doing and building on these positive practices;
- Thinking and talking about childhood – exploring YES and NO parenting skills;
- Exploring how children learn best;
- Optional: Introducing the Circle of Courage: Talking about resilience;
- Setting homework tasks.

Session 2: Language learning and how children learn best

- Get feedback from parents on homework tasks, including some discussion on "good talking time";
- Discuss why language development is so important for learning, and why it is important to develop mother tongue- as well as school language (particularly for children who are not learning in their mother tongue at school);
- Think and talk about how children learn language and how we can stimulate/enrich language, over and above what we are already doing.

Session 3: Interactive story reading, drawing and early reading and writing

- Get feedback from parents on homework tasks, and answer questions parents may have;
- Introduce a new story and model interactive story reading;
- Have some fun with crayons and paper – draw your own pictures and talk about how you feel about your pictures and your children's pictures;
- Think and talk about the names of colours and how children learn about colours;
- Think and talk about how drawing is important "brain work" for children;
- Think and talk about how drawing and writing are linked;
- Think and talk about how drawing, writing and reading are linked;
- Think and talk about whether we can learn more about our children by noticing what is in their drawings;
- Introduce the *Have-a-go*-writing activity;
- Shared writing (optional);
- Homework tasks.

Session 4: Supporting reading and writing

- Get feedback from parents on homework tasks and answer their questions;
- Talk about language games they used to play as children – as far as possible linking these with the material in the session;
- Introduce the little fold up books and blank booklets;
- Consolidate information on how to support reading and writing at home;
- Introduce games to support reading and writing;
- Tell about using print around us to support and develop reading and writing;
- Talk and think about the fact that when we read and write, our children will copy us.

Session 5: Importance of the development of big and small muscles, balance and good body image

- Introduce the importance of personal storytelling using handout 5B: *Telling your own stories* and playing the *Word Dice Game*;
- Talk about games they used to play and link these with the information in the session;
- Help parents understand the link between physical development and reading and writing;
- Talk about how children learn by DOING and often through PLAY;
- Work through the booklet: *My body and space around me*;
- Talk about how children learn to hold a pencil;
- Recap information on the 5 senses and how children learn;
- Talk about why good hearing is important and how it affects reading and writing;
- Give homework tasks.

Session 6: Maths is fun

- Get feedback from parents on homework tasks and answer their questions;
- Talk about maths and concrete learning, getting ideas and games from the group;
- Introduce and play simple dice games together;
- Introduce concrete concepts that form the building blocks for maths, including numbers, shape, size and measurement, matching and sorting and looking for patterns;
- Help parents think and talk about ways to introduce easy concepts at home in an informal way;

- Homework tasks.

Session 7: Review of the material

- Get feedback from parents on homework tasks and answer their questions;
- Work through the booklet: *Supporting learning at home* together;
- Get feedback on the course – oral or written;
- Plan a follow-up session and get suggestions regarding their needs;
- Encourage the group to build its own support group – this may include forming a committee;
- Hand out certificates and celebrate!

Each session contains an icebreaker entitled 'Getting started'; individual and /or group activities; facilitator commentary; additional activities; helpful hints; and homework activities for parents to implement with children at home.

4.3.2   Modification of the parent programme

As indicated the recommended duration of the Wordworks Home-School Partnership programme for parents is seven weeks. In view of the time commitment required from families, I adapted the programme by reducing the sessions to six. Since the focus of this study is on supporting emergent literacy and to minimise the demand on the participating families' time, I omitted S**ession six: Maths is fun,** which deals with the development of basic maths concepts. Each session lasted about 2½ hours every Wednesday evening with short breaks between activities (cf. 4.3.1). I provided light refreshments at the beginning of each session so that parents did not have to concern themselves with arrangements for an evening meal. Each participating family received the Parent Guide (part of the handout pack included in the Wordworks Home-School programme) containing a summary of the programme, as well as weekly resource packs with photo-copiable Little Books, charts and handouts including games and activities.

4.3.3   Development of literacy sessions for children

The Wordworks Home-School Partnerships programme for parents does not have a specific component for children. It is assumed that the training sessions will only be attended by the parents. However, I decided to engage the young children of participating parents in six parallel literacy sessions which I self-designed for the study.

I included the children's component for the following reasons:

Firstly, the literature review in chapter 2 (cf. 2.7.5) indicated that many parents are reluctant to join family literacy programmes because of time constraints. Having to care for a family (e.g., making an evening meal, doing homework, general supervision as well as finding a suitable caretaker for the children while parents attend a family literacy programme) is a formidable barrier to participation. By providing a constructive parallel programme for the young children under professional supervision, I was able to overcome this barrier as well as to enrich and extend the Wordworks programme.

Furthermore, I decided that data collected through observing the children during literacy activities could be used to support other forms of evidence collected (Koshy 2005:96). I felt that observing the children could provide rich insights in terms of language development, phonological knowledge, alphabet and print knowledge and concepts of print. These data could be illuminating in capturing an ongoing record of changes and progress over the six weeks of implementation, especially when compared with the benefits claimed in the literature (cf. 2.6). By collecting children's drawings and print during their activities, I obtained additional evidence of skills not easily communicated. Finally, I ensured that the children were not be subjected to experimentation, any kind of formal assessments or interviews and made observation of the children as non-intrusive as possible.

Thus, I self-designed a programme for the children that was aligned with the sessions of the Wordworks Home-School Partnerships programme for parents. Activities for the six children's sessions were designed around the following theme: the upcoming birthday party for a fictitious character, Jono, a life-size puppet. Activities included opportunities to discuss, draw, read environmental print, make cards and invitations and draw up lists.

4.3.4 The modified Wordworks Home-School Partnerships programme for parents and young children

The full content of the Wordworks Home-School Partnerships Programme for parents, inclusive of all seven sessions, (Comrie 2012) is attached as an e-version in Appendix J. The full content of the additional programme for children which I designed is attached as Appendix K.

Table 4.1 presents the outline of the modified Wordworks Home-School Partnerships Programme for parents and children.

Table 4.1: Modified Wordworks Home-School Partnership Programme for parents and young children

Session 1: Parent group: Good talking time Getting to know each other; parents as the child's first teacher; talking about how children learn; importance of a good self-esteem. **Session 1: Children's group: Jono and his party** Meeting Jono. Introduce yourself to Jono. Discuss Jono's up-coming birthday. Reading calendars. Help Jono design a letter of invitation for his birthday party. **Session 2: Parent group: Language learning** Language learning; talking about how children learn language and the importance of language development; why it's important to tell and read stories with children and how this helps with learning to read at school. **Session 2: Children's group: Birthday presents** Help Jono decide on birthday presents. Reading of advertising brochures. Making lists. **Session 3: Parent group: Fun with drawing, early reading and writing** Modelling interactive story reading; having fun with drawing, and supporting early reading and writing. **Session 3: Children's group: Party planning** Planning for the party; draw up a shopping list.

> **Session 4: Parent group: Supporting reading and writing**
>
> Listening and listening games that support reading and writing; using print around you; making little books.
>
> **Session 4: Children's group: Making birthday cards**
>
> Planning games and activities for Jono's birthday party.
>
>
> **Session 5: Parent group: The importance of big and small muscles**
>
> Planning games developing big and small muscles; balance and good body image; how these aspects affect reading and writing; the importance of good hearing.
>
> **Session 5: Children's group: Baking for Jono's party**
>
> Baking Jono a cake. Reading and writing recipes.
>
>
> **Session 6: Parent group: Celebration and certificates**
>
> Summary; questions; discussion about changing routines and positive discipline; certificates and celebration.
>
> **Session 6: Children's group: Celebration and certificates**
>
> At last! Jono's birthday party! Making birthday cards. Join the parents for handing out of certificates.

4.3.5 Facilitator training for the Wordworks Home-School Partnerships programme

The Wordworks Home-School Partnerships programme offers training and ongoing mentoring to facilitators on how to run the seven-week course for parents. Training is based on the facilitators' guide (Comrie 2012). The programme suggests that facilitators could be recruited from: Foundation Phase teachers, learning-support teachers, social workers, education officials or an informed librarian or parent. Comrie (2012) suggests that at least two facilitators be present per parent group (25-30 parents) when the programme is implemented for parents (Comrie 2012). The structure of and length of facilitator training is not stipulated; this could be decided by the overall programme implementers and will depend on the need.

4.4   SELECTION OF SITE

I approached ten independent English medium pre-schools with Grade R programmes in the area most accessible to me and invited the principals by email to take part in this study. I regarded it important that the location of the school was accessible to me as implementation would require intensive fieldwork for at least eight weeks: six weeks for the implementation of the modified Wordworks Home-School Partnership Programme and two weeks for recruitment of families and teachers-facilitators, facilitator training and overall feedback. In the e-mail to principals I explained the purpose of the programme, and provided an overview of the structure and content and ethical considerations.

Only one school principal, the principal of an independent English medium school which comprises a preschool section (3-5 year olds) and Grade R through Grade 2 situated in Pretoria East (pseudonym: Rising Rainbow) wholeheartedly accepted this invitation with a view to improving family literacy and building staff and parental capacity in this regard. As recruiting often starts with schools that have populations demonstrating a need to learn interactive literacy skills, I followed up only on the school that reacted to my invitation.

I arranged a meeting with the principal (Principal Lesley) to introduce myself and to explain in detail the content and the purpose of the study and the Wordworks Home-School Partnerships programme and to answer all her questions. I made it clear that implementation of the programme would not interfere with regular instruction but hoped that it would enhance literacy instruction, literacy learning and services to parents. The principal as the manager of the school provisionally accepted the invitation to participate and took the matter further to the School Governing Body for their consideration. Thereafter, I obtained written permission from the School Governing Body to conduct the research at the school (see Appendix A) and to proceed with the recruitment of families.

4.4.1   Description of the school

Rising Rainbow is a private pre-school and primary school attached to a local community church. The school is situated in an upmarket, leafy suburb. Besides the pre-school, the school offers Grade R to Grade 2 and has received permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to offer Grade 3 in 2016. The learner enrolment is multi-cultural; the language of

learning and teaching is English. The learner enrolment at the time of the study was 57 learners (excluding the children in the age group 2-4 years); the staff component was 7 teachers including the principal. The language of learning and teaching at the school is English. However, the school accommodates children from a variety of national and ethnic backgrounds. Many children are not English proficient when they enter the school; however, the school embraces linguistic diversity, acknowledges differences and promotes respect.

4.5 SELECTION OF THE FAMILIES AND TEACHER-FACILITATORS

Seven families from Rising Rainbow participated in the implementation of the Wordworks Home-School Partnership programme. The sampling procedure followed was purposeful sampling. Babbie (2008:179) describes purposeful sampling as "a type of non-probability sampling in which the units to be observed are selected on the basis of the researcher's judgment about which ones will be most useful or representative". According to Lodico *et al.* (2010:134) the goal of purposeful sampling is not to obtain a large and representative sample; the goal is to select persons, places or things that can provide the richest and most detailed information to help us answer our research question. The criteria for the selection of families for this study were two-fold: a) the family should have at least one child enrolled in Grade R; b) at least one parent should be available to attend all six sessions. No aspects of family demographics, for example, income level or home language, were chosen to target or exclude interested families. These criteria were later modified to include the participation of families with young children ranging from age three to age eight (pre-school through Grade 2) in order not to exclude any family which voluntarily accepted the invitation to participate.

The sampling took place as follows: The principal organised an information sharing session with all families with a child enrolled in Grade R. This session was attended by only 9 families. The principal and I explained the purpose of the study, the aim of the Wordworks Home-School Partnerships programme and the overall content and structure. I explained that the participation was voluntary, the identity of families would be protected by the use of pseudonyms and that they were free to withdraw from the programme at any time.

The literature review (cf. 2.7) had prepared me that recruiting families for a family literacy programme is never an easy process. This was indeed the case and adjustments had to be made to my initial sampling strategy. Decisions were made on my expectation that there would be

many revisions, changes and adaptations of the original plan. This expectation was consistent with Anderson *et al*'s (2007:146) description of action research as "typically, we do not get a plan absolutely right, and in fact, as we implement a plan, the very implementation raises new issues or things we hadn't expected or anticipated". Because action research is fluid and flexible, (Lodico *et al*. 2010:321), I had to be open to these changes. Initially, eight families volunteered to participate. This included three families with a child in Grade 1 who were keen to participate and were duly welcomed into the programme. One family withdrew after the first session. I regarded the number of participants (8 families; later 7 families) as ideal: a small enough group to allow all participants to receive attention from the facilitators and to contribute to the discussions during the sessions. The number of children (n=9) was also considered ideal for the activities planned for the children's component of the programme. Each family who volunteered to participate in the study was requested to give written consent and an assent letter for each child which was to be completed by the parents on behalf of the child (see Appendix C). Interested families were given the letters of consent and assent to take home and to consider and then return to the school if they wished to participate. In this way families were not placed under any duress to accept the invitation to participate in the programme.

The difficulties experienced in sampling concurred with the findings of the literature study regarding recruitment of families for family literacy (cf. 2.7). As DeBruin-Parecki (2009:388) points out, it is not that families do not want to attend and learn how to help their children become more academically successful in the future, but time constraints, fear, financial constraints, language and cultural issues, lack of understanding of the purpose of such programmes and lack of awareness of programmes as such militate against participation. The characteristics of the families are presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Characteristics of family participants

Family (pseudonyms)	Age bracket	Home Language	Parental occupation	Number of children	Participating child(ren)
Thabo Sithole Ntombi Sithole	30-35	siSwati/English	Engineer Lab technician	2	Boipelo (5 years)
Bernard Belanger Faye Belanger	30-35	French/English	Telecom & network services engineer Stay at home mom	3	Elsa (5 years) Doris (3 years)
Abena Ekuoba	30-35	Twi/English	System Controller	1	Masego (7 years)
Sam Ndlovu Ruth Ndlovu	35-40	Sesotho/English	Payroll Administrators	3	Pansy (7 years)
Sally Sutherland	30-35	Afrikaans/English	Stay-at-home mom, helps her husband with the administration of his business	1	James (5 years)
Aamori Cloete	40-45	English	Analyst	1	Victor (7 years)
Sophia Dube	35-40	French/English	Self-employed: markets mining equipment	2	Declan (6 years) Robbert (8 years)
Gontsi Ndlebe *	35-40	Sesotho/English	Sales manager	2	Ellen (7 years)

* Gontsi dropped out after the first session

Table 4.1 indicates only one family indicated English as their home language; the remaining six families were bilingual. Children's age ranged from three to eight years. A full description of the families in given in Chapter 5, section 5.2.

4.5.1   Selection of the teacher-facilitators

As facilitation of the programme was seen as a valuable professional development activity all seven teachers (inclusive of the principal) employed in the school were invited to participate as possible facilitators of the Wordworks Home-School Partnerships programme. I regarded the teachers as appropriate facilitators of the programme, since they were all well qualified, knowledgeable about language and literacy development and acquainted with the families and the children in their classes.

The teachers and I met after school one afternoon for an orientation session where I first explained the background and context of my research and reviewed the content, format and structure of the six sessions of the programme, including the children's literacy sessions. I discussed all the teaching materials required for implementation and made these available to the teachers. Due to constraints exercised by teachers' time and personal circumstances, the principal and five teachers accepted the invitation to participate as facilitators of the programme (N=6). All gave written consent for participation (See annexure B). During implementation, the principal facilitated most parent sessions and the teachers took turns in co-facilitating the parent sessions and the children's group sessions.

The characteristics of participating teachers is presented in Table 4.3

Table 4.3 Characteristics of participating teachers

Teacher	Age bracket	Gender	Highest qualification	Position in school	Years of teaching experience
Lesley Cooper	60-65	Female	PTD & HEd	Principal	40
Lucia Delport	60-65	Female	B.Ed	Teacher	40
Melissa Summers	20-25	Female	B.Ed	Teacher	1
Rowena Abrahams	20-25	Female	B.ED	Teacher	1
Charné Pretorius	20-25	Female	B.Ed	Teacher	1
Louise Lovemore *	35-40	Female	-	Teacher	10

* Only co-facilitated session one for the children due to her relocation to another school.

Table 4.2 indicates that all teachers were women; two teachers including the principal were over 60 years with 40 years teaching experience. Three teachers had only one year teaching experience. One had ten years' experience but only facilitator the first children's session due to relocation. All teachers held suitable higher education qualifications.

4.6   DATA COLLECTION

Multiple methods of data collection were used to gather data during the implementation of the programme. In this section I firstly summarise the process of multiple data collection and list the multiple techniques of data gathering. Thereafter, I discuss each data collection technique in greater detail.

4.6.1   Process of multiple data collection

The Wordworks Home-School Partnerships programme for parents and children was implemented during the second term of 2015 (April to June). The six weekly sessions were held at the school, and the principal and I were responsible for the overall supervision of the implementation. The participating families, teacher-facilitators and children met on six consecutive Wednesday evenings from 18h00 to 20h30. All sessions had focussed time for parents and focussed time for children (cf. 4.3.4 above).

I collected data from the families in the following ways:

- Audio-recordings of the six parent training sessions facilitated by the teacher-facilitators. Verbatim transcripts were made of recorded sessions.
- Audio-recording of parent feedback discussion held before and after each weekly session. Verbatim transcripts were made of recorded discussions.
- A parent journal supplied to each family with the request that they would make weekly entries for the duration of the programme (see appendix I). I also kept a researcher journal for the duration of the study.
- A semi-structured interview based on a flexible interview guide (see appendix F) was conducted with each family at the completion of the programme. The interviews took about 45 minutes to complete, were conducted at the school and were recorded on a digital recorder. Verbatim transcriptions were made of the recorded interviews.

I collected data from the teacher-facilitators as follows:

- Field notes made during the orientation and training session for teacher-facilitators.
- Audio-recording of feedback discussion with teacher-facilitators held after each weekly session (see appendix G). Verbatim transcriptions were made of the recorded discussions.
- Final feedback interview with the principal five months after the conclusion of the programme. Field notes were made.

I collected data from the children as follows:

- Observation of the children's sessions based on a flexible observation guide (see appendix H) and descriptive field notes.
- Audio-recordings of the six children's sessions. Verbatim transcriptions were made of the recorded sessions.
- Artefacts produced by the children during the children's sessions and at-home literacy activities, such as drawings and evidence of emergent writing.

4.6.2   Researcher status and role as observer-participant

Herr and Anderson (2005:30) caution that the researcher should clearly articulate his/her role during action research. This requires not only reflecting on the research question at hand but also reflecting deeply about how one's role and positionality becomes a lens through which reality is viewed. In terms of this research I occupied several social roles: mother of three children, former primary school teacher, a theoretically informed postgraduate researcher and a provider of professional development for teachers for the third largest teacher union in South Africa. These diverse roles all uniquely positioned me to lead a fruitful action research study on family literacy. As a parent and former teacher I had first-hand experience of the importance of children's literacy from the dual perspective of the home and the school; as a theoretically informed researcher I enjoyed the insights derived from a thorough literature study on the topic of family literacy in general, and in South Africa in particular; and as a provider of professional teacher development I have acquired the knowledge and skills of both a facilitator and coordinator of training programmes.

My position during the implementation of the Wordworks Home-school Partnerships programme was that of observer-participant. McMillan and Schumacher (2010:415) describe the role of observer-participant as one in which the researcher creates the role for the sole purpose of data collection during a study. Thus, with the permission of the school and participants, I positioned myself as an "outsider-within", to use the term proposed by Anderson *et al*. (2007:11), to describe outsiders who collect data within the community. This position provided me the opportunity to become an expert observer of the participants during the implementation of the programme. The dual role of observer and participant allowed me to be facilitator and collaborator in the programme, as well as observer (Herr & Anderson 2005:32).

Considering that "participant behaviour is data and occurs all the time right in front of you" during research (Klein 2012:49), observation was an important technique in this study to collect data. As outsider, observation was influenced by my stance as privileged active observer. Although I was visible and known to all the participants, I tried to be as unobtrusive as possible. During the weekly sessions, I functioned as a facilitator's aide, moving in and out of the role of facilitator and observer.

Observation during the group sessions became very complex as the parents and the children sessions were held at the same time, but in two different rooms. I constantly moved between the two rooms where the sessions were held; thus, I could not rely only on my observations made on the observation schedule and my field notes. To ensure that I did not miss data I recorded both the parent and the children's sessions in full using a digital audio-recorder. To collect rich data on the children's group sessions, I requested the teacher-facilitator responsible for the children's sessions also to make notes on the observation schedule (Appendix H). I regarded the teacher-facilitator as qualified to make useful observations. Phillips and Carr (2010:72) maintain that teachers are 'naturals' at the art of observation since "deliberate data collection is the extended eyes, ears and soul of the teacher."

Once the decision was made on what should be observed, I had to keep in mind that the essential purpose of observation is not only to watch human behaviours and actions, but to also derive meaning from these experiences. I had to be aware that observation was complicated by many factors and by relationships between participants, myself as observer and the environment. I had to heed Klein's (2012:56) caution that the researcher observes unintended nuances and surprises and that it is normal and natural for a researcher to go into an observation

looking for one thing but discovering another. Further, I also had to consider Klein's concern (2012:49-50) that "complexities and nuances must be carefully considered when drawing conclusions". This was important, since I also relied heavily on audio-recordings of sessions and I had to keep in mind that I might have missed nonverbal cues, such as facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice and body movements. Koshy (2005:98) cautions against the distortion of interpretations by introducing what one wishes to see into the data gathered, another aspect I had to constantly review. I addressed this issue by reflecting on my experiences as observer-participant in the days between sessions and making reflective notes in my own journal.

4.6.3   Family journals

Data was collected via the family journals which each family kept for the duration of the programme. At the commencement of the programme each family was given a home-activity pack, which also included a journal so that families could record what they did with their children as well as their observations and experiences whilst engaging in at-home literacy activities. During each session I provided writing prompts (see appendix I) for journal keeping, and families who had access to computers and preferred to keep an electronic diary, were encouraged to do so. The journal encouraged parental involvement and facilitated ongoing communication with parents by providing feedback to me and the co-facilitators on the value of the at-home literacy activities. The use of journals probed the changing beliefs and thoughts of the participants as well as documenting the use and strengths of strategies and activities employed in the sessions. The journals also gave parents the opportunity to record their observations of the children during at-home literacy activities.

4.6.4   Researcher journal

An important source of data was my own research journal in which I recorded notes of what happened during and after each session, of why and where new ideas evolved and of the research process itself. Thus my journal provided a source of field notes made on the spot and of reflective notes made in the days between sessions when I had distantiated myself somewhat from the research process. The reflective process involved in journaling contributed to my own professional development by providing me an opportunity to actively engage in the experience, and served as a way to document transformation in thought and growth in understanding, as well as capture on paper emerging concepts and themes. Although I used a free writing style

I tried to be reflective and analytical and link impressions and experiences to the theoretical data collected by my literature review (chapters 2 and 3). My reflective journal also served as a source of verification for authenticity of the data, thus helping to ensure trustworthiness and reliability of the study. One disadvantage of the field notes was that I had to caution against personalising incidents, as Koshy (2005:98) warned that it may lead to subjectivity.

4.6.5 Semi-structured interviews

Interviewing comprised an important data gathering technique in this study. According to Klein (2012:21) interviews are particularly suited for studying people's understanding of the meanings in their lived world, describing their experiences and self-understanding, and clarifying and elaborating their own perspectives on their lived world.

To this end I conducted a semi-structured interview with each family who participated in the study using a flexible interview schedule (cf. Appendix F). The goal of the semi-structured interviews with the families was to obtain understanding of parents' perceptions of their child's early literacy skills, on current family practices related to literacy experiences in the home as well as their experience of the implementation and impact of the Wordworks Home-School Partnerships programme. Of particular importance were the insights gained around parent participants' reports of their children's literacy development. According to Boudreau (2005:33) descriptive parent reports of their children provide access to parents' extensive knowledge about their children across time and contexts and provide information about behavioural skills that may be difficult for the researcher to observe. Parent reports are based on the parent's greater knowledge of a child and may be more representative of a child's ability.

During my planning phase I intended to conduct the interviews with the families prior to implementation of the programme. Due to parents' tight schedules I could not do this. Instead, the interviews were done after completion of the programme; however, this had the advantage of allowing me to ask questions about the parents' specific experience of the programme. Before I started with each interview I explained again the purpose of the study, confidentiality and how the results would be used to enhance literacy development. To guide the collection of data in a systematic and focused manner during the interviews, I drew up an interview guide that included a list of possible questions to be addressed in the interviews with all the participant families. However, I regarded the interview guide as extremely flexible. This allowed me to

change the order of the questions, omit questions or vary the wording of the questions depending on what happened in the interview. It also allowed me to add other questions during the interview to probe unexpected issues that emerged. Questions examined parent report of their own behaviours, or what they do that facilitates early literacy development as well as the motivation and experience of the family literacy programme. I avoided asking leading questions and took care not to convey my own opinions during the interview.

All interviews took place at a venue indicated by the parents (most families were interviewed at home), were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim by myself using a word processor programme. The recordings also made it possible for me to give my full attention to the context of the interview (Koshy 2005:92). After transcription copies of the transcripts were shared with the participants so that they could review what was said or to clarify information.

4.6.6   Feedback discussions

Data was also collected during feedback discussions with teacher-facilitators and with parents at each session with a view to using the data collected for immediate and future improvement of the Wordworks Home-School Partnerships programme.

This endeavour to obtain continuous feedback during the research is characteristic of an action research approach. Action research is about change, is an ongoing process and in the words of Atkins and Wallace (2012:133) "messy". By "messy" they meant that the process of reflection, planning, acting, observing and reflecting may at times become a little confused or messy as the researcher explores different aspects of the same problem. In this study enormous amounts of data were collected in the feedback sessions and I had to make decisions about how to reduce the data and use it to make decisions about easily implementable improvements to the programme. Further, Atkins and Wallace (2012:134) caution against setting a rigid number of feedback cycles during a project as this reduces action research to the procedural. Anderson *et al*. (2007:146) and Kemmis *et al*. (2014:113) also stress that following a set sequence of feedback is not required. What is important, however, is the systematic focus on an issue, with critical self-reflection, and the inclusion of multiple perspectives that can deepen the researcher's understanding of the issue being studied. In this study, the number, length and sequence of feedback sessions was guided by the six session structure of the programme and

the time that participants were able to devote to this process as dictated by their personal schedules. This process is described in the ensuing paragraphs.

4.6.6.1 Feedback discussions: parents

Participant reflection and feedback is an important part of the Wordworks Home-school Partnerships programme and this element is built into the design of the programme (Comrie 2012). Accordingly, in this study, a feedback session for the parents was held at the beginning and at the end of each weekly session.

Immediately before each new training session time was dedicated for group feedback and reflection. Parents were asked to talk about the opportunities they had created for their children to engage in at-home literacy activities during the preceding week, such as book time, shared reading, drawing, emergent writing or simply good talking time. They were asked to give feedback about the usefulness of the at-home literacy activities provided and to reflect on any changes in their routines at home as a result of participation in the programme. The parents were also invited to freely share anything that was of particular interest or significance to them. I recorded this discussion and made notes of the feedback with a view to discussion with the teacher-facilitators. Further the teacher-facilitators were able to make immediate use of the parents' feedback and deal with points raised or refer to anecdotes in the ensuing session. Similarly, at the end of each session time was given for discussion. Parents had an opportunity to reflect on content and the activities of that particular session and how that would help them to support learning at home during the week to follow. This discussion was also recorded by audio-recorder and by notes. Both the teacher-facilitators and I endeavoured to make use of this feedback in the ensuing sessions.

4.6.6.2 Feedback discussions: Teacher-facilitators

Feedback from teacher-facilitators was also an important component of the programme. In this regard I collected additional data from the teacher-facilitators after each session after the parents had left. The teacher-facilitators and I reflected on the session which had just been held, shared our observations and commented on other data that was gathered. Decisions on appropriate future action and the planning of the next session were also made at these meetings. I also recorded the feedback discussions and transcribed the recordings verbatim.

4.6.7 Documents and artefacts

Data was also collected from documents and artefacts generated by parents and children participants during the implementation of the programme. These included items produced by the participants during the activities in the sessions or at home. At home documents and artefacts included the parents' journals, the children's drawings and artefacts included in the home-resource packs (e.g. the book Masego wrote and the birthday cards the children had made), as well as photographs of children's work, which I took during the children's group sessions. This data provided very useful information on the children's existing knowledge of literacy, and on newly acquired literacy skills, as well as on parents' experiences while engaging in literacy practices at home. I supported other forms of evidence collected (Koshy 2005:96). Documents and artefacts were very illuminating in capturing an on-going record of changes and progress over the six weeks of the programme. The documents were also useful in proving evidence of skills not easily communicated. Photographs of children's work captured the rich detail present during the children's sessions.

4.7 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis and interpretation were, as Lodico *et al.* (2010:165) suggested, continuous throughout the study, so that insights gained in initial data analysis could guide future data collection.

To me as an action researcher the challenge was to create a coherent story from all the data collected. As the research design was qualitative, the presentation of evidence mainly took the form of descriptions. Rather than looking to generalise findings based on a study of large number of cases, I followed Koshy's advice (2005:109) by "carefully looking at the descriptions, narratives and situations, analysed and interpreted the data and tried to recognise possible biases."

The multiple methods of data collection used in this study generated an enormous amount of data. Transcripts of interviews (individual and feedback discussions which formed part of each session), family journals, my own journal and field notes and observation schedules, documents and artefacts formed the raw data. Data analysis loosely followed Creswell's (2009:148) three-stage data analysis process:

a)   Preparation and organisation of data for analysis;

b)   Reducing data by means of codes and grouping related coded data into categories and themes; and finally,

c)   Presenting data in the form of a narrative discussion substantiated by rich data.

My first task was to organise the data gathered after each weekly session. This meant that I had to maintain a punishing schedule of transcribing recordings, collating field note and writing summaries of each session, which noted the most important events and key recommendations after every session. This, however, enabled me to reduce the data into more manageable chunks assembled around a weekly session. Thereafter, verbatim transcriptions were read several times to make sense of what the participants were saying about home literacy environments and children's emergent literacy skills and behaviours. As I read each transcript I broke it down to find meaning, identified possible codes and marked transcripts accordingly using different colours. Finally, I grouped coded data into broad categories and themes accompanied by memos which incorporated interpretation and theoretical reflection. While analysing the data, it was important that I revisited the aims and expectations of the research to view the data in the light of the original expected outcomes. I also had to look out for unexpected outcomes which may be of significance, and report on them too. The analysis of the data was continual and ongoing and, in the spirit of action research, the gathered data and analysis informed each other as the analysis guided the next steps of my data gathering and action (Anderson *et al*. 2007:212). As my focus was on addressing the research questions of the study, ongoing reflection was essential. I followed the advice of Anderson *et al*. (2007:212) and stopped periodically to see if anything needed changing in the inquiry process so that there were no gaps in the data. In addition I took the advice of Anderson *et al*. (2007:215) to follow my hunches and intuition, as "these are very important and usually extremely significant in the process of analysis and should not be ignored."

During this process I also consulted regularly with my supervisor with regard to the interpretation and the arrangement of the data into a narrative whole. My final decision was to arrange the data in the form of three distinct narrative discussions substantiated by verbatim quotations from the interviews or journals, and enriched by artefacts. Firstly I wrote the 'story' of each family; thereafter I wrote a narrative account of each session of the programme including the impact of feedback on subsequent sessions; finally, I presented a discussion of

the main interpretative themes emerging from the research. The findings are presented as rich, descriptive data in Chapter 5.

4.8   ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The following ethical principles were upheld throughout the study:

4.8.1   Voluntary participation

Voluntary participation (Lodico *et al*. 2010:207; Anderson *et al*. 2007:142) is a basic ethical rule. All adult participants volunteered for the study and children gave assent. All participants were informed that they could withdraw from participation at any time without any penalty.

4.8.2   Written and informed consent

To embark on the study I obtained written permission from the Ethics Committee of the College of Education, Unisa, the principal and the governing body of the school (cf. Appendices E, A).

Thereafter, all adult participants (parents and teachers) were asked to sign a consent form which outlined their right to privacy or to withdraw. This document also described the purpose, planned process of the study as well as the consequences (cf. Appendices B and C). After discussing the covering letter at the information session, the consent forms were sent home to the parents to sign, to confirm that they understood its contents. This was done so that they would not feel coerced into participating. This process made the consent as informed as possible and demonstrated my respect for every individual's autonomy. Participants were enabled to make a more objective personal decision about the implications of participating and also, in some cases, about withdrawing from the study if they come to feel that they no longer wish to participate.

I also obtained permission from the participating children via a letter of assent completed and signed by parents on behalf of the children (Appendix C). As the children are not yet able to read and write, a very simple letter of assent was drawn up, explaining in pictures the activities that they would engage in.

4.8.3   Anonymity and confidentiality

Anonymity and confidentiality are two important ethical issues. All participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality of all data collected. All guarantees of privacy, confidentiality and anonymity were honoured. I used pseudonyms to protect the identity of the school and the participating teachers, parents and children.

4.8.4   Avoidance of deception

One way to avoid deception is through the researcher's choice of degree of participation. I chose to be an observer-participant and in order to avoid deception I communicated what this role would entail beforehand to all the participants. Another form of dishonesty would be to falsify the data. All data gathered (e.g. transcriptions of audio-recordings) were verified by the participants. Maintaining good field relations also established trust and credibility. Sensitivity, honest communication and non-judgemental interactions were a necessary part of good field relations.

4.8.5   Accuracy

I had to ensure that the data collected is accurate and to guard against fabrications, fraudulent materials, omissions and contrivances as these are both non-scientific and unethical (Denzin & Lincoln 2008:194). After transcribing the interviews I made copies and sent them to the participants requesting them to check my transcripts to make sure that they contain what they said and meant. During the interviews participants were asked to repeat or were probed to give more clarification in some cases to make sure that we are on the same page.

4.8.6   Competence of the researcher

Lodico *et al.* (2010:115) cautions that selecting a role as an observer may influence how the participants behave, respond and react. As a qualitative researcher it was important to recognise the influence this might have on the reality of the phenomena being investigated. Choosing to be a participant-observer allowed me to observe participants' activities as unobtrusively as possible and minimise the number of interactions with them, while maintaining a visible presence in the setting (Lodico *et al.* 2010:115). This degree of participation allowed for

interactions with participants, although in a more formal and structured manner, for example through interviews or very brief informal interactions. Although having had a connection with the group, I did not participate in the group's activities as a facilitator of the training sessions.

4.9   TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE DATA

According to Newton and Burgess (2008:22) many researchers have rejected validity as a useful concept within qualitative approaches. Feldman (2007:22) is critical of the many qualitative researchers that have attempted to seek alternatives to the use of validity as an indicator of the quality of their work. Feldman's concern (2007:22) with alternative conceptualisations of validity such as credibility, persuasiveness, verisimilitude and others, is that it tends to focus on the quality of the report rather than the quality of the research. With this criticism in mind, I agreed with Heikkinen, Huttunen and Syrjälä's claim (2007:7) that it was important to arrive at some measure of "goodness" of the research.

4.9.1   Validity

Validity is one of the strengths of qualitative research, and it is based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the viewpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account (Creswell 2009:190). As validity refers to "the reasons for believing truth claims" (Moghaddam 2007:236; McMillan & Schumacher 2010:485), I had to ensure sound and robust data collection and consensus of accurate interpretations (Koshy 2005:143).

4.9.1.1   Triangulation

Koshy cautions that interpretations can be very personal in nature and achieving consensus may not always be possible within action research. Qualitative inquirers triangulate among different data sources to enhance the accuracy of a study (Koshy 2005:143; Creswell 2009:190). Triangulate means identifying different data sources of information and then examining evidence from these sources and using it to build a coherent justification for themes (Creswell 2009:190; Kemmis *et al.* 2014:70; Anderson *et al.* 2007:36). If themes are established based on converging several sources of data or perspectives from participants, then this process can be claimed to add to the validity of the study. In this research triangulation was done to corroborate evidence from different individuals (parents and teachers), types of data

(observational field notes and transcriptions from both individual and group interviews), and methods of data collection (documents and interviews). I used these different methods to enlarge the scope of my research and also to help me to find supportive information.

4.9.1.2   Democratic validity

To ensure democratic validity I had to consider the extent to which the research was done in collaboration with all parties who had a stake in the problem under investigation (Anderson *et al*. 2007:41; McMillan & Schumacher 2010:485; Anderson *et al.* 2007:41). Multiple perspectives and material interests had to be taken into account to ensure that the research team focusses on the interests of other stakeholders as well as finding solutions that benefit all.

I employed member checking as I brought data analysis, interpretations and conclusions back to the teachers and parents for verification and input during the focus group meetings and the final feedback interview. Participants were asked for clarification of their ideas, and verification that their thoughts had been captured correctly. I also shared the draft of the end product for approval that it accurately reflected the thinking and intention of the group.

4.9.1.3   Outcome validity

One test of the validity or trustworthiness of the research is to examine the extent to which actions had led to a resolution of the problem, or to a deeper understanding of the problem and how to go about resolving it in the future (Anderson *et al*. 2007:40,149; McMillan & Schumacher 2010:485; Anderson *et al.* 2007:40). Outcome validity is synonymous with the successful outcome of the research project. This, of course, begs the question: successful for whom? I kept this question in mind during data collection and analysis. Outcome validity was enhanced by problem solving that took place in the context of the site and was solved and understood within those parameters, possibilities and limitations.

4.9.1.4   Process validity

Process validity refers to the extent that the research process is adequate; it refers to the methodological adaptations that were utilized to fit the realities of the setting. Anderson *et al*. (2007:41,150; McMillan & Schumacher 2010:485; Anderson *et al.* 2007:41) reminded that

outcome validity is dependent on process validity in that, if the process is superficial or flawed, the outcome will reflect it. I ensured process validity by having carefully spelt out how the methodology was carried out and how it was developed and adapted over time.

4.9.1.5   Catalytic validity

Catalytic validity relates to the depth of the process. According to Anderson *et al*. (2007:42,151; McMillan & Schumacher 2010:485; Anderson *et al*. 2007:42) it also refers to the ability of the research process to transform the participants, deepen the understanding of the participants, and motivate participants to further social action. This is indeed one of the aims of the research study. Throughout the collection of data I tried to find evidence of how the action had stimulated participants and enhanced the home literacy practices of the participating families. In the case of action research, not only the participants, but also the action researchers themselves must be open to reorienting their view of reality as well as their view of their practitioner roles. All involved in the research should deepen their understanding of the social reality under study and should be moved to some action to change it. Keeping a research journal in which the participants and I could monitor our own change processes and consequent changes in the dynamics of the setting reinforced catalytic validity.

4.9.1.6   Dialogic validity

In qualitative research the "goodness" of the research can also be monitored through a form of peer review. Bias and subjectivity are a part of action research. The key is that these experiences and beliefs need to be critically examined rather than ignored. Research reports must pass through the process of review by other researchers in order to be disseminated through academic journals (Anderson *et al*. 2007:43,150; McMillan & Schumacher 2010:485). Mechanisms had to be put in place to ensure that they do not have a distorting effect on the outcomes. In order to promote both democratic and dialogic validity some have insisted that practitioner action research should only be done as collaborative inquiry. Others simply suggest that action researchers should participate in critical and reflective dialogue with other action researchers. To enhance critical and reflective dialogue I asked the writers of the Wordworks Home-School Partnership programme to critically read my work and to offer explanations and analysis of the data. By doing so they provided some perspective and freedom from any bias or assumptions on my part (Anderson *et al*. 2007:43,151).

4.9.2.   Reliability

Lewis (2009:8) explains that reliability is synonymous with consistency or dependability. This means that research findings can be replicated by another researcher. He further states that a qualitative researcher can enhance reliability by ensuring research worker reliability, and the use of various means of data collection. As mentioned earlier various data collection methods were used in this study to ensure reliability. I checked transcripts to make sure that they do not contain obvious mistakes made during transcription, by re-reading them quite a number of times. I also provided a reliable detailed description of the participants, the school and the programme. Although qualitative researchers do not expect their findings to be generalisable to all other settings, it is likely that the lessons learned in one setting might be useful to others. In an effort to ensure transferability it was important to scrutinise data collection methods and data analysis for validity. If claims and findings are to be trusted and put to use in larger contexts I had to ensure that there is a reason for other teachers, students, policy-makers and parents to believe and trust this knowledge.

4.9.3   Limitations of the study

Some of the criticism made by many against action research is that action research is a "soft" option in which the practitioner researcher works with a small number of people and that the research is therefore not proper research. (Lodico *et al*. 2010:164). The relatively limited sampling in qualitative research is based on saturation rather than representation. The purpose of action research is never to generalise, but rather "to transfer from a sending context to a receiving context" (Anderson *et al.* 2007:44). The findings, it is hoped, will illuminate similar situations in other schools and provide other researchers with a starting point from which to embark on similar programmes (Atkins & Wallace 2012:112).

4.10   CONCLUSION

This chapter provided an account of the research design of the study and how an action research design using qualitative methods of data gathering were used during the implementation of a family literacy programme. Action research as method gave the benefits that it allowed active engagements of the participants, that it would empower the participants, that it would give them a "voice" and bring about a positive change for themselves and their community. To avoid all

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the critique against action research I had to put in place the maximum guidelines and safeguards to be sure that the study is of the highest standard.

This is, I trust, reflected in the data presented in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

5.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the findings of the study which investigated the implementation of a selected family literacy programme using an action research approach and qualitative methods of data gathering. The findings have been organised as follows: Firstly, an individual profile of each of the participating families is presented. The following section describes the six sessions together with a discussion of the reflective feedback component. These findings are interpreted in the light of existing theories and the literature findings as described in Chapters 2 and 3. Thereafter, key themes emerging from the findings are highlighted. In conclusion, the chapter provides a review of the aspects of the programme that worked well and the aspects that did not work as effectively with a view to the further improvement of implementation of the family literacy programme.

5.2   THE PARTICIPATING FAMILIES

An information session to orientate the participants to the Wordworks Home-School Partnerships programme was held the week before the programme was scheduled to start. Nine families attended the orientation session. The six-session programme for parents and children commenced early in the second term (April/May) of the school year (2015) (cf. 4.3.2; 4.6.1). Eight of the nine families accepted the invitation to participate and attended the first session. One family dropped out after the first session. The remaining seven families attended all six sessions (cf. Table 4.2). This includes the nine children who participated in the children's sessions.

5.2.1   The Bélanger family

Bernard and Faye Bélanger are both from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). They immigrated to South Africa twelve years ago amid civil unrest in the DRC, during which Faye nearly lost her life. Faye has an 18 year old son from a previous relationship and together the couple have two little daughters, Elsa (5 years) and Doris (3 years). Bernard is a

telecommunications and networking services engineer, while Faye is a stay-at-home mom. The Bélangers live in a small duet house in a security village in the eastern suburbs of Pretoria. Their home language is French and especially Faye struggles to express herself in English. From time to time Faye helps out at Rainbow Rising School as a volunteer. Initially Faye and the two girls attended the first session of the Wordworks Home-School Partnerships programme alone. Faye then persuaded Bernard to attend the remaining five sessions with her and the children. This was very positive, as Morgan *et al*. (2009:168) indicates that children whose fathers are involved in their literacy learning benefit significantly and demonstrate higher academic achievement and social and emotional well-being

Motivation to join the programme: Faye explained that she had decided to participate because she felt she needed to know how to help her children at home with their homework. In Faye's own words:

> *"Not always come and be an African family but also know your child. Not all the time, like, to tell your child what to do, but to also have time with your child. The things I never been taught. I don't want my children to be like me. I decided I need to learn. I need to see what is going to happen. How this course is gonna go."*

This comment of Faye indicated to me how deeply rooted social cultural influences are in terms of parental involvement of literacy learning at home. Faye was deeply, even painfully aware of the limitations of her own upbringing in terms of literacy learning in her cultural context (cf. 2.7.3; 2.7.8). Bernard also recalled the lack of parental support with homework as a child.

> *My father used to work also for the government in the Congo, and he was all the time travelling. And like, you still…the only thing is, that when you go to school, you think you have someone to help you with your homework, but you don't have time with your parent. And the homework, you don't do with your parent. You do it alone or with someone. The parents pay for someone to help you.*

Thus both parents wished to break the negative cycle that they had experienced in their families of origin and provide support to their own children. This comment shared the sentiment that parents, often due to work demands, struggle to find time to spend with their children and to assist them with homework.

5.2.2   The Sithole family

In the case of the Sithole family the father, Thabo, attended most sessions of the Wordworks Home-School Partnerships programme alone; his wife, Ntombi, only attended two sessions when he was unable to attend. Thabo works for an engineering and IT company and travels often. Ntombi also works full-time. The Sitholes have two children, a daughter, Ella (11 years) and Boipelo (5 years). Boipelo attended the programme for children. The Sitholes' home language siSwati.

Motivation to join the programme: Thabo decided to join the programme as Boipelo has a long history of developmental and behavioural problems. Thabo explained: *"We were always aware that we need to put in an extra effort. So the programme was in actual fact an answer to our prayers."* Thabo and Ntombi took Boipelo out of his first pre-school because he was biting children; the second pre-school he attended complained about Boipelo's "*violent*" behaviour. Thabo and Ntombi also noticed that Boipelo's speech was significantly delayed and he was eventually diagnosed with low-spectrum autism. They enrolled Boipelo in a special school for learners with autism, but after a year decided to take him out as they reasoned that he could benefit more in a mainstream environment where he is exposed to other children who can speak. At the time of the study Boipelo had been enrolled in Rising Rainbow School since the beginning of 2015.

5.2.3   The Dube family

Sophia Dube, together with her two sons, Declan (6 years) and Robbert (8 years) attended the Wordworks Home-School Partnerships programme. Sophia was born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and immigrated to South Africa twelve years ago. Her husband, who is also Congolese, still works in the DRC and visits the family only once a year. Sophia's home language is French; the youngest boy, Declan, cannot understand or speak French; and Robbert understands French but is unable to speak it. The language spoken at home is thus a

mix of English and French. Sophia works for a company that imports mining equipment, and earns a comfortable income. As Sophia's office is in Johannesburg she commutes between Pretoria and Johannesburg (±50 km) every day. During the interview Sophia confessed that, as a result of her rigorous work routine, she is exhausted and has little time to make input into the children's education. She said, *"I was like tired. When I am tired, get them from school, get here, warm the food, eat, I bath them and then I am in my bedroom because I know their homework is already done."* This is the boys' second year in Rising Rainbow School.

Motivation to join the programme: Sophia motivated her decision to join the programme as follows: *"I wanted to learn about how to take care of my kids, especially concerning the school stuff. I didn't know how to handle all those stuff and whatever. I didn't know anything. I even send them to aftercare because I couldn't handle anything."* Declan, who is not French proficient, is currently undergoing speech therapy. According to Sophia *"I joined because it was to see how you are going to help me deal with the kids. Because I wasn't patient. I was beating him* [Declan]. *You know, all the time I am nervous."* Clearly, the dual demands of career and childcare was too much for Sophia to cope with and was seriously impacting on her relationship with her children (cf. 2.7.5). I admired her dedication to make time in an already demanding schedule to attend the programme in the interests of her children.

5.2.4   The Sutherland family

Sally Sutherland and her only son, James (5 years) attended the Wordworks Home-School Partnerships programme. Her husband has a 14 year old son from a previous marriage, who visits the family every alternate weekend. The Sutherlands live in a high security village in an upmarket suburb. They run their own business from their home and Sally assists her husband with the administration of the business. Sally is very shy and self-conscious. James was also very unsure of himself and very dependent on his mother. Both Sally and her husband are Afrikaans-speaking, but they only speak English to James. The decision to raise James as English-speaking was not deliberate. According to Sally, *"When James started speaking, he was a bit slow in picking up the words. He didn't seem to pick up the Afrikaans words. We tried English and he started picking up words. He started speaking."*

Motivation to join the programme: Sally joined the programme because she was just interested to know what it was about.

5.2.5 The Ekuoba family

Abena Ekuoba and her daughter, Masego (7 years) attended the Wordworks Home-School Partnerships programme. Although Abena's family is originally from Ghana she was born in Bucharest, Romania, and was about four years old when her parents relocated back to Ghana. Abena's family immigrated to South Africa twenty years ago. Abena lives with her partner, who has a 19 year old daughter. Masego is the couple's only child. Abena's mother tongue is Twi, a dialect of Akan, a member of the Kwa sub-group of Niger-Congo languages. The family speak English at home. Abena is a systems unit manager and earns a comfortable salary.

Motivation to join the programme: Abena joined the programme so she would be able to better assist Masego with her schoolwork. Abena's comment reflects the sentiment of many parents that want to be involved in their children's schoolwork, but need guidance (cf. 2.7.2).

5.2.6 The Cloete family

Aamori Cloete attended the Wordworks Home-School Partnerships programme without her husband, Albert. However, Albert joined the interview that was held at the families' home in order to make appreciative input on how his family benefited from the programme. Albert has two older adult daughters from his first marriage. The couple's only son, Victor (7 years old), participated in the children's sessions. The Cloetes live in a comfortable home in a pleasant, quiet suburb in the east of Pretoria. Both Aamori and Albert have professional jobs and earn comfortable salaries. Aamori has a condition of congenital deafness and wears a hearing aid. The Cloete's home language is English.

Motivation to join the programme: Aamori decided to join the programme because she was having difficulties in reading to Victor. She felt she was not being exciting enough and was not able to keep his attention. When she heard about the programme, she thought, *"It was a good opportunity to know something about reading."*

5.2.7   The Ndlovu family

Sam and Ruth Ndlovu attended the Wordworks Home-School Partnerships programme together. The Ndlovu's have three children: Pansy (7 years old in Grade 1), and two smaller boys, Moses (4 years) and Theo (18 months). The Ndlovu's live in a comfortable house in a quiet suburb in the east of Pretoria. Both Sam and Ruth have post-school qualifications and have good secure jobs which provide a comfortable income. The Ndlovu's home language is Sesotho and although the children respond when they are spoken to in Sesotho, they only speak English to their parents. Pansy attended the programme with her parents.

Motivation to join the programme: The Ndlovu's decided to join the programme because they had experienced great frustration in helping Pansy with her homework. According to Ruth: *"Some things that she came home with - I would ask questions and I was not getting it. And some things that I was doing, she was not understanding. But generally it was the frustration for both of us. She couldn't do certain things and I couldn't know how to teach her. And then we got frustrated, the both of us."* This comment of Ruth confirmed that parents need help in bridging the gap between literacy at home and formal schoolwork. Parents want to support their children's learning but are unsure of how to do it best (cf. 2.7.2). Problems with assisting children also lead to a breakdown in the parent-child relationship.

5.2.8   Discussion of the families' needs and motivation to participate

The participating parents' motivation to join the family literacy programme came as no surprise. Their diverse motivations simply reflect and confirm the findings of a large body of research (Lukk & Veisson 2007:55; Morrow & Young 1997:737) (cf. 2.7.2) which indicate that parents want to support their children's learning and schoolwork, but lack the confidence because they feel that they lack the necessary skills (Michael *et al*. 2012:71; Pross & Barry n.d:33-39; Jay & Rohl 2005:71) or do not have time to do so due to heavy work schedules (cf. 2.7.5). This sentiment was indeed shared by the Ndlovu, Dube, Sithole and Bélanger families. Similarly, as other studies have shown, these families welcomed the opportunity that the Wordworks Home-School Partnerships programme offered to help them better understand the curriculum (cf. 2.7.3) and their children's learning needs (Chance & Sheneman 2012:12; Swain *et al*. 2014:79; Learning literacy together 2009:9). No family expressed a particular need to improve literacy learning. Their comments reflected the frustration and anxiety

experienced by parents who are unsure how to support their children with schoolwork, deal with behavioural problems and meet emotional needs.

5.3   THE SIX SESSIONS OF THE WORDWORKS HOME-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAMME

5.3.1   Session 1: Parent group: Good talking time

This session covered module 1 of the Wordworks Home-School Partnership programme. Eight families attended session 1. Session 1 for parents was facilitated by Principal Lesley and Teacher Lucia. Both Lesley and Lucia are women aged over 60 with 40 years experience in the profession. Session 1 for the children was facilitated by Teacher Louise. I moved between the sessions as aide to the teacher-facilitators.

Principal Lesley asked the parents to introduce themselves and share their expectations of the programme. All parents expressed the desire to be able to better assist and support their children with schoolwork *"and strengthen school learning"*, as Thabo had so neatly summed it up (cf. also 2.7.2). This view was supported by Sam, who claimed *"I am not a teacher. I don't know where to start."* All the parents expressed some anxiety and frustration about having to deal with their children's homework. As all the parents beside one are not native English-speakers (cf. 3.4.1; also see table 4.2), and are raising their children as English-speaking, they expressed the need to better understand how the school introduces the alphabet and teaches reading.

This particular session focussed especially on what Epstein refers to as a Type 1 (parenting) type of involvement in her six type model of involvement (cf. 2.8.1.1). Principal Lesley asked the parents to share examples of good teaching moments they have had with their children. Many parents recounted a challenge that their children have been confronted with and how they had used that situation to build a sense of mastery and self-confidence in their children. Some parents were unsure if an informal learning experience was worthwhile. For example, Thabo was uncertain if his example of how he had shown and encouraged his son to use the water slide at uShaka Marine World, a marine fun park, counted as an authentic teaching-learning experience. Another issue that arose was that of corporal punishment, although it did

not form part of the formal content of session one. Gontsi, the mother who only attended one session of the programme, said:

> *I know nowadays they say it is bad to beat your child and whatever, but it really works for me. I find it quite normal. I cannot talk one thing twenty times. I have to use my hands and whatever that I have in front of me. And one of the sisters attended a session here, sometime last year. She said, "You know mommy, I don't know if you beat me, this is actually abuse." That was the worst thing that she said, because I had to hit her even harder. So I am not so sure whether like it practices, because most of us do, and when do you cross the line, because I still believe that sometimes you need to, because I am not taking stones, or whatever. This, as parents, how far can one go?*

Principal Lesley handled this unexpected turn of direction very well by responding:

> *Were you at our discipline workshop? Just remind me to give you the notes. Because I think… a hiding is the very end of a process. There is so much more that happens before a hiding, in training in obedience you need to respond rightly the first time to get the attitude right. That is a consequence that happens right at the end and it cannot be abuse. It's got to be a hiding … done in a certain way. It's not just hitting the child, only on the bottom, but you have to be very sure it is not in anger. So let's just talk about that.*

In her response, Principal Lesley referred to a prior parenting workshop organised by the school. These are held on a regular basis. Gontsi inquired: *"There is nothing wrong with hitting on the bottom?"* Principal Lesley continued to explain:

> *Only ever on the bottom. The seat of verdict, it is called.* [everybody laughs]. *I think I have to be very careful here, because legally you are not allowed to do that, OK, and there is a point in where you as a parent decide how you are going to manage discipline, and I think you have to be very careful of what you do, because there are many parents who are abusing children, and so you've got to make it very clear you choose to*

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follow the legal approach to discipline, because the Bible says: If you spare the rod, you spoil the child, but it's got to be right, as a process, not just 'Whack!, Whack!, because you haven't listened to me' and I think there is a learning process that has to happen."

This discussion concluded the introductory phase of the session.

Thereafter Teacher Lucia facilitated a discussion on how children learn best (cf. Comrie 2012:16): the value of open ended conversations (cf 2.2.3; 2.4.4; 2.4.6), copying and imitating (cf. 2.2.3), learning through play, movement and exploration, and through the use of the senses (cf. 2.2.1). Teacher Lucia used the wall-chart (cf. Comrie 2012:17) included in the Wordworks Home-School Partnerships Facilitator Guide to build a mind-map in order to give structure to the discussion. She also introduced the terms *guided apprenticeship* and *scaffolding* (cf. 2.2.3) which form part of the content in the Faciltator Guide (Comrie 2012:17), but she faltered at the term 'apprenticeship'. Her comment, "*I must admit, I don't really know what that means"* illustrated a lack of thorough preparation. Principal Lesley came to the rescue: "*It's like you take your child to a workshop and you stand there and you unscrew and you give him a screwdriver, so he is copying you. It's an apprenticeship where you learn by doing rather than by studying."*

Principal Lesley then sent for Boipelo who was in the children's session to build a puzzle with her. She used puzzle building to explain how to model and scaffold an activity by starting off with puzzles of 6 - 9 large pieces, simple pictures and few colours. Boipelo responded with shy enthusiasm and this was an opportunity to affirm the little boy as well as provide an example of an authentic learning experience for the watching parents. She explained that only thereafter should larger puzzles with smaller pieces, more complex pictures and many colours be introduced.

To help the parents reflect on positive and negative parenting strategies (cf. 2.8.1.1), which is dealt with by the Facilitator Guide (Comrie 2012:17), Teacher Lucia asked the parents to reflect on teaching moments they remember best from their childhood. Their recollections ranged from fun moments they had with their parents, to memories of appraisal for achievements and to negative experiences.
Abena shared a positive experience:

Drawing. I never thought I was good at drawing. So I still remember my picture. My mom and everybody talks about it today. There was a drawing competition…and I felt I can't draw. So I decided to draw a TV with a bird in it. So I sat in front of our TV, this black and white little box, and then drew this TV and drew a nice little bird on a stick. Surprisingly, I won the competition by drawing that. So since then, I decided, 'OK, maybe I can be a fashion designer'. But I still can't draw. That was just the one time and I started enjoying visuals. I still get ideas in my head, but I get somebody to draw it for me. But I can guide someone to do that visually, though I can't do it myself.

Sally shyly shared her experience: "*I only remember when I was little, my mom used to - when we came back from school - ask us to think of something that starts with a certain sound. And you would think of things, maybe an animal. We were enjoying it so much we never realise we were learning.*"

Aamori also remembered fondly:

Yeah, my mother would put on music and I would dance and dress up. She and I would just go crazy. She would teach us songs…she would teach us music like that. My mother is very beautiful… She showed me an appreciation for different types of music. So I can listen to any music. I love jazz, and hip-hop, and yeah, and I have an appreciation for all of that. So she taught us music in a fun way."

These memories indicated a deep and lasting awareness of the positive influence parents can have on children's learning.

On the contrary, Thabo recalled a painful experience:

For me it was a bit rough, because I still remember, you know, you start with addition and subtraction. So they gave us homework which was division and multiplication. So for division I just interpreted it as minus. So I would put the answers for four minus three, kind of, because it was division

> *and multiplication. But yah, my dad just gave me a few slaps and told me*
> *that this is how you should do it.*

Linking their childhood memories to their own parenting strategies, Sophia confessed: *"Eish, I don't have time to listen to my children, because I am thinking about how to make money. That's it."*

Faye also sadly reflected on her regrets about the way she raised her eldest son:

> *I have a child and he is eighteen tomorrow, and I missed this…I was the*
> *same as my parents. I did the same thing to my boy. And now he is first year*
> [at university]. *I didn't get involved with him. It is like when your child said,*
> *'Mommy, help me.'* [I answered] *'No, no, no, no, you are supposed to learn*
> *at school.' Because that is what I had been taught. You need to learn. You*
> *don't need to come to us, your parent. And today, he is like, my relationship*
> *with my son is…I don't want to be the same with the girls.*

The confessions of Thabo, Faye and Sophia indicated a desire to do better than their own parents had done. They joined the programme because they had come to realise how important it is to spend time with their children in spite of the sometimes overwhelming demands on their time.

Teacher Lucia then discussed the ability and importance to bounce back, regardless of how stressful or traumatic one's childhood had been and the earlier mistakes that one had made during parenting. The concept of resilience is an important aspect of the Wordworks programme (Comrie 2012:21), which is aimed at building parental self-esteem and resilience so these qualities can be transferred from parents to the children (cf. 2.2.3; 2.2.5). This was especially important for Sally, who made the following remark about her son, James: *"He is very…he doesn't have lots of self-confidence. Me as well."* When James first came to Rising Rainbow School, he would simply say, "I can't do it." He would not even attempt doing anything if he felt that there was a chance that he could fail. Although James is now happy to go to school, he *"sometimes still cries if he has to go to the bathroom on his own."* Teacher Lucia suggested that playing with other children the same age as James could help the little boy. But Sally responded: *"No, we don't have friends. We don't socialise."* Although Sally

had expressed a very neutral motivation for joining the programme, I observed that her participation gave her an enriching opportunity to connect with other families and share similar concerns (cf. 2.2.7). This discussion gave Albena an opportunity to talk about her daughter of the same age, Masego; she had to learn to bounce back after her over-enthusiasm had to be curbed in the interests of the other children in the class. Abena recalled several times during Grade R where Masego had become very emotional about the teacher's continual reminder to keep quiet and to allow other children a chance to respond in class. But Abena understood the teacher's dilemma with her lively little girl and had comforted her, saying: *"It's ok, give the other kids a chance. It means you know it* [the answer]. *So you don't need to feel bad."* Principal Lesley's responded with delightful honesty to Abena's story and affirmed her parenting approach. She said:

> *But Masego is very much like you, and I think I am the guilty teacher! I would tell her: 'Masego, I know you know it. Now would you just keep quiet and give the others a chance.' Because she does…she does genuinely know that. But I like the way you handled it. I think to say the teacher knows you know that and she could come back. I don't think she lost anything in that process because it was for us it was more of a positive thing to see. We know she knows.*

This spontaneous conversation between the principal and the parent highlighted the importance of providing teachers and parents a safe space to share their experiences of a child. On many occasions throughout the six-week programme various teachers and parents had the opportunity to share their unique perspectives on the children in their common care and forge closer and more honest partnerships.

Thabo shared that he as a parent was not confident in supporting Boipelo with school work because he felt he lacked expert knowledge (cf. 2.7.2):

> *My one challenge with the syllabi, I mean, it changes and everything. For instance, I know nothing of that, so you know, so the confidence on our side as parents is a bit suspect, because now I am gonna contradict him, even though I think I correct him. I am in fact contradicting what is being taught at school. It is a bit of a fear that I've got.*

His comment reflects parents' insecurity when helping children with schoolwork. This comment ushered the facilitator's discussion of the Circle of Courage (Comrie 2012:22) with a brief explanation of the concepts of belonging, mastery, independence and generosity and how they operate in the home. This discussion provided parents with positive guidelines to implement in the following week.

In concluding the session, as part of the homework discussion, I handed out the guidelines of keeping a family journal (cf. 4.6.3; Appendix I). I explained to the parents that the aim of the homework was to reflect on the kinds of opportunities they create at home to interact with their children. I encouraged the parents to reflect on the routines they as a family have and to journal their good talking times. I also encouraged them to create opportunities to talk to their children about the activities their children had engaged in during the parallel children session (cf. 5.3.1.1 below).

5.3.1.1   Session 1: Children's group: Jono and his party

The nine children were very excited to meet Jono, a life-size hand puppet. Their activities over the following six weeks centred around Jono's upcoming birthday: talk about birthdays, birthday presents and parties. Teacher Louise explained that they would plan Jono's party, write invitations, draw up shopping lists, create birthday cards and bake a birthday cake. During this first session they were trying to agree on Jono's age, and each child got a chance to offer a suggestion and count on their fingers their own and Jono's age.

Figure 5.1 Jono, the puppet

The children became so excited that no-one could be heard. Teacher Louise expertly got them back in line with the "Finger on-the-mouth" routine. Her overall style of facilitation was predominantly formal and 'school-like'; but the children were already conditioned to these school-like procedures of raised hands to indicate they wanted a turn to a talk (cf. 3.4.2.3). When she asked them to start writing invitations, they all waited patiently for Teacher Louise to show them what to do. It appeared they were also conditioned to what was regarded as a wrong way and a right way to do a task. After the group had decided on the wording of the invitation, teacher Louise guided the younger children by making dots on the papers handed out for the purpose so that they could join the dots to write the letters. The Grade 1 learners (Masego, Victor and Pansy) immediately started copying Teacher Louise's example. As it was still very early in the year, the Grade R children struggled to write their names by themselves. I could not determine the Grade R and Grade 1 learners' knowledge of letter-sound correspondence as no experimental writing was encouraged. Teacher Louise's style of facilitation was structured and strict; the children even had to ask for the colour pencil they would like to use.

5.3.1.2   Feedback discussions with teacher-facilitators

Engaging the teachers as facilitators offered them opportunities to enhance their existing knowledge and thinking on early literacy work with families. Their preparation for the session compelled them to study the Facilitator Guide or the outline for the children's session. This created an opportunity for the teachers to obtain richer insight into the learning needs of the parent community and to develop appropriate approaches to support their needs. Feedback from the teacher-facilitators was therefore very important, but finding a suitable time to have the feedback discussions proved to be a challenge. At the end of the two and a half hour session it was already late in the evening and it was not a good time to have a feedback discussion with the parents or the teachers. The feedback discussions with the parents were therefore held at the beginning of every following session (cf. 4.6.6.1). The feedback discussion with the teacher-facilitators was to be held in the week after the session, but prior to the next session (cf. 4.6.6.2).

At the initial orientation session with teachers (cf. 4.3.5) Principal Lesley expressed concern that the content of the Wordworks Home-School Partnership programme might be too easy for the participating parents who were literate, educated professionals. During the first

feedback discussion Principal Lesley acknowledged that, during her preparation for the first session, she had considered proposing that the programme content should be condensed, the number of sessions reduced and the time allocation for each session reduced. However, after the implementation of the first session, she reflected that her judgement was premature: the structure of the programme was perfect; it engaged the parents; it provided a safe space for parental discussion; and parents found the material stimulating and useful.

The observation guide of the children's session completed by Teacher Louise was less useful. Her comments (i.e., adequate, meritorious, moderate, etc.) were not descriptive and followed the typical pattern of a school report card. I had to rely on my observations and recordings of the children's session. Possibly the gaps in thorough recording was due to circumstances: the session occurred during Teacher Louise's last week at Rainbow Rising as she had resigned to take up a position at another school.

In my researcher journal I had reflected on Principal Lesley's impressive facilitating skills, and her thorough and intimate knowledge of each child participating in the programme. It was also clear that she was used to working with parents. She successfully drew out from parents the literacy skills that already existed within the families, and built on them. She valued each parent's contribution and throughout encouraged parents to continue creating opportunities for interaction with their children around books, stories and writing. Parents were treated as equal partners and their skills, expertise, resources and hopes for their children were fully and empathetically recognised. Although Teacher Lucia was an experienced teacher, she was less confident in facilitating. I noted in my researcher journal that she was not well prepared; her facilitation mainly comprised reading the Facilitator Guide. This created one-way communication and she failed to connect with the parents. She did not facilitate again.

Together we decided that we would follow the programme content for session 2 as indicated as we had not yet had a feedback session with parents.

5.3.2. Session 2: Parent group: Language learning

Session 2 covered module 2 of the Wordworks Home-School Partnership programme (Comrie 2012:25). The module focussed on how children learn language and the importance of language development. In terms of Epstein's model the session covered parenting (type 1)

and learning at home (type 4) as types of parent involvement (cf. 2.8.1.1). Principal Lesley facilitated the entire parent session on her own. The parallel children session was facilitated by Teacher Charné.

The session opened with a feedback discussion among parents on their experiences of the homework and the past week (cf. 4.6.6.1). As cited in chapter 2 a literate environment has high levels of talk (where people say more than is necessary). Interactions and relationships between children and adults are recognised as the primary medium through which literacy is acquired (cf. 2.2.3). It was therefore encouraging to listen how the parents, in their reflections of the previous week's homework activities, revealed how hard they had worked to create opportunities for interaction and open-ended conversations with their children. As the parents gave feedback on the strengths and the weaknesses they had observed in their own parenting, I considered if this was the reason why Gontsi had not returned to the programme (cf. 2.7.1). As I had reflected in my researcher journal, during the previous session she was self-opinionated about her skills as a parent, to the point where she had corrected other parents when they voiced their concerns and uncertainties. Her unwillingness to reflect and critically evaluate on her own parenting style deprived her of an opportunity to learn and to grow. The parents' positive reflections in the feedback time were confirmed during the one-on-one interviews with parents at the conclusion of the programme. Almost all of them reported on how the level of interaction in the home had changed significantly as a result of the programme and particularly as a result of the learning which took place in Session 2. Sophia recalled an incident when she had asked her boys to pack up their toys:

> *Before the programme I was shouting. During the programme, after the programme actually, I called them. They were sitting here, talking now peacefully. The thing is - I never heard. I never give them time to talk to me. I was like* [slams her fist in her hand] *just give order, give an order and never heard them. Now we know how to deal with any situation. We can talk about it…I wasn't patient. I was beating him. Now I will fetch the children early. We can talk. You learn about what they've got like a problem, when they need you also. Things that I couldn't do before.*

This comment reveals an improvement in both the quantity as well as the quality of parent-child interaction and communication at home.

Faye also confessed:

> *I was - 'I don't want to listen to them'. All the time it was shouting, shouting,*
> *shouting. And they - 'Mommy is all the time shouting. She is always angry'.*
> *But you don't know. You just shout for nothing and you are like, 'I am*
> *talking to you. You don't hear me. Are you deaf? Are you stupid?'*
> *Everything just stopped. I learned now, I need first to look, to talk. And now*
> *it is better to sit and talk, and I can see if it is a problem, then I can know."*

These confessions during the feedback time paved the way for the content of the second session: thinking and talking about language and the ways in which language can be used. Principal Lesley shared ideas on how to provide opportunities for children to talk, how to listen and create opportunities for their children to learn new words. This discussion was very important as English is not the native language of the parents (except one) although the parents are raising the children as English speaking (cf. Table 4.2; 3.4.1). Principal Lesley used Handout 2a (Comrie 2012:28-30) to discuss how informal playground language differs from more formal classroom language and how to bridge the gap. Bridging the gap between informal literacy and school-like literacy is one of the aims of family literacy programmes (cf. 1.2.1; 1.2.2; 2.5.2).

The participating parents then embarked on a discussion related to their common concern about the correct English pronunciation of the letters of the alphabet and letter combinations that children learned at school. They were very concerned when their children (who were learning English) corrected their parents' pronunciation.

In particular, Sophia voiced here worries as Declan was engaged in speech therapy. Sam and Ruth shared that they had enrolled Pansy in extra English classes to make sure that her English is on standard. Ruth said:

> *Because we also want to help her* [Pansy] *build the vocabulary. As parents*
> *we realise, you know, she is struggling more on the English words and then*
> *we knew that when she goes to Rising Rainbow School, it is English. So we*
> *speak more English, and when she makes a mistake, we say 'No, it is not he,*
> *it is she, it is not come, it is came if it is yesterday', and things like that.*

Thabo indicated that although they speak English at home to Boipelo, they also make sure that he is exposed to the family's home language (siSwati). Thabo explained:

> *We converse most of the time in siSwati. So yah, we try to speak to him and we enforce it to him. So we can basically see that his understanding is far better than we thought, 'cause to him, a basic sentence structure…he is actually speaking back. But he is understanding most of the instructions that we give to him in Siswati. That is what we try to do most of the time.*

Similarly Abena felt it was important that Masego is exposed to her home language (Twi).

> *I speak my language, so she does understand. At home, because it is only me and her, we speak English. The only time she hears my language, is when I speak to my brother on the phone, or my mom or my dad. She can pick up small things, like 'come, go', little things in my language, so she gets that. But once you get into big conversations, she gets lost. But I would like her to know the languages. I think it is important to know.*

In the Bélanger family Elsa and Doris are exposed to both French and English. But the person who struggles to cope with the demands of having two languages spoken at home is Faye. To improve their language and communication as a family they now eat around the table. This was a direct result of the programme. Faye confirmed, *"I can say now we have a long chat, eating, asking them questions."*

Principal Lesley used the opportunity to stress that parents should not confuse pronunciation and accent with correct language. She emphasized that they as parents should rather be more interested in their children's critical thinking skills, reasoning skills and confident self-expression. Because my role was not strictly that of an observer (cf. 4.6.2), I decided to share an anecdote concerning my youngest child. As a toddler he struggled with ear infections, up to the point that he had grommets implanted in his ears almost every year. As a result, he confused many similar sounds. He often had to rely on lip-reading to "see" the sound or word. We therefore spent many hours practising sounds and pronouncing words. As a result his phonemic awareness skills are extremely well-developed as evidenced when he "assisted" other children in the remedial class that I was teaching at the time. He was in Grade R and

when he waited for me in my classroom at the end of the school day, he often popped up to assist a much older learner who was struggling with letter or sound recognition. The parents listened with interest to my story and this built a sense of community during the sessions in which any boundary between parents and 'experts' was blurred.

By using the examples provided in the facilitator guide, the group also discussed language for different purposes (Comrie 2012:29-30). This emphasis on the contextualisation of language was important as parents sometimes feel that they must teach their children to "talk properly". This activity made them realise that language structures and register differ from context to context. As a group, they explored how to create opportunities to strengthen language learning at home (cf. 2.4.2; 2.4.6).

After much discussion about language the session turned to practical activities. Principal Lesley distributed to each parent Handout 2c: Baby bird finds his mother, with 8 pictures (Comrie 2012:35). She asked the parents to create a story from the pictures. This provided parents with the opportunity to practise storytelling skills, the sort of questions they could ask a listener and how to ask them. The activity created great fun among parents. Everyone joined in and parents were relaxed and uninhibited, another indicator of community building within the group. Principal Lesley encouraged them to use a different tone of voice for the different characters. To everybody's amusement, each parent got an opportunity to tell their stories to the rest of the group. For homework Principal Lesley asked the parents to take their stories home to "read" to their children (Epstein's type 4 activity – learning at home; cf. 2.8.1.1). She also instructed parents to create more stories together with their children, using the same pictures.

5.3.2.1   Session 2: Children's group: Birthday presents

Teacher Charné facilitated this session around Jono and his birthday presents. The children talked about their own birthday presents they had received and tried to establish a perfect gift for Jono. They talked about presents suitable for boys and presents suitable for girls. The children did not need much encouragement and eagerly started drawing gifts they believed appropriate for Jono. The older children, such as Masego, Victor and Robbert, tended to dominate the discussions; all the children freely participated in the drawing activities. This provided me with an opportunity to observe their drawing skills. At age 3 years, Doris'

drawings were typical of her age. At the same time I noticed that Boipelo's drawings (age 6) were immature for his age. This may have been due to the developmental delays his father had mentioned during the interview (cf. 5.2.2), but it also may be due to a lack of stimulation and enrichment at home (cf. 2.4.2 & 2.4.5). Thabo acknowledged the problem and undertook to try to address the problem as a result of what he had learnt during the programme:

> *He does not have a space, but he, with the pack that you had provided us, it is very useful, because he would time and again grab something from the pack, organise papers to start writing things. Especially with these letters now, he would try and show us that he can write his name. So yah, he is basically using the pack that you had provided us. Otherwise, we as a family, we had never really organised him that. And now he keeps on, I think that is the teachers now, 'You must ask your parents for a Lego (sic).' So maybe, yah, I still need to give him that. But the environment at the house, I definitely do not think that it is conducive for him to improve.*

The children also did not label their own drawing; instead they asked Teacher Charné to label their drawings for them.

5.3.2.2. Feedback discussions with teacher-facilitators

Principal Lesley was very excited about the change in the group dynamics. She was very pleased that group participation was more open and trusting and the parents were less hesitant to share their opinions and experiences. My observation, as captured in my researcher journal, indicated that Principal Lesley was very open and sensitive to the parents' feelings and immediately responded to reassure or encourage when necessary. My observations further reflected that Principal Lesley's facilitation style was a clear example of the wealth approach (cf. 2.5.2), whereby parents are viewed as equal partners and parents' funds of knowledge and contributions are valued and respected. She showed a genuine interest in the parents' perspectives and opinions and successfully creating a two-way communication.

Teacher Charné felt that the children were enthusiastic about the activities of session 2; all had participated fully and enjoyed the programme.

5.3.3   Session 3: Parent group: Fun with drawing, early reading and writing

Session 3 was based on module 3 of the Wordworks Home-School Partnership programme (Comrie 2012:42) The session focussed on the importance of drawing and experimental writing, the role of writing in learning to read and how children become writers by reading and readers by writing (cf. 2.4.3; 2.4.5). Sophia and her two boys were unable to attend this session. Principal Lesley facilitated the parent session; Teacher Mandy facilitated the children's session.

In the feedback discussion Faye and Sam voiced obvious frustration about the homework assignment, which revealed key misunderstandings about parent-child storytelling and reading. According to Edwards (2004:50) and the discussion in paragraph 2.4.4, book reading is a very simple teacher directive, but a very complex and difficult task for some parents. Edwards' (2004) view was confirmed during the ensuing feedback on the at-home activities during the previous week. According to the literature (cf. 2.4.6.2), children are natural storytellers from the time they can string together a few sentences. They use their knowledge of the world and their experiences to convey content knowledge as well as linguistic structure knowledge to recount stories. But both Faye and Sam's expectations were different. They were upset that their children did not recount the stories to them exactly as they had been told or read. For them a story has to be logical and any recount thereof should be an exact retelling of the original. Faye voiced her frustration as follows:

> *Because I didn't understand everything she was making the story, because the story was about the mom and the family. And she was creating things like, maybe things, 'Oh, little bird, don't you want to go and play with his brother?' And I was…'No, that was not what they wrote here. They wrote other things'. I don't understand it."*

Sam's frustration was similar, "*She was telling things that I did not read to her. That is where the frustration comes in normally. I tried to assist her, but got frustrated. She was telling things differently."*

These comments demonstrated that parents often do not understand or value the role of imagination (cf. 2.2.1). Abena, on the other hand, had a quite different experience:

I had Masego read the story to me the other way around. The picture, we did that week. I got her to tell me a story from that. And like you have said. I was amazed at her imagination. She started out by saying: 'The bird sat in the nest for a very long time, waiting for the egg to come out. And finally the egg came out, and the big mommy chicken was hungry after waiting so long. And she would like to go…' The interesting thing like…to cut a long story short, she added interesting things, like when the chicken, 'Oh, the bird hatched. It looked around and cannot find the mommy. She decided to go and look for the mommy. Then it found the goat. And the goat says 'Hi little bird, what is your name?' And the bird goes, 'I don't know my name. My mommy hasn't given me a name yet.' So she told her own story from that, which was quite interesting, the angle she took it from. Then she also added the mean pig, the goat. And finally, because she was being chased, 'The woman said, 'Pig, go away. Leave the little bird alone.' And then she took the bird and took him back to the nest' and all that. That was how she told the story, which was quite nice.

This anecdote and the ensuing storytelling activity described below indicated that Masego was an apt learner with a colourful imagination and strong language skills. These were recognised and strengthened by her mother's attention and sensitive support.

During the story telling activity, Principal Lesley modelled interactive reading and asked the children to join the parent session. This would not have been possible if I had not designed and incorporated the children's component into the original Wordworks Home-School Partnerships programme and the participation of the children was a great bonus throughout the programme. The parents sat in a semi-circle around the seated children. Principal Lesley read the story: '*Choco wants a mother*'. This interactive story reading not only demonstrated to the parents how to capture children's attention, how to ask seeking questions, add information and expand on the child's description (cf. 2.4.2), but also provided parents an opportunity to observe their own child's behaviour. Although all the children clearly enjoyed the story and eagerly participated, Masego's phonemic awareness skills were noteworthy. She was always the first one to respond to questions testing their phonemic awareness skills (cf. 2.4.6.1); a feature which bore out her mother's and Principal Lesley's observations during the

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first session (cf. 5.3.1). After Masego, James was the child who participated most frequently, a pleasing development in the light of Sally's concerns voiced in the first session and at other times during the programme (cf. 5.3.1). It was also interesting to observe Boipelo and Victor. Although Boipelo's face expressed interest and excitement, he did not respond verbally, not even when a direct question was directed at him. Victor only participated when a question was directed at him. The rest of the time he sat rocking gently while listening. Pansy was also very quiet and Principal Lesley asked her to move closer. She only responded when a specific question was directed at her. Elsa's facial expressions clearly revealed her enjoyment of the story, but it was unclear how much three-year old Doris understood. Thereafter, Teacher Rowena led the children to a separate room.

Principal Lesley used the storyline of the story she had just read to explain to the parents how to explore 'hidden stories' within a story:

> *And also, when you read a story six or seven times, always change the story, Ok.* [She picks up the book 'Choco wants a mother' and starts reading] *'I am sure my Mommy would hold me', said Choco. Then think of what you could do* [reading from the book again] *'Mommy Bear tried it and held Choco, but Choco got very scared because he didn't know Mommy Bear'. As I was reading that story, I realised that this little bird* [in the previous story] *went off with a stranger. So now we talk about stranger-danger. All right? So maybe your conversation could stop at this page. Get the story to here: 'And baby bird says, 'Well, a mommy would keep me safe and look after me.' And then Choco thought, 'This bear is a stranger'. Can you see how you could take your story, and then you can teach a whole lot of other stuff? So don't even finish reading it, ok? Stop there, and make up the dangers and how Choco would get away, and where would be a safe place to go? And you can change your story to help you and to help your child and skill your child, or you can talk about adoption. Isn't it a beautiful story for adoption? Because these were obviously not her children, but she chose them to go with her. She chose to adopt them. And any story's got that potential in it, if you try. Don't be scared to improvise. This person wrote this story this way. You can use the visual clues to tell your own story.*

This discussion confirmed that teachers should not assume that parents know how to read books to their children (cf. 3.2.6.1; 3.2.8 & 3.3.2.1), but should provide practical guidance (cf. 3.5.4) and create opportunities to model interactive reading. Aamori also did not experience much success with traditional storybook reading, *"because Victor gets bored to death if we read stories. We started out I read the first picture, he reads the next, but we rushed through it so quickly."* This comment reminded me of Victor's rocking behaviour earlier during the interactive story reading session. But, according to Aamori, he loves meaningful, real-life literacy experiences. She said:

> *But then Victor had a problem with a DVD that doesn't want to play. So he asked me to Google how to fix it.* [Imitating her son] *'But you can't fix it like that. Find another way to do it'. Then we will look through some examples and I will read it. So he enjoys things like that where he can fix things. I don't say anymore I don't know. He will tell me, 'Google it, mommy!' But reading a story like that, it is absolutely boring. I have to find a way to make it more exciting.*

Aamori was unsure if reading user instructions could be counted as "true reading". Principal Lesley used the opportunity to point out to Aamori that Victor already knows how to source information, an important literacy skill. Further, Aamori's example illustrated to the group the value of reading with a purpose.

Although African society is typically described as an oral culture, these families' comments revealed that the rich forms of traditional storytelling are no longer typical in these families. Television viewing has replaced oral interaction and storytelling traditions in many homes (cf. 2.4.6.2).

Thereafter, Principal Lesley announced that it was time for the parents to draw a character or a scene from the story she had read earlier. This instruction was greeted with reluctance and nervous giggling. It was clearly not a common activity for parents to engage in! While drawing Faye remarked that she often criticises her children's drawings; if the drawing was not good, according to her, she would tell them so, tear it up and throw it away. *"I would go, 'What are you drawing? It is not neat. It is not nice'."*

Bernard confirmed:

> *When Elsa was coming from school, when she was coming with her drawings and then she was showing them to Faye, Faye was like, 'Oh, what is this?', and she would take the papers, crumple them and put it in the dustbin. So Elsa was running to me. She was crying, 'Talk to Mommy, she did this.' So she changed, I mean now, instead of going to the mother, she came to me with the drawings. 'Daddy, look what I did for you.' I said, 'Oh, that is so nice, so nice'.*

When the parents had to evaluate their own pictures, none felt that it was good enough and were very self-conscious about their efforts. They clearly felt vulnerable and exposed. Being forced to draw herself, Faye acknowledge how emotionally devastating it was for her children to tell them that their drawings were not good enough and to tear them up. She grasped that drawing was a way of communication for children because they do not always have the vocabulary to express their inner feelings or experiences. This was an epiphany for Faye, who later shared:

> *I stopped her at everything she tried. 'Mommy look at the…' I was - 'No, no, no, no!' You know, about feeling comfortable at my drawing, because even myself now, I try to draw things. And I ask her, 'Just tell me, what is this?' And when she tells me, it is a bit like you… even if it is not right. But for her, now it is right. And I can see now she is improving when she is drawing.*

Bernard confirmed the change in his wife's attitude: *"She learned that she doesn't have to react like that when the kid is coming. So you just need to encourage the kid to do…I mean appreciate what she is doing. And in that way she is also growing more confident."* This anecdote confirmed a transformation in Faye's understanding and appreciation of her children's drawings. She told me after the programme that she now encourages her children to draw pictures and tell the story from their drawings.

Principal Lesley then used real drawings of children from different age groups to demonstrate how children's drawings develop and mature (Comrie 2012:45-46). I observed that the parents were very anxious to compare their own child's drawings to the expected age norm. Noticing

their anxiety, Principal Lesley explained to the parents how they can draw their children's attention to finer detail, such as drawing a neck, arms and legs using double lines, for example. She also showed them some examples of early stages of writing (cf. 3.4.5.2) and explained how drawing eventually spills over into 'pretend' writing when children come to understand that print carries meaning. She explained that it was important that parents do not try to correct the invented spelling used by their children (cf. 2.4.5; Comrie 2012:47), but instead to encourage it. It was extremely important that parents respect and acknowledge inventive writing, as it is indicative of emergent literacy. Principal Lesley explained that knowledge of written language does not come from being read to, but from pretend reading and pretend writing. As emergent writing progresses from scribbling to more conventional forms of writing, parents should encourage the use of invented spelling by creating opportunities for children to draw and write.

Discussing the topic of writing, Ntombi, who attended this session on behalf of her husband who was unable to attend, questioned why the school teaches the /a/ sound the one week and the next week they learn the /t/. *"He then writes it down for us. We did not understand why he is learning /t/. So I was wondering. I don't follow it because last week it was Anny Apple."*

Principal Lesley explained:

> *Why don't we do A, B, C? We do C, A, T, M, O, P. That is the first set, c- a-t, m- o- p. Because you can make many words from that and they are all easy sounds. No /b/ or /d/ yet, so we don't have that confusion. And we start straight away, because now he can already read c/a/t/ say cat, ok? Can you see why? And then we drill them with a lot of words which they did already last term. So the teacher says to them, 'Take buttons. Listen to this word. /c/a/t/' And they put /c/, they put one disc, /a/, they put one disc, and /t/, they put one disc. They don't write it, but they have already learned it's got three letters. And then they did dog. They put a button for /d/, a button for /o/, and a button for /g/. Or you clap it, /m/ (clap), /o/ (clap), /p/ (clap). Now if you've done mop, those words, you can do pat, /p/, /a/, /t/. You can start building words. So they have already heard little words. Now they are starting to recognise them and the letter that goes with the sound. And this is how, at this school, how we learn it.*

Faye then asked about the sounds /c/, as Clever Cat, and /k/ as in Kicking King as it is the same sound. Sam also complained about Pansy confusing the /i/ and the /l/. Principal Lesley promised to make copies of the Letter Land series they use at school, and to later discuss each letter with the parents. This discussion illustrated the need to inform parents about the curriculum and explain the learning theory behind it in a simple way.

Lastly, Principal Lesley discussed the principle of writing with a purpose:

> *Now the children are doing lists tonight* [in the children's session]. *But can you see how you make writing relevant? Even if it is just a drawing, let them do it. So, you can say, Mommy is going to the shops, what do you need? Let them write it down. Say, look what is missing here. We need to buy bread. Now let them draw the bread. Put it on the list and take it with you. And when you are at the shop, you say, 'Ok, I am going to buy what is on the list.'*

She proposed another suggestion:

> *Think of a lunch box. Think of what you can put in, a message, ok?* [demonstrates] *I love you. Or you can draw or paint. When they open their lunch boxes, I can read. If they can't, give it to a teacher and a teacher will read it to them. There is nothing more precious than something like that. Your child knows that you thought about her. So think about that message and then suggest, 'Why don't you leave a message for mommy on the fridge before you go? Write it tonight and in the morning you put it on the fridge for when mommy comes, I will be able to see it.' So encourage that, and if it is a picture, that's fine. When she brings home a picture from school, you need to be able to talk about it. Ask her questions.*

Abena then proudly shared how Masego loves to write notes:

> *When I go to work, I find a note. 'Mommy, I am sorry that I was naughty'. Naughty was spelt n..o..t..y. 'Mommy, I just want you to understand that I love you. From Masego'. And she drew a little heart. I thought it was so*

cute. And I was trying to think… 'What is it that she do?'(sic)…I can't
remember what she was writing about, but she likes to write notes."

For homework, the parents were asked to spend some time drawing with their children and to talk about their drawings. To facilitate the discussion at home, they were asked to take their own drawings home, show it to their children and tell them about the drawing activity and how they had felt. In preparation for the next session parents were also requested to think about language games they enjoyed playing as children.

5.3.3.1   Session 3: Children's group: Party planning

In preparation for the birthday party, the children were requested to draw up a shopping list of things they needed to buy for the party. Teacher Rowena allowed the children much more freedom than the previous facilitators. She asked the children to think of all the things they would need for Jono's party. After the children had listed a number of things: balloons, cupcakes, cold drinks and candles, they were given blank paper to start making their lists. All the children preferred to draw items; examples of emergent writing were very limited. Underneath are some of the examples:

Figure 5.2 A bottle of coke drawn by Masego, age 7

Figure 5.3 Clothes drawn by Elsa, age 5
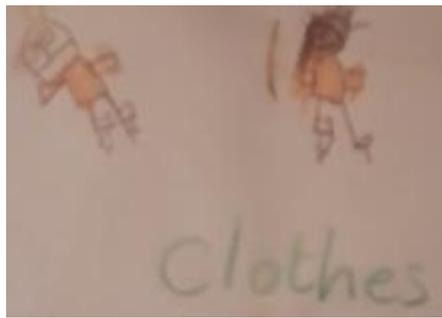
Figure 5.4 A packet of Lay's chips, by Masego, age 7

Figure 5.5 Sweets drawn by Victor, age 7

Figure 5.7 Candles drawn by Doris, age 3

Figure 5.6 Cup cakes, by Boipelo, age 6

Only the older children's drawings (Masego, Pansy and Victor) included some captions. Boipelo and James' drawings included some random letters. Interesting to note was that no

child put their names on their drawings. Possibly this was because they realised they were drawing up a shopping list and that their drawings does not really count as pictures.

Together, the children drew up a programme for Jono's party which Teacher Rowena wrote down for them. Underneath is the programme compiled by the children, and written down by teacher Rowena.

Figure 5.8 The party schedule compiled by the children and written down by teacher Rowena

Schedule
2pm - arrives (½ hour)
2:30 - wish Jono Happy birthday (10 min)
        + pray
2:40 - eat cake and sweet (30 min)
3:20 - games : musical statues/chair
    (1 hour)   : stick the tail on the
                donkey
                : Hide 'n seek
                : touchers (outside)
                : pictionary (no winner)

4:30 - show: magician + balloon
                animal   (1½ hour)

6:00 - presents (30 minutes)
        - home time

5.3.3.2   Feedback discussion with teacher-facilitators

Principal Lesley reflected on how well the Wordworks Home-Family Partnerships programme met the parents' needs. She and I were surprised at how intimidating the parents had experienced the drawing session. We were both amazed that the parents had never thought of drawings as a way their children communicate their experiences and that their drawings were indicative of their level of development.

I commended Principal Lesley for the way she responded to parents' questions. She not only answered their questions satisfactorily, but throughout facilitation managed to assess the parents' strengths and fears, commended them for venturing an answer and encouraged them with a positive thought. Here follow some examples which I noted while making the transcripts of the session:

Abena and Masego: *And she's got the ability to do that. So you can always encourage her.* [Principal Lesley encouraged Abena to have Masego writing more stories, and submitting it to a publisher.]

Sam and Pansy: *She is obviously seeing something and she was telling you about it in the story. Always pick up on that and say 'Really? And then what happened?' Because they don't always have to stick, in fact, children don't always stick, because their imagination is creating so much more. And just think of the fact that she is using language which wasn't in the story.* [Principal Lesley affirmed Pansy's use of imagination and skilful use of language.]

Thabo and Boipelo: *And that is perfect. I mean, that is absolutely wonderful. Look at Boipelo, by the way. He is always the first one with numbers. When you tell him something, or ask any question with numbers, he is always the first one.* [This was particular encouragement for Boipelo's parents in the light of his suspected disability.]

Sally and James: *But now, can you see that you are still using reading as a tool to teach him? Because very soon you won't read him, he will. All you'll say is, 'Ok, here it is, off you go and do it.' So he's got an added incentive to learn to read, because he wants to get that information. So that's fine. Me, to read a manual? No ways! I will read a story, not a manual, all right? But he obviously has got that side to him. So, keep on encouraging him. You are*

still teaching him, you're still being the primary teacher. In fact, that's very precious. [Leslie affirmed Sally's role as primary educator and praised her shy little boy.]

Faye and her girls: *Now, Faye, that can hurt you. I know who you are and I know you that you can say: 'I am actually gonna learn.' Don't let it hold you back in any way, because you can be comforted to know that none of us here, none of us here, can speak French. Right? So you've got to…so you've got the richness of that language. I mean, if you ask any of us to read a story in French, we would all go 'no, no, no!!!!' So that is…you have another ability which the others don't have. Just learn from it and let it go. Ok?* [Leslie affirmed Faye's ability as a native French speaker as an asset she brought to the learning experience, not a drawback.]

As a result of this feedback session we decided to include the Letter Land songs and rhymes in the following sessions. Letter Land is the school's formal English literacy programme and, as such is not part of the Wordworks programme. However, parents' continual questions about the way the school teaches phonics and the correct way for them as parents to consolidate at home persuaded us to adjust the sessions to incorporate these changes.

5.3.4   Session 4: Parent group: Supporting reading and writing

Session 4 was based on module 4 of the Wordworks Home-School Partnership Programme (Comrie 2012:54). The focus was on the support of reading and writing through listening skills and playing listening games. The module also included the use of print in the environment to draw children's attention to letters and the way they sound (cf. 2.4.3; 2.4.6.1). Bernard and Faye and their two daughters had apologised for not being able to attend this session. Principal Lesley and Teacher Melissa co-facilitated the parent session; Teacher Rowena facilitated the children session.

Before the two groups split Teacher Melissa asked the children to join her for interactive book reading. While the children got settled on the mat, Principal Lesley asked the parents to move closer. This gave the parents another opportunity to observe how to read to children and provided them a window into how their own children respond to whole class reading activities. Interestingly, Victor made the same rocking movements as during the previous week's story session. The chosen story, 'The Gruffalo' (Donaldson 2009) allowed for lots of

repetition and the children joined as an enthusiastic chorus every time they were expected to. The text also had lots of rhyme. Teacher Melissa talked about the author, Julia Donaldson, and illustrator, Axel Scheffler, and then drew their attention to the rhyming words. Masego was very quick in pairing the rhyming words. Melissa also asked the children to think of words with the same meaning as some of the words in the text. She also asked them to find certain objects in the illustrations. Even Boipelo participated but it seemed like James had lost interest in the story. He was playing with a little soft toy bunny he brought from home. Teacher Melissa used the story of the Gruffalo to demonstrate how children's attention could be drawn to identifying rhyming words and finding words with similar meaning.

Principal Lesley thereafter played a simple game with children to consolidate their knowledge of letters and their sounds. She had put wooden blocks with letters on them on the floor, about 3 metres from the children. They then took turns in throwing a bean bag at the blocks with the letter representing the sound she indicated. This activity not only consolidated phoneme-grapheme correspondence but was also a balancing and gross motor exercise.

After the children had left with Teacher Rowena Principal Lesley prompted the group to reflect on the activities they had initiated and shared at home with their children during the previous week. For example, she asked Abena:

> *Did Masego write you another letter? Could you see that she was reading tonight? Before you were even saying the words, she was reading it. Her eye had already picked up that the endings were all the same. It's just that she is very language and written word aware, so that she can immediately pick up what's happening.*

Principal Lesley further pointed out to the parents:

> *So you can see the excitement that the story reading is generating. During the story, Melissa didn't do the first part interactive, she just read it. But the children were totally involved. Their attention was focussed and you see they kept moving towards her…because they were like drawn into that. So that's what reading should be doing - drawing the children into what is*

happening. The Gruffalo, I think, is one of the loveliest children's stories because it is just so rich.

Thereafter Teacher Melissa gave the parents some ideas on how to make their own 'little books'. The use of the little book and its construction is dealt with the programme (Comrie 2012:55) and is contained in the handouts. Melissa distributed the little book handouts and gave parents the opportunity to cut out and fold a little book. The rest of the little book handouts were given as a homework activity.
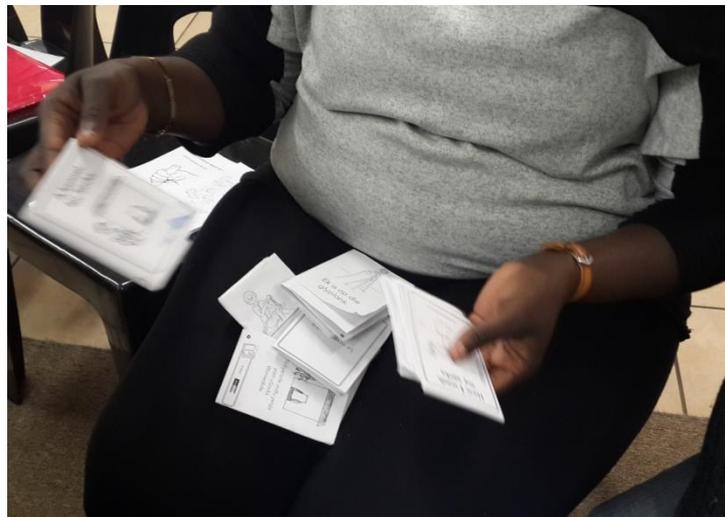
Figure 5.9 A parent making a little book

Principal Lesley and Teacher Melissa proceeded by explaining some phonemic awareness activities parents could do at home with their children (cf 2.4.3; 2.4.6.1). The parents each received a little home-made drum and were asked to clap (or beat on the drum) according to the syllables in their names. Some parents were confused between syllables and sounds. After explaining, Principal Lesley got them going.

Sophia went first: "*So* (clap)*...phia* (clap)*."*

Principal Lesley: "*Ok, and how many syllables? And what did you say?"*

Sophia: "*So* (clap)*...phia* (clap)*"*

Principal Lesley: *"But you can say 'So* (clap)*...phi* (clap)*...a* (clap)*'. Ok, so you break it up into three. But if we were doing the letters of her name, that is very different."*

They went round and all the parents succeeded in clapping the syllables of their names until they got to Sam: *"Sa (clap)...aam* (clap). (He tries again) *Sa* (clap)*...aaa* (clap)*...am* (clap)*."*

Principal Lesley: *"I would say 'Sam* (clap)*', because we don't say 'Sa...aaa...am'."*
The willingness of the parents to engage in these activities demonstrated that the group had become comfortable with each other and were willing to take risks in participating in activities which, in another context, would have been considered childish or embarrassing. The parents then played listening games with words and sounds (cf. 2.4.6.1). From the activities it became clear that the parents confused letter names and sounds. Building word ladders especially proved to be very difficult for some parents. However, the activities gave them ideas of how to play games with letters and words.

To follow up on the parents' request and our decision to demonstrate the Letter Land sounds, songs and rhymes, Principal Lesley distributed handouts with the Letter Land letters and rhymes. She explained why they often ask children to bring objects to school that start with a specific sound.

Abena laughed: *"Words with /u/ is difficult. I say 'utensils', and Masego would say 'No, it's pots'. But together it is called utensils!"*

Principal Lesley replied:

You see, /u/ (sound) is not the U (letter name). But that, Abena, is really good. And onion, they brought me an onion. I would write it on the board and would say 'You are quite right. It starts with /o/, but it doesn't sound like it.' Ok. So we use the sound. Like knife, it starts with a /k/, but we doesn't sound it. So once you write it, the children begin to associate it.

There is not much to start with /o/. Ostrich, octopus and otter."

The concept of the letter sounds which are different to the letter names was new and confusing for some parents. However, it gave them a good idea of the kind of learning challenges that their own young children faced at school.

Principal Lesley then showed the parents examples of storybooks appropriate for young children. She explained the role of illustrations and how to consider the size of text, the role and effectiveness of repetition, the complexity of the language and vocabulary and the ratio of text to illustrations when buying books.

In conclusion, the parents shared their concern about the influence of their native tongue on pronunciation of English sounds (cf. 3.2.8; 3.4.1). Everyone had fun trying to produce the tongue clicks that occur in the African languages, particularly in Xhosa and Zulu. Principal Lesley promised the group to focus more on sounds during the next session. This concluded a very rich session for the parents in which they were introduced to many linguistic and text-related concepts.

5.3.4.1   Session 4: Children's group: Making birthday cards

Teacher Rowena facilitated the children's session. The session was devoted to making birthday cards for Jono. This time the birthday cards contained lots of writing. Samples of the children's endeavours follow below.
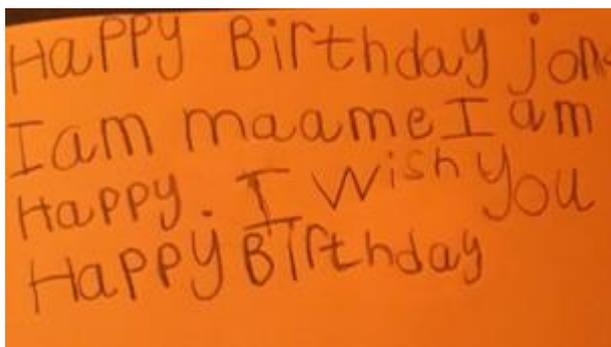
Figure 5.10 Masego, age 7

Figure 5.11 Pansy, age 7

Figure 5.12 James, age 5
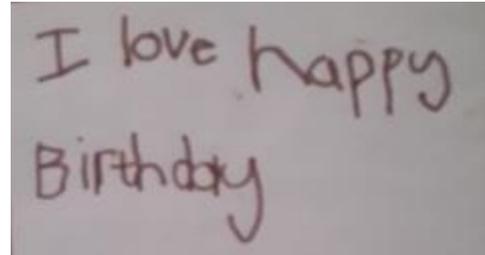
Figure 5.13 Robbert, age 8

Figure 5.14 Declan, age 6

Figure 5.15 Boipelo, age 6

It was especially interesting to observe James while making his card. He wandered around the classroom, studying words on the wall charts until he found the letter he was looking for. He then would rush back to his table to reproduce the letter quickly before returning to each for more letters to copy. It was clear that he did not write random letters, but he was looking for specific letters. In comparison to the very regulated first session facilitated by Teacher Louise, the children were given the freedom to express themselves freely and to experiment with drawing and writing without any prescriptiveness.

5.3.4.2   Feedback discussion with teacher-facilitators

During the feedback session we recognised that parents are still requesting information on phonics and how the school teaches letters and sounds. Clearly it was very important for the parent to understand how children were being taught. Principal Lesley decided that more information on this topic should be added in the fifth session.

5.3.5   Session 5: Parent group: The importance of big and small muscles

Session 5 was based on module 5 of the Wordworks Home-School Partnership Programme (Comrie 2012:65). In this session parents were introduced to games that develop big and small muscles. The importance of balance and good body image, and how it affects reading and writing was part of the formal programme content. Attention was also given to games that strengthen good listening skills. The session was co-facilitated by Principal Lesley and Teacher Melissa. The children session was facilitated by Teacher Rowena.

During refreshment time, Abena proudly showed off Masego's little book which her daughter had written and illustrated.

Figure 5.16: The book Masego wrote

The session commenced with Teacher Melissa's explanation of the importance of play-based learning (cf. 2.2.1; 2.3.4; 2.3.6.1). She gave parents examples of big motor- and fine motor development and parents talked about the games they had played as children. They recalled

games such as 'I spy', Snakes and Ladders, skipping with a rope and a variety of ball games. Teacher Melissa shared with parents games and songs they can use to teach their children different body parts and discussed the importance of developing big muscles before small muscles. She also highlighted the importance of posture and balance, exploration through movement and knowing where your body is in space. The importance of play as a building block on which all academic learning will take place was explored (cf. 2.2.1; 2.3.5).

Principal Lesley emphasized the value of a balance between play and television viewing. This topic caused a stir as the parents concluded with some surprise that Principal Lesley was saying that television is bad for children. This topic elicited lively discussion both in the session and during the individual family interviews held at the end of the programme. Thabo confirmed that this discussion had been a revelation to him. He, like so many parents, had been of the opinion that TV is an effective learning medium.

> *But what we spoke about and what was said in the sessions, there was that, there is disadvantages, you know. The fact that TV kind of locks, you know, so that the kids basically are not free. They are watching that one teacher, whereas opposed to reading, where you read to the kid. They might get the same information, so they learn to listen, look at you, ask questions, be interactive. TV does not have that. So I was actually worried that, you know, bout the gadgets that we've got. So is it ok for me to, you know, like this - he knows Impi Ink* [the visual representation of the letter I in Letter Land] *and whatever, sing songs and play games. So is it ok for me to just hand over? You know the dangers of these gadgets?*

I explained that television viewing has benefits but the importance is to keep a balance and avoid indiscriminate viewing:

> *There is nothing wrong with TV. I think often, yah, teachers will create the impression that TV is bad. It's not. I think it is just finding a balance, to not have them watch television too much, but link watching a TV programme with good talking time. And discuss maybe the programme. Try and enrich, and ask questions, and expand. Let them think a little bit further. Ask them challenging questions. What do you think would have happened if...So it is*

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not the TV is bad, or that the gadgets are bad, it's just, use that and expand
on that. So it is not just TV.

At that point Thabo agreed with me**:**

I think I agree 100%, because for instance this Captain Hook thing, you
know, like my son actually told me: 'I think this man is an evil man. He is
bad.' So it was actually an opportunity for me to come in with a smart
comment.

I affirmed her insight saying,
"Yes! Ask him, 'Why do you say so? What behaviour was there that made
you felt that he was bad?' Pick up on that and take it further."

Similarly, in the final family interview, Aamori mentioned that, as a result of the Wordworks programme, she and her husband had changed Victor's routine: they had reduced television viewing and insisted that he spend at least an hour enjoying physical activities. Sophia, on the other hand, felt that television was a positive learning tool. Her comments also illustrated the misconception parents have about balanced television viewing. She felt she had succeeded in limiting television viewing but her description of the family routine suggested otherwise.

Oh, my God, Robbert likes too much television. And he learns. Robbert is a
genius, if I can say that. He is extremely intelligent. And I notice that he
learns a lot of things from the TV. Because he doesn't watch any other
programme. Only cartoons, only cartoons, and he learns a lot. He knows
too much. For Robbert, it is not something bad. But I am very strict with
them, concerning the TV. When it is TV time, they know it is TV time. During
the week, Monday to Thursday, they watch television only from when they
come back from school up to seven. And they know. Not even in the
mornings. The TV is on only when they come back from school, and after
eating and bathing, they are watching television. And then at seven,
everything is off. The only days when they are free to watch television, until
I know they won't go up to midnight because they will get tired, is only
Friday and Saturday.

Sally shared that the family does not have a television, and apart from reading books and watching educational DVD's on the computer, James has lots of play time. As an only child James was very dependent on his mother. Sally had decided not to send James to Grade 1 the following year as she felt he is not emotionally ready for the demands of Grade 1. According to her he still cries if he has to go to the bathroom on his own, or when he doesn't see his mother.

Apart from the discussion on physical games parents could play with their children, teacher Melissa and Principal Lesley provided parents various examples of games to develop fine motor skills. Principal Lesley concluded the session by playing the CD with the Letter Land songs and rhymes used at school to teach children the alphabet (names and sounds).

5.3.5.1   Session 5: Children's group: Baking for Jono's party

The children, almost beside themselves with excitement, went off to the kitchen with Teacher Rowena and Teacher Charné to bake cupcakes for Jono's birthday party. Teacher Rowena assigned some children the task of mixing the ready-mix cake dough; others were assigned the task of mixing the icing. I had hoped that Teacher Rowena would have prepared child-friendly recipes for the children so that they could 'read' the ingredients and instructions; instead she read the recipe from the packet, measured and added the ingredients herself, and just asked the children to mix the dough. I later journaled that I felt an important literacy learning 'moment' had been overlooked: I would have elected to use child-friendly recipes with illustrations for each child so that they could 'read' the recipes. Nonetheless, Teacher Rowena grasped the opportunity to discuss concepts, such as more and less, big and bigger. The children were very excited to watch the dough "grow" through the glass pane in the oven door.

The children received icing sugar paste in the primary colours so that they could make decorations for the cupcakes. They talked about shapes and colours and explored how to create more colours by mixing the primary colours. These activities provided an excellent opportunity for small muscle development. Once the cupcakes had cooled, the children decorated them with icing sugar and their self-made decorations. Teacher Rowena then stored the cupcakes in the freezer. They were only to eat them the next week when they celebrate

Jono's birthday party. The kitchen was left a mess, the children were covered in icing sugar from head to toe, but they were ecstatic about session 5.

5.3.5.2   Feedback discussion with teacher-facilitators

Teacher Melissa indicated that the notes Principal Lesley had prepared for her presentation on play-based learning were of great help. My observation, as captured in my researcher journal, confirmed that Teacher Melissa had relied heavily on the notes. I also observed that the younger, inexperienced teachers were more comfortable co-facilitating with older, more experienced teachers. This illustrated two observations: the key role Teacher Lesley played in the success of the programme, and the younger teachers' need for backup support when working with parents. Pre-service teacher education in South Africa does not include training for working with parents, and younger teachers are often nervous and unsure of themselves. An unpredicted benefit of the Wordworks programme was the learning opportunity it afforded the less experienced teachers.

The two teachers who facilitated the children's session shared how much the children had enjoyed baking the cupcakes.

5.3.6   Session 6: Parent group: Celebration and certificates

Session 6 covered module 7 of the Wordworks Home-School Partnership Programme (Comrie 2012:81) (session 6 of the programme: Maths is fun, was omitted as already mentioned). The session focussed on Jono's much anticipated birthday party and the handing out of certificates. Principal Lesley and Teacher Rowena attended this session. They decided to keep the parent and the children group in the same room for the full session. This did not allow for a parent feedback session on the previous week's activities. However, I was able to gather that information during the individual family interviews held after the programme had concluded.

Principal Lesley distributed certificates of attendance to each couple or parent and to each child. The children received their party packs which included the cupcakes baked the previous week, and the parents enjoyed refreshments. This gave the parents the opportunity to spend some time together and chat.

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Figure 5.17: A proud Bélanger family with their certificates (with permission of the parents)

The final session confirmed that the programme had been a platform for parents to get to know one another, to share common concerns and solutions, and to forge strong bonds. Although I was disappointed that the opportunity to reflect with parents during session 6 was lost, Sam remarked during the one-on-one interview: *"That is how you build a community."* (cf. 2.2.7).

The evening ended with Principal Lesley and Teacher Rowena playing party games with the children. This provided the parents with another opportunity to observe the kinds of games they can play with their children.

Figure 5.18: Teacher Rowena and the children playing games

Sam also appreciated the value of parents observing teacher-child interactions:

The amazing part is how much you can learn by playing. It stood out, you know. It is those small things that one doesn't really think about. The learning from that is so amazing. You know you can learn anytime with kids.

5.3.7   Family journals

The purpose of the family journals was to encourage participating parents to reflect on the manner in which they as a family engage in literacy activities at home as part of their daily routine (cf. 2.3.6.1; 4.6.3). During facilitation little emphasis was placed on the keeping of the journals and, as a result, commitment to keeping the journals was rather poor. During the one-on-one interviews some parents indicated that they kept notes on their cell phones; others did not keep a journal at all. However, the parents who did manage journal-keeping commented on the value.

Aamori shared that she had been enriched by keeping the journal:

I liked the idea actually that we had to keep almost like a record of what we did… I actually did that very thoroughly after the first week. Writing down your programme as a family and then, you know, just trying to see how you can make changes every week. Or how, what we learned the previous week, see what we can do this week.

Note making in a journal or on a device also provided an opportunity for husband and wife to share their parenting and literacy experiences. Ruth indicated: *"I will normally just make notes. And some of them were on my phone. Then when he* [her husband Sam] *come home, then we will share."*

But in many cases the effort required to make time to journal was too much amidst parents' busy routines. Thabo confessed:

The first weeks, I actually did. The first weeks I would write it on the tablet. I would write it, just in case they would ask it at the session, I would just flip it. And so, yah, I have tried it the first weeks, but unfortunately, it has actually, kind of, even though at the back of my mind, I am still conscious

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of, you know, the things, when we speak. So I noted things at the back of my
mind, but I definitely had stopped jotting it down.

As a researcher I was disappointed that the journals had been poorly kept and failed to enrich the data as intended. I realised that, if journal keeping is to be part of a family literacy programme, facilitators should develop strategies to encourage the practice: incentives, regular reference to journal keeping and the provision of scaffolding to guide entries.

5.3.8   Observation

Observation presented problems due to the fact that the parent and the children's sessions took place at the same time in two different venues. As I had to move between the two sessions, I had to rely on the audio recordings to ensure that I captured all the available data; at the same time I was mindful that valuable information was inevitably lost.

I observed that it is optimal when two teachers co-facilitate a session. I realised that the successful implementation of the programme relied on the expertise and experience of the facilitator. Younger, less experienced teachers can learn from and draw from the expertise of the more experienced teacher. I concluded that the best combination was a more experienced teachers co-facilitating with a less experienced teacher. In this way the two are able to complement one another and the session is a valuable learning experience for the less experienced teacher. As the programme proceeded I observed also that teachers and parents relaxed, participated freely, and were willing to take risks. I observed a pleasing growth in trust among parents and a mutual respect as a real sense of closeness and community emerged over the six weeks (cf. 2.6.2; 2.6.3; 2.7.7 & 2.7.8). This observation was confirmed by Ruth, who remarked:

> *And I think, the parents, we made each other feel comfortable. There was*
> *no one saying 'I am better than so', or 'My child is better'. We were all just*
> *there to learn from each other and the programme itself.*

Another observation that was very positive was the unexpected level of father participation. Parent involvement worldwide tends to be dominated by mother involvement (Lemmer 2013b). Of the seven families participating, three adults were fathers. In particular, Thabo

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represented his family and his wife only came when he was unable to attend. When I arranged for the individual family interview, it took place with Thabo. Possibly this is due to a more authoritarian paternal family structure; however, it affirmed Thabo's concern for his children and provided a very positive role model to the entire group. Furthermore, feedback from the Belangér and Ndlovu families indicated that these fathers were very involved with their children at home. They play with their children, assist them with homework and read them stories. Bernard and Faye explained Bernard's involvement, which overrode common cultural perceptions and practices:

> **Bernard:** *"Yah, I can say the programme met the expectations. As you can see, from the beginning, Faye was going alone, and so she was telling me every time, 'Why are you not coming to the programme, and so on because it is not only something for myself, it is for both parents'. So she was insisting. One day she was, because she was going to two sessions and I was not there, she was insisting. So I just decided to come also and see. Actually, I was coming just to see. And I found it interesting. That is why I came.*

> **Faye:** *Because at the beginning, it was for him, 'No, no, no, it is for you. It is for you', because in Africa, I told you before, the mother takes care of the children, and he was like, 'No, it is for you, not me'. And I said, 'No. What are you saying? It is not only about me, but together, because the children…we need to know something'. I don't know, I know my parent did not taught me about it, and I want you to come. It is very nice. And when he was, the more we stayed, he was like, 'Ah! You're right', and also here, sometimes if I am busy doing things, he calls 'Ester, go and get this. We can just set the table, and we sit, all of us we're trying to create something. Or we go down there, there is a small playground. We can play, we can do something outside here. We can play ball, something. I say, 'Do you see. It is nice', because not only do the children need to know he can play with us. It is not all with Mommy, no. We need to do something for them.*

The reflection of Faye and Bernard suggests a powerful breakthrough in parenting practices formerly dictated by cultural expectations, which can in future change the lives of the family's children.

My observations of the children's sessions was that, although they tended to be school-like, the atmosphere was more relaxed and non-threatening than school. As the programme continued, the children increasingly experimented freely with writing. Experimental writing became more frequent in their drawings. My overall impression was that the children enjoyed the programme and were delighted at attending it together with their parents.

5.4   THEMES EMERGING FROM THE STUDY

The rich and detailed description of the implementation of the modified Wordworks Home-School Partnerships programme (Comrie 2012) presented in the aforegoing section has been interwoven with my interpretation of the events and process also in the light of the literature study (chapters 2 and 3). In this section I have distilled four key themes which emerge from the findings.

5.4.1   Strengthened funds of knowledge and social capital

The first theme that emerged is that the strengthened partnership approach had strengthened the families' funds of knowledge and social capital. The role of funds of knowledge was discussed in Chapter 2 according to Freire's socio cultural approach to literacy (2.2.4). Each family in this programme brought to the table significant and valuable prior experience which was on the whole not ignored but affirmed, particularly by Principal Lesley. In particular, linguistic diversity as represented by the families was acknowledged as an asset and not a deficit. Poor parenting practices disclosed by parents in the discussions were not condemned but the facilitator and the other members of the group suggested alternatives.

The programme created the opportunity to activate family social capital and to build on social capital in the school (cf. 2.2.7). Parents built community with the teachers (the so-called 'experts') through the processes of linking (as identified by Woolcock 2001; cf. 2.2.7). Teachers were affirmed by the parents' appreciation for their commitment and skill, a benefit also highlighted by Epstein (1987; cf. 2.6.3; 2.8). As a result parents felt that they now could approach their child's teachers at any time if they need help or support. Parents also built community with one another as parents by bridging (as identified by Woolcock 2001; cf. 2.2.7). Further, families confirmed time and time again that they not only got to know the teachers better, but also know one another. This finding is consistent with the literature which

indicates that not only are closer bonds forged between parents and teachers but also between parents and parents as an outcome of family literacy programmes (Burningham & Dever 2005:88; Swain *et al.* 2014:79; Ordonez-Jasis & Ortiz 2006:46) (cf. 2.6.2). Aamori remarked: *"As parents we bonded and we got to know Principal Lesley a bit more."* Sophia confirmed: *"Actually we are like a family now. It is not like a session of a group. It is close now and it is good."* Through sharing, the parents realised that they share common fears about their parenting and their children's success, they can now trust in each other and rely on one another for support. Ruth said:

> *The first session, it was a little bit...I don't want to say tense, but still, sort of new. It is the first time with the other parents and personally, before I went there, I figured I am the only one who is having these problems. But going there knowing that there are other parents, then it was like, Ok, at least there are other parents struggling with the same thing. I am not the only one.*

Her husband, Sam, confirmed: *"We were not open for mistakes. The programme actually opened the eyes of us to see, you know what, it is actually good. You can open up, even if there are mistakes. There is a way to deal with it."*

Sam added:

> *Because of this thing* [the programme] *happening now, I said to her* [Ruth, his wife], *'December, when we go to holidays to the family, we are going to take this things* [newfound knowledge and handouts], *you know, and encourage our cousins and say, 'Listen, this is the only way we can build a better future for them'. Because - look, the future is in our children! We are doing them a very serious disservice, because these are the people who need to take the country forward. The moment we slack and we don't teach them this kind of things, sorry, there is no future for us!*

Finally, as Padak and Rasinski (2000:3) suggest, the participating parents reported a decreased sense of isolation. Not only do they now know that they experience similar challenges, but they can also rely on one another for support.

5.4.2   Improved confidence in parenting for literacy development

Burchinal and Forestieri (2011:86-87), Barone (2011:377), Crawford and Zygouris-Coe (2006:261) as well as Parcel *et al.* (2010:828) indicated that parenting practices appear to be the strongest predictors of early literacy skills. At the outset of the programme most parents disclosed that they are not confident to support their children with schoolwork (cf. 2.7.2), and at times certain parents confessed to previous poor, ill-judged responses to their children's efforts at drawing or story recounting. Thabo voiced his lack of confidence to help Boipelo as such:

> *My one challenge with the syllabi, I mean, it changes and everything. For instance, I know nothing of that, so you know, so the confidence on our side as parents is a bit suspect, because now I am gonna contradict him. Even though I think I correct him, I am in fact contradicting what is being taught at school. It's a bit of a fear that I've got.*

However, both in informal conversation and during the individual family interviews after the programme's conclusion, all parents indicated that they now understand the curriculum much better and feel better equipped to support their children. This finding was also consistent with the literature (Chance & Sheneman 2012:12; Swain *et al.* 2014:79; Learning literacy together 2009:9) (cf. 2.6.2).

5.4.3   Improvement in quality of parent-child interaction

A striking key theme to emerge from this study was parental perceptions of improved parent-child interactions. This finding is also consistent with the literature (Mqota 2009:79; Padak & Rasinski 2000:3; cf. 2.6.2). All parents shared that they now have much more patience with their children and were surprised at how much they enjoyed two-way conversations at home. Participants in the programme had removed the strain out of their relationships with their children. The children now were actually looking forward doing homework. There was less criticism and more encouragement and support.

> Sophia said: *"We didn't have this talking things between my sons and me. I was like tired. But now, I fetch them* [from after-school care]. *On our way*

back home, we are talking. 'Mommy, did you see that sign? Momma, this is
the robot [traffic light], *you have to stop. Don't jump the robot, it is all red,*
Momma, you should stop.' You know, we are talking and I learned it from
here [the programme]. *I am giving them time to talk.*

The Ndlovu's described their interactions during homework activities, before they
participated in the programme, in the following way:

"Sometimes, you know, you come and there is so much pressure at work and
then when you come home they [Ruth and Pansy] *are fighting and the other*
one is crying and I would come in and say 'You know what, try to take it as
if it is your new colleague and you have to teach her.' Because it is your
child. You want so much from her."

After the programme, Ruth indicated:

The programme really did bring a great deal into our system and our
involvement of what is happening. First of all the TV is off. The TV part is
non-existent for us. And then, secondly, when we get to do the homework, it
is not as intense and serious, and you have to sit, you have to concentrate.
Now it is fun, it is fun! She [Pansy] *is even looking forward doing it. If she*
is with me and she is doing homework or the reading, I would say 'You are
going to read for Daddy'. And then she looks forward to it. If she is with
Daddy, and he is 'You must read to me', then she gets to be proud and say
I want to do it.

Thabo also indicated:

You know, other things that we kind of not take seriously, eh, what can I call
it? The emotional side, you know, like if you shout at the sister, you basically
impact on him directly. He picks it up, I started noticing after joining the
programme. His sort of patience, what did his parents do? Ok, but I heard
you shouting at her. So he thinks he did something wrong. I am going to
beat him. You start picking up things that previously you basically just

ignore. You thought you were dealing with the sister alone. You might never know how it is actually affecting him psychologically. So yah, we are cautious now at what we do and say. And the fact that he needs the information as well, because maybe it will help him. So if he knows what the sister does, going forward, he is not going to repeat the same mistake. [This comment from Thabo was a clear indication that he had spent some time thinking about how they as a family interact and communicate, and how best to move forward to the benefit of the children.]

For Faye the information on the importance of reading and talking about drawings gave her the opportunity to improve on their communication and interaction as a family as well. She indicated:

Yah, it is like everything, when we are doing…everything changed for me since the course. It is like, you want to know, you want to talk to them. I was I don't want to listen to them. And now it is better to sit and talk, and I can see if it is a problem, then I can know. Because sometime they say at school 'Did you see something wrong with Elsa?' For me it was fine, because you don't pay attention to your child. And I was 'She is fine!', because you don't pay attention. And it is like, now I need to pay attention to my children.

The Bélangers' level of interaction and communication had improved to the point that it is already positively impacting on Doris' emergent literacy development as well (cf. 5.4.4 below).

5.4.4 Raised awareness of literacy learning opportunities

Through their new knowledge and improved confidence parents felt they were ready to assume with confidence their role as primary educators of their children. Parents were alert to literacy learning moments as they occurred spontaneously in the family and were able both to maximise these and to avoid the formerly discouraging behaviour that a few had confessed to during the programme.

Several families told me about changes they had made in their routines at home which are benefiting their children, such as changes in television viewing and physical activity. Further, the families were able to transfer their new knowledge and skills to siblings who had not attended the course. Both the Bélangers and the Ndlovu families have other children younger than five years and reported that they had noticed a transfer of skills to the younger children. I recorded this conversation during my one-on-one interview with the Bélanger family.

Faye: *We use to just to read, but now at the session we learned that, now, when we read, 'Ok come, now it is your turn to read us a story.' She* [five year old Elsa] *doesn't read, but she…she creates the story.*

Researcher: *She is pretend reading.*

Faye: *Yah, pretend reading. It is like if she looks at the picture, she creates things. It is very nice.*

Researcher: *"It is wonderful. And it wasn't like that before?"*

Bernard: *No, it wasn't like that before, and what is interesting is that Doris* [three-year old Doris also attended the programme] *is also doing the same."*

Researcher: *"Oh wonderful!"*

Bernard: *"Yah, when Elsa is reading or pretending reading, so she* [Doris] *is just listening. When…once Elsa is finished, she* [Doris] *says, 'It is my turn now. Let me also read the story.' And if you give her the book, she does the same thing. And the story is quite different, I mean, she takes something from what Elsa said, and then she adds, she does some other stories."*

Bernard also noticed: *"Sometimes she* [Doris] *can draw something and I ask, 'What is this?' and she says: 'Oh, I am just writing what she* [Elsa, her older sister] *is saying.'"*

This is clearly an indication that Doris has already started to pick up the concepts of print (cf. 2.3.5; 2.3.6.1 & 2.4.3). At the age of three Doris is already aware that print (text) carries meaning and can be used to convey a message. This is possible through the opportunities created by her parents.

Sam and Ruth shared their observations:

> *And now learning. What we have learned, we're starting to apply to him* [refers to her middle child, who did not attend the programme]. *Just so as we are doing Pansy's stuff, he will do this, do that. And in the story, just asking questions generally. Because he also had challenges. When we were reading, he was not concentrating. All of them. But learning how to read to them, he now sits still. He now listens. Then he also gets interested. So we have that quiet 10, 15 minutes when everybody is just sitting, listening. And even when we do the words with Pansy, when he is playing around, he would say '/k/ /a/ /t/'. Sometimes he will say 'cat', sometimes he will say 'pot'. But he is pronouncing it the way we are teaching her. And I remember your story when you were saying you were teaching your son! He was just around. You were not teaching him, but how he got to learn. That is how he* [her son] *is. He will say '/c/ /a/ /t/, pot' or '/p/ a/ /t/, mom', something like that. But the fact that he can pronounce them the way we want shows that we are on the right track. He is listening.*

Sam and Ruth's experience with their son is an indication that he is already picking up on phonemic awareness (cf. 2.4.6.1). Listening to his parents helping his sister with her school work, provided an opportunity to pick up on the sounds that make up words.

In summary, participation in the family literacy programme appeared to have improved knowledge about emergent literacy, enriched family literacy routines and raised awareness of the potential of literacy learning for all members of the family.

5.5   LESSONS FROM IMPLEMENTATION OF PROGRAMME

In conclusion, the overall aim of action research is to use knowledge generated from problem solving in real-life situations to improve practice (cf. 4.2). Therefore it is important to reflect on aspects of the implementation of the modified Wordworks Home-Family Partnerships programme which worked well and to also to consider aspects that were less successful.

5.5.1 Aspects that worked very well

Firstly, I discuss the successes of the programme.

5.5.1.1 Parallel children sessions

The children's component worked extremely well and was a strength of the moderated programme. Children's sessions were not part of the original Wordworks Home-School Partnerships programme (Comrie 2012). Notably, all the family literacy programmes currently available in South Africa only focus on working with parents (cf. 3.5). Having a children's session as part of a family literacy programme, as designed and introduced in this study, is new to theory and practice of family literacy programmes in South Africa. In this study parent and children's sessions were parallel sessions; this meant that I required additional facilitators. Fortunately, the teachers teaching at the school were available and willing to facilitate. Importantly, having the children's sessions provided excellent authentic opportunities to model interactive reading to the parents, demonstrate to parents how to play educational games and provide parents with a unique opportunity to observe their own children's behaviour during the interactive modelling sessions. Examples of how well this worked are discussed below.

An unexpected benefit of the children's sessions was Aamori's experience. When her son witnessed her 'learning' about his own school learning, her value as the primary educator of her child was validated.

Aamori: *I think, maybe subconsciously I almost taught Victor that teaching happens at school. You know, he'd come back and say 'My teacher said'. So you know, everything is the teacher is right, and the teacher knows and I don't necessarily know. Whereas this programme maybe gave me some credibility because he was there with me and he saw that I am learning about reading, and I now also know a bit about reading. Maybe now he is more open to me reading.*

Researcher: *Ok, that is an interesting observation.*

> **Aamori:** *Mommy can also do this because I saw Mommy learning about it. Now that I think about it, I think it gave me some credibility. It's not just teacher, Mommy can also teach me.*
>
> **Researcher:** *Since you now also have a bit of 'know-how' on how to.*
>
> **Aamori:** *And he was there and he saw it!'*

Victor's mother's participation in the programme conveyed a strong message to Victor that she valued his education and this resulted in an increased motivation for the young boy. This agrees with the literature on the matter (Mqota 2009:75; Van der Berg *et al.* 2013:20-21; Levine 2002:4) (cf. 2.6.1).

Furthermore, the children thoroughly enjoyed the sessions and this may have contributed to the high attendance and low drop-out for the programme. According to Sophia, her children egged her on to keep up programme attendance. She recalled:

> *They have been asking me 'Momma, when are we going to…they are calling it 'School at Night' … 'we want the 'School at Night' to come back again'. They have been enjoying it too much! Yah, it was like every Wednesday night we know that we are going somewhere. And they have been waiting. Even when they leave the house in the morning, they know. 'Momma, today is Wednesday. We are going to School at Night'.*

Similarly Sally indicated that James had enjoyed the children's sessions: *"He enjoyed going there and he was talking about what they did. He really looked forward to Jono's party and the things they did for the party."*

In summary, for these reasons, the children's component is recommended for future implementation of the Wordworks programme and similar programmes.

5.5.1.2 Principal buy-in

The active participation and leadership of the school principal in the programme was a striking feature and made a major contribution to successful implementation of the programme. Principal Lesley accepted the initial invitation for the study; she obtained permission from the

school governing body; she organised the venue and resources; she assisted parent recruitment and acted as major facilitator to parents. This provided a strong example of leadership for the rest of the staff. The teachers followed in her footsteps and while they facilitated sessions, they knew she was there for support. They could rely on her expertise and knowledge. Her participation sent out a powerful message to her staff, the parents and also to the children of how much she valued the programme as well as their participation.

Moreover, parents appreciated the leadership and expertise of the principal during her dedicated participation in the programme. This also provided an example which increased the validity of the programme among parents. Thabo indicated:

> *She* [Principal Lesley] *just shows us that she's got the experience and the knowledge. In fact, without this programme, I do not believe we would have had an opportunity to see her clearly, because we hardly communicate. So it was an opportunity for her as well. And to know that your child is in good hands at school.*

Aamori confirmed: *"The nice thing was that I think as parents we bonded, and we got to know Principal Lesley a bit more and she knows us more."*

In summary: strong leadership and active participation on behalf of the school principal or a community leader is recommended for future implementation of the Wordworks programme and similar programmes.

5.5.1.3   Teachers as facilitators

Another success factor of the implementation was the use of the children's teachers as facilitators. This provided an opportunity for the parents to witness and appreciate the teachers' knowledge and skills as well as their commitment to and affection for their children (cf. 2.4.6.2; 2.6.2). It provided a platform where parents could ask about aspects of the curriculum they did not understand. As Mqota (2009:80) had indicated, the bond that had developed between the teachers and the staff created a relationship of trust and a new level of confidence to approach the school whenever they need to seek clarity on certain issues. This new confidence of parents benefits the school as a whole, as parents better understand the

curriculum and the school system and are equipped to provide the support to their children that they most need (cf. 2.4.6.3; 2.6.1). It became clear that the parents have a new respect and appreciation for the teachers and value their input and contribution to their children's education more. Further, children were comfortable and at ease with teachers who were familiar to them. Finally, what was learned in the programme could be reinforced by teachers in the classroom during the week. Teachers also experienced their participation in the programme as an opportunity for professional development.

In summary: the participation of the children's teachers or other adults with strong caregiving roles is recommended for future implementation of the Wordworks programme and similar programmes.

5.5.2 Aspects which did not work as well

To ensure the continuation of not only the family literacy programme at this particular school, but to promote the future of family literacy programmes in South Africa, it is necessary to be honest about the aspects that proved to be a challenge.

5.5.2.1 Low participation rate

Family participation of the programmes is a challenge. This was expected, as many studies noted the same problem (Morrow & Young 1997:741). According to the literature, low participation may be due to the fact that parents do not perceive family literacy as a need (cf. 2.7.1), or as the participants in this study had indicated, participation is hampered by time constraints (cf. 2.7.5). Further, lack of knowledge and misperceptions may also discourage participation. In this regard, Ruth also shared an interesting view that might be the reason why many parents did not join:

> *You know, when they say, well, my thoughts initially were 'Oh, a reading*
> *programme', and I thought 'Are we all going to stand there and read to the*
> *children? Or are they going to make you read?' If they say she must read,*
> *oh my goodness! You know, you had those uncomfortable…anxiety to see*
> *'Ok, how is this going to be?' So that is why, with the first day, it is like,*
> *'Ok, here we are. Let's see what this is all about.' Those of us who have a*

fear of people, you're thinking 'Am I going to be asked to stand in front of all the other parents and say something? Uhm, not so much!' But like he [Sam] *said, fear of the unknown. Not knowing. It is the first time I ever had such a programme. So they don't know what is happening. But I think, word of mouth, as we speak, maybe moving forward, they will join.*

Ruth's comment made me realise that the programme director must deal with these fears explicitly during the orientation meeting. A future solution is to allow parents who have already participated in the programme share their experiences of the programme when a repeat run of the programme is planned. If it is the first time a programme of this kind is implemented as in this study, parents' fears still need to be laid to rest.

Another reason may also be the lengthy and comprehensive nature of the programme. Participation required a commitment for six weeks. This meant that family routines had to be adjusted and parents' had to make time in their work schedules. In this regard parental commitment is paramount. As Sophia indicated: *"We did it because we wanted to learn. We make it because we wanted to learn, but it was difficult."*

However, some parents indicated that they liked the small size of the group. Abena said:

Initially, the first day I must say I was going in there to say 'Agh, I wonder how this is going to be with other parents, and what is this about?' But after that day, I was 'Wow!'. And I think also because the group was not too big. The size of the group was perfect, because we were able to hear each other. I think if it was a larger group, it might have not had the same effect.

Although parents enjoyed the small group size, the challenge is to find ways for more families to benefit from family literacy programmes. My experience led me to consider the following possible:

- Advertising the success of the programme by placing photos on the schools' notice board after each session. Photos, a short video clip and asking parents to share their experiences during general or grade parents' meetings can motivate more parents to participate in future.

- Dissemination of a summary of the programme to all families in the school through regular newsletters can ensure that the benefits are not limited to the few who are able to attend the family literacy programme.

5.5.2.2   Finding the best time to meet

Timing of the programme is a major hurdle. The parents indicated that it was very difficult to meet during the week, but realised that it would be even more inconvenient during the weekend. As the sessions were from 18:00 to 20:30, parents felt that it got too late. Most parents worked, so it is also not possible to hold the sessions in the afternoon. Most parents fetched their children from after-care at about 17:00 and had to be back at 18:00 for the sessions. For future implementation the school should consider holding the sessions on week nights but to start the sessions a little earlier.

Thabo confirmed: *"So, if every parent was picking up their kids, I would say 17:00 was kind of a continuation of your day."*

> **Researcher:** *"And now there is an hour in between that you have to kill before you come to the programme."*
>
> **Thabo:** *"I would recommend, Ok personally, because I am near, even half past 4 would have suited me. But I think there are others ...so that the session does not interfere with your after work routine. Because like, for me I was preparing for the Comrades* [a sporting event] *so it became a bit of a challenge,*
>
> **Researcher:** *"But still you managed to come."*
>
> **Thabo:** *"Yah, I definitely was impressed."*

However, parental commitment outweighed logistical constraints. Abena asked: *"What am I going to do with my Wednesdays now? I was starting to feel important on Wednesdays."* Aamori confirmed: *"I actually looked forward to those Wednesday evenings."* Sophia shared the same sentiment: *"It was like, every Wednesday night we know that we are going somewhere."*

5.5.3 Researcher observation of the parallel sessions

Observation of the parallel sessions created a problem. I had to move between the two rooms and had to rely heavily on the audio recordings of the sessions as well as the teacher feedback. Although I had provided the facilitators of the children sessions with a structured observation schedule, the richness of the sessions could not be captured on the observation schedule. Remarks, such as *meritorious*, *enthusiastic*, *engaged* and *adequate,* were ineffective to describe the lively interactions and the quality of learning that took place during the children's sessions. Facilitators also rotated, which meant that I had to explain my expectations regarding observation over to each 'new' facilitator. Although we had covered the content of the programme during implementation, I realised that I should have trained the teachers on the use of the observation guidelines. This issue is also covered in Chapter 6 (cf. 6.4).

5.5.4 Inadequate training of the teachers

Successful implementation of family literacy programmes requires focused training of facilitators. During the orientation session I only gave an overview of the content of the programme. I felt that there was no need to provide the in-depth kind of training that Wordworks provide to their facilitators, as the teachers participating in this study were qualified with years of teaching experience. However, this was a misjudgement: only Principal Lesley had the level of experience to facilitate the parents smoothly. As we progressed through the programme I realised that the younger, less experienced teacher required training in the content of the programme. This is an important observation, as schools that are interested in implementation of family literacy programmes in future should not assume that their teachers are able to work with parents. Even the teachers facilitating the children's sessions, to my surprise, were unable to provide the kind of feedback I was interested in. As my focus was more on facilitation of the parent sessions, I clearly had not provided enough information on my expectations in terms of the children's sessions. I relied too much on the teachers' professional knowledge and I should have been more directive in the training and guidelines I had supplied for the children sessions.

5.6   MEDIUM TERM IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME

Five months after the implementation (October 2015) I met Principal Lesley for an unplanned informal interview. During this meeting she highlighted the following medium term improvements to practice that had ensued in the school as a result of the programme.

- Greater sense of community: The principal indicated that the staff have observed a greater sense of community among the parents. She also reported that the interaction between the teachers and the parents was more open and positive (cf. 2.6.2; 2.6.3).

- Less tension and stress around children's reading in the classroom: The principal reported that the children who had participated in the programme have much more confidence in the classroom and feel less intimidated by reading and learning (cf. 2.6.1).

- Greater sensitivity to parental background and needs: The principal indicated that teaching staff do not take parents' knowledge on reading and literacy for granted. They no longer assume that parents know what teachers are talking about, but are much more explicit when giving homework instructions. During parent interviews the principal and parents have asked more specific questions to elicit information about children and the kind of support parents require.

- Reading Festival: As a result of the programme and to benefit of the wider school community, Rainbow Rising has since organised a Reading Festival. A workshop was held with all parents explaining the importance of reading; teachers also modelled how to read to the children at this workshop. Thereafter, teachers held sessions with all the children in the school preparing them to read a story. During the Reading Festival, a parents' evening was held at which the children read to the parents. Evidence of this event is provided in the photos which follow.

*Figure 5.19 A teacher assisting a little one to read*

Figure 5.20 Children reading to their parents at the Reading Festival

Principal Lesley shared her delight in all the children who had attended the programme, in particular Biopelo, who did well, reading at the Reading Festival. As a result of his disability

the teachers were concerned that Boipelo would not participate. On the contrary, to their surprise, he read his book to the audience with great confidence and pride.

- To follow up on the Wordworks programme and the Reading Festival, the school is planning to have a follow up Reading Festival in 2016. Part of the Reading Festival programme will include giving the parents who participated in the Home-School Family Literacy Programme an opportunity to share their experiences with the audience with a view to promoting family literacy.

5.7   CONCLUSION

The success of a family literacy programme depends on how well it matches up with parents' needs. To get a better understanding of how family literacy programmes can support family literacy and enhance emergent literacy, this chapter provided an overview of a family literacy programme that was implemented in a well-resourced school in an urban suburb in Pretoria, South Africa. The chapter started off by profiling the participating families individually. The chapter then provided an outline of the six sessions. Key themes were identified in the light of literature findings as described in chapter 2, and a review given of the aspects of the programme that had worked well and the aspects that did not work so well.

Chapter 6, the concluding chapter of the thesis, will highlight key findings and make recommendations for the improvement of practice. Chapter 6 will also propose areas for future research, note limitations of the study, and outline final conclusions.

CHAPTER 6
SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH, FINAL CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1   INTRODUCTION

In this concluding chapter I focus on a summary of the literature study and on empirical investigation in the light of the problem formulation and aims. I reiterate key findings and make recommendations for the improvement of practice. I propose areas for future research, note limitations of the study and outline final conclusions.

In Chapter 1 I formulated the main research problem as: *What is the role of family literacy programmes that are aimed at supporting emergent literacy in young learners?* The research question was divided into more specific sub-questions. Section 6.2 and 6.3 describe in detail through a synopsis of the study how the main research question and the sub-questions have been addressed through this project. The objectives of the study was outlined as follows:

1.   To identify the theoretical framework that informs family literacy programmes, to describe the role of the family in early literacy development in historical context and to highlight the barriers, benefits and features of effective family literacy programmes in partnership with the school.
2.   To describe family literacy practices in South Africa in the light of family structures and to underline the implications for family literacy and literacy provision in formal education and through family literacy programmes.
3.   To explore the perceptions and experiences of parents, teachers and learners during the implementation of a family literacy programme aimed at supporting emergent literacy in young learners in a selected primary school in Gauteng using an action research approach.

The purpose of the study was to investigate the role of family literacy programmes aimed at supporting emergent literacy in young learners. I explored the research question through an extensive literature review and an empirical inquiry. Based on the findings of the literature and the empirical inquiry I aim to make recommendations for the design and implementation of

family literacy programmes in South Africa so as to strengthen emergent literacy for young learners.

6.2 SUMMARY OF THE LITERATURE RESEARCH

In Chapter 2 I discussed the theoretical perspectives that underpin home-school partnerships (cf. 2.2). Seen in the light of South Africa's poor performance in national and international assessment, Van Wyk (2010:204) already in 2010 argued that the home and the school can no longer be studied as two separate entities independent of each other. I therefore first discussed the contribution of the theories of Piaget, Dewey, Vygotsky and Freire to home-school partnerships and family literacy. Piaget's theory confirmed that learning takes place through social interaction (including language) and human relationships (Berns 2016:189; Piaget 1929; 1952, 1964; 1966). Dewey advocated a child-centred approach to learning and saw the child as part of a social whole. He argued that education is not assigned to schools alone but constitutes all the relationships and interactions by which we learn how to live as individuals in association with others (Dewey 1938). Dewey's approach re-affirmed that the literacy learning of the child cannot be separated from the home environment. Vygotsky's theory resulted in an increasing interest in the years before formal education that were hitherto regarded as a waiting period before the introduction of formal education. Vygotsky emphasised the role of more capable others in scaffolding the learning of children (Berns 2016:243,323). Like Piaget he underscored the social nature of learning (Doyle 2012:86). Freire (Monchinski 2010: 30; Morrell 2008:54; Glass 2014:337; Freire 2006:86) argued that it is not the teacher's task 'to fill' students with the contents of his narration. Freire cautioned that the experiences which learners bring with them to the learning situation are valuable and should not be ignored by the educator (Morrell 2008:54). The teacher has the responsibility to 'read' the child's world and create suitable learning environments by building on the "funds of knowledge" already existing in families. In addition the contribution of ecological theories and the notion of social capital have also been described in terms of their relevance to the topic. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory posited that the school and home cannot be separated, and influence each other reciprocally (Van Wyk 2010:204; Bronfenbrenner 1986:723; Berns 2016:20-31). He viewed the family as the most effective and economic system for fostering and sustaining the child's development (Wasik & Hermann 2004:10; Doyle 2012:89; Bronfenbrenner 1986:723). Bronfenbrenner argued that, although the family is the principal context in which human development takes

place, it is but one of several settings in which developmental processes can and do occur. Events at home can affect the child's progress in school, and vice versa. Bronfenbrenner's systems model is particularly helpful in fostering frameworks for interaction between families and schools. Epstein's (1987:126) model of overlapping spheres proposed that, although some practices of families and schools are conducted independently, others reflect the shared responsibilities of parents and educators for children's learning. Epstein believes that when teachers and parents emphasise their shared responsibilities they support the generalisation of skills required by teachers and by parents to produce successful learners. As schools, family and community partnerships do not automatically produce successful learners, partnership activities should be intentionally designed to engage, guide and motivate learners to produce their own successes. The social capital theories re-affirmed the necessity to value the "funds of knowledge" already existing in families (Van Wyk 2010:204; Parcel *et al.* 2010:828). The more information teachers have about the children's home environment the better equipped they will be to accommodate the needs of the parents and the children. Teachers should view parental involvement as a form of social capital (Lukk & Veisson 2007:56) rather than a threat or a nuisance.

A historical overview of the role of the family in literacy acquisition (cf. 2.3) depicted how views of the family as primary learning context for literacy have evolved over time. This historical overview provided a better understanding of current approaches to family literacy and the role of parents in the child's literacy acquisition. Snow's model (Snow 1991:5-10) of family literacy programmes is most useful for understanding the intent of family literacy programmes and the nature of what actually takes place. The ORIM framework (Morgan, Nutbrown & Hannon 2009:171) identified the key roles parents play in providing opportunities, recognition, interaction and a model of literacy for each of the four strands of early literacy, namely environmental print, books, early writing and aspects of oral language.

The literature highlights two approaches to family literacy programmes (cf. 2.5), as beliefs about parents often impacts on the goals of family literacy programmes. The deficit approach implies that literacy activities of low-income groups, minority groups and English second language groups may not be valued, as the literacy activities they engage in are not regarded as mainstream activities (Nutbrown *et al.* 2005:25,169; Jay and Rohl 2005:59-60). Unlike the deficit approach the wealth approach suggests that the family literacy 'curriculum' should be based on the needs voiced by the family members themselves (Train 2007:293-294). The

wealth approach requires family literacy educators and providers to identify which literacy patterns already exist within families, and to build on those patterns, rather than to impose traditional, mainstream, school-like activities on families (Lemmer 2013a:26; Keyser 2006:4). When an effective partnership between the family and school has been established, participation in family literacy programmes benefit all role-players: parents, teachers, schools and the community as a whole (cf. 2.6).

It was also important to identify the barriers that impact on the relationship between participation and parents' motivations, expectations and persistence in family literacy programmes (cf. 2.7). Little gain can be expected where uptake in family literacy programmes is minimal (Doyle and Zang 2011:224). A range of barriers indicated by the literature study alerted me to the kind of challenges I could face towards implementation.

Lastly Epstein's typology of home-school partnership model was used to explain how schools could tailor family literacy programmes to match with parent's needs (cf. 2.8.1.1). An overview of the six major types of involvement, namely parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaboration with the community indicated how schools could use the various types of involvement to structure a comprehensive programme that involves all families as their children progress through the grades (Epstein *et al*. 1997:13). Epstein's proposal (Epstein *et al*. 1997:13) of an action team to design programmes provided clear recommendations on the various roles and responsibilities of each member of the group.

Chapter 3 gave an overview of literacy practices in South Africa with special reference to family literacy. The chapter first clarified the term family as "social groups that are related by blood (kinship), marriage, adoption, or affiliation with close emotional attachments to each other, that persists over time and go beyond a physical residence" (Amoateng & Heaton 2007:14). The roles and responsibilities of parents pertaining to the South African Schools Act (SASA) No.84 of 1996 (RSA 1996b) were also outlined (cf. 3.2.1) The various types of family as discussed in Chapter 3 (cf. 3.2.2) indicated how the erosion of the family environment as a safety net has left South African children vulnerable to all types of abuse, exploitation and neglect (Unisa 2008:41). The laws and regulations aimed at protecting children's rights was outlined. The Green Paper on Families (DSD 2011a) places the family at the centre of national policy discourse, development and implementation and aims to provide guidelines and strategies for promoting family life and strengthen families.

The impact of socio-economic conditions, rapid urbanisation and the effect thereof on the well-being of families, various family and health issues and the socio-cultural changes families face re-affirmed the vulnerability of children (cf. 3.2). Furthermore, the political and economic circumstances under which groups of people encountered literacy throughout the history of South Africa also impact directly on how literacy is viewed today in various spheres of the community (Prinsloo 2005:80). Segregated and differentiated schooling during the first half of the twentieth century resulted in inequitable schooling opportunities for many people of colour (Prinsloo 1999:5; Booyse & le Roux 2010:50). As a result many adults in South Africa have not had much schooling opportunities themselves and give out negative messages, probably derived from their own unpleasant experiences of harsh discipline and didactic teaching methods in school (Kvalsvig 2005). These negative memories are unlikely to make the prospect of entering primary school attractive to five year olds. No wonder reading is not a common and widespread leisure pastime in South Africa (Programmes to Increase Literacy in South Africa 2004; Mulgrew 2012). Most children in South Africa do not have books in their homes, and even if their families could afford it, few books are available in African languages (Thorton & Thornton 2008:65; Bloch 2000). As Bloch (2012:8; 2015:2) had indicated, for children to become readers and writers, they need to be in environments where people interact with them, encourage rich and creative language play and make them aware of the world of print. Furthermore the increasing trend for parents to enrol their children in English medium schools as early as possible with a view to acquiring English proficiency irrespective of the learner's home language causes many South African children to acquire first time literacy in a language that is not their home language, namely English (Bloch 2015:3). The failure to achieve equally under conditions of "equality" is due to environmental factors rather than to innate inferiority.

Despite the intentions of the White Paper on Early Childhood Development no. 5 (Department of Education 2001a) the quality of ECD provisioning in South Africa is still poor (cf. 3.4.2.3). Not only is there very limited public funding, but teachers often present reading and writing as isolated and disconnected from children's emergent meaning-making, language and literacy resources (Prinsloo 2005:157). Even though enrolment in Gr R has reached near universal access, De Witt *et al.* (2006) found that 65% of Grade R learners do not meet the minimum criteria for early literacy development and will enter Grade 1 without the skills or concepts to master reading. According to Samuels (Samuels *et al.* 2015:3) the developmental trajectory of most children is already well established at school entry and schooling simply reinforces the emerging developmental trends, usually widening the gap between those who read and those

who do not. The practical implications thereof can clearly be seen in the poor performance of South African children in international and national assessments (cf. 3.4.5).

Although there is a clear indication of the role that family literacy can play in South Africa to support the development of literacy among young learners, the South African state education system does not promote family literacy.

Research of educational programmes with a family literacy component available in South Africa produced a handful of initiatives run by non-governmental, non-profitable organisations (cf. 3.5) (Desmond 2008; 2012). The early Childhood Development project run by READ, the Family Literacy Project, the Home-School Partnership programme Wordworks, the Run Home to Read programme of Project Literacy, the Family and Community Motivators' Programme of the Early Learning Resource Unit (ELRU) and the First Words in Print project of the Centre for the Book are examples of such programmes (cf. 3.5) and was discussed in detail in Chapter 3. As a final conclusion Rule and Lyster (2005) outlined lack of a workable organisational structure, lack of funding, poor practitioner development, multilingualism and a lack of advocacy as some of the challenges to successful implementations of family literacy programmes in South Africa.

6.3   SUMMARY AND CONTRIBUTION OF THE EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION

In Chapter 4 I explained the rationale of choosing an action research design using qualitative methods for the investigation of the study. Kurt Lewin, originator of the term *action research*, believed that knowledge should be created from problem solving in real-life situations (cited in Anderson, Herr & Nihlen 2007:19). Lewin (cited in Reason & Bradbury 2008:4) and Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon (2014:25) believe that action research allows both critical reflection and theory to go hand in hand with practice. The features of action research (cf. 4.2) lend itself to the purpose of this study. At the same time I had to be mindful of the critique of action research (cf. 4.2.1) as was indicated by the literature.

I also explained why I chose the Wordworks Home-School Partnership programme and how it was modified to suit the context of my study (cf. 4.3.2). I also explained the development of a

children's literacy component to complement the parent training component and the arrangements for facilitator training (cf. 4.3.3). Rising Rainbow School, an independent English medium school which comprises a preschool section (3-5 year olds) and Grade R through Grade 2 situated in Pretoria East accepted my invitation to participate in the programme. I obtained written permission from the School Governing Body to conduct the research at the school and proceed with the recruitment of families. The sampling procedure followed was purposeful sampling. The school principal, four Foundation Phase teachers and seven families including nine children participated in the study. Criteria for family inclusion were that the participating families should have at least one child enrolled in Grade R and at least one parent should agree to attend the full six-week duration of the modified Wordworks School-Family Partnerships programme. This criterion was later modified to include the voluntary participation of families with young children ranging from age three to age eight (pre-school through Grade2). Data was gathered during parallel sessions from parents, children and teacher-facilitators through multiple techniques: observation, interviews, training and feedback sessions, artefacts and journals.

In Chapter 5 I presented the research findings of the study. Findings were presented as follows: Firstly, an individual profile of each of the participating families was presented together with their motivation to join the programme (cf. 5.2). The parents' motivation confirmed the sentiment of existing research indicating that parents want to support their children's learning and schoolwork, but lack the confidence because they feel that they do not have the necessary skills (Michael *et al*. 2012:71; Pross & Barry n.d:33-39; Jay & Rohl 2005:71) or do not have time to do so due to heavy work schedules (cf. 2.7.5). Thereafter the six sessions (parent and children sessions) were presented together with a discussion of the reflective feedback component. Key themes emerging from the findings were then highlighted (cf. 5.4). Strengthened funds of knowledge and social capital, improved confidence in parenting for literacy development, improvement in the quality of parent-child interaction and a raised awareness of literacy learning opportunity emerged as key themes.

Lessons learned from implementation of the programme covered the aspects of the programme that worked well and the aspects that did not work as effectively with a view to the further improvement of implementation of the family literacy programme (cf. 5.5). The parallel children sessions contributed particularly well for a number of reasons. Buy-in by the Principal and co-facilitation by the teachers was also highlighted as an aspect that worked really well.

Aspects that did not work well were the relatively low participation rate due to time constraints experienced by the families. Observation of the two parallel sessions was also challenging. Inadequate training of the teacher-facilitators contributed to the poor feedback I received pertaining to the observation schedules (cf. 5.3.1.2; 5.5.3).

The medium term impact of the programme already indicated some benefits for the parents and their children, the teachers and the school (cf. 5.6). A greater sense of community was affirmed, as well as less tension and stress around children's reading in the classroom. The principal also reported a greater sensitivity to parental background and needs. Of particular importance was how the Reading Festival had contributed to benefit the wider community.

6.4   RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF PRACTICE

A number of recommendations to improve the implementation of family literacy programmes are proposed. These recommendations are based on the findings of the literature and the empirical inquiry.

6.4.1   Policy recommendations for family literacy

Research has indicated that family literacy programmes should be school-based and school driven. To ensure that schools implement family literacy programmes a strong policy framework should make provision for the implementation of a partnership approach in curricular, management and non-curricular matters. Although the South African Schools Act (SASA) No.84 of 1996 (RSA 1996b) makes provision for parent involvement through School Governing Bodies, there are no written policies that specify areas for parent involvement in curricular activities as proposed by Epstein. Governance related involvement is only weakly related to teaching and learning and as such do not lead to improved learner performance. The preference for many parents is not for involvement through school governing bodies, but for involvement in their own children's learning.

Strengthening of existing policies and strategies: Two existing policies in the South African Schooling system can be strengthened to promote family literacy programmes and up-skill teachers to work with parents:

a)   Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS)

The Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) (DBE 2015d) is a teacher appraisal system whereby teachers are required to identify their strengths and weaknesses and to design their own training needs accordingly. The Personal Growth Plans (PGP) of all the staff members of a school is used to compile a School Improvement Plan.

Linked to the School Improvement Plan (SIP) and the Personal Growth Plans (PGP's) of teachers, the South African Council for Educators (SACE) (SACE 2011) implemented in 2012 the Continuous Professional Teacher Development System (CPTD) whereby teachers are required to sign up for in-service training programmes in an effort to promote life-long learning. Teachers are required to accumulate 150 points in a three year cycle.

Advocacy for family literacy programmes and provision of in-service teacher training programmes to strengthen facilitation skills with parents can ideally be promoted within the IQMS policy framework and CPTD system. It is proposed that membership of a school's action team, as well as participation in all activities thereof, be acknowledged within the CPTD system.

b)   Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS)

The Policy on Screening, Identification and Support (SIAS) (DBE 2014c) aims to provide a systems delivery framework for supporting learners who experience barriers to learning. A School-Based Support Team (SBST) is a support structure that is proposed to plan, budget and coordinate all programmes directed at learner support. Ideally, planning and budgeting of activities of both the action team and the School-Based Support Team should be aligned and coordinated to prevent a fragmented support system in the school.

Strengthen Pre-Service teacher training to provide for teachers working with parents: As this study indicated, schools who are interested in implementing family literacy programmes in future should not assume that their teachers are able to work with parents. To prepare teachers to work with families, more specific with parents, undergraduate teacher training

programmes in South Africa should make provision for a core module covering directed guidelines for working with families and parents.

Funding of family literacy programmes: Not having to incur costs for participation in family literacy programmes is an important factor in enrolment. Unfortunately there are cost implications for schools running family literacy programmes. It is proposed that corporates and businesses that provide support to schools, either through funding or availing material, should qualify for tax benefits.

6.4.2 The integration of the family literacy programme in an ongoing comprehensive parent involvement programme

Implementation of comprehensive family literacy programmes requires effort and commitment, not only from the participating families, but also from the teacher-facilitators. To ensure that schools do not become discouraged by poor attendance, or fall into the trap of implementing fragmented activities which fails to strengthen one another, schools will need to design and implement family literacy programmes as part of an ongoing parent involvement programme such as advocated by Epstein (1987). According to this recommendation family literacy programmes should not be 'stand alone' programmes, but should fit into a strategic three year school improvement which activates all six areas of parent involvement in the interests of family literacy. Through the integration of the family literacy programme into the six areas of the comprehensive parent involvement programme, its sustainability is ensured and future cohorts of parents can be reached year after year.

Design family literacy programmes on a theoretical framework: The proposal is therefore that schools design family literacy programmes on a theoretical framework, such as Freire's REFLECT approach, Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model of development or Epstein's typology of home-school partnership. Epstein's model is particularly helpful in tailoring family literacy programmes.

Make someone responsible: As Epstein had indicated, "Parent involvement is everybody's job but nobody's job until a structure is put in place to support it." Epstein therefore proposed the constitution of an action team comprising parents and teachers to guide the development of a comprehensive program of partnerships. In this way the continuation of the programme does

not rely on a single 'champion' or expert but is owned and organised by a joint partnership of parents and teachers. The purpose of the action team is to design programmes including all six types of involvement, and to integrate all family and community connections within a single, unified plan and program. It will be the responsibility of the action team to identify the needs of parents, and to plan school improvement plans to allow for a continuum of involvement; from very active, complex school-based activities with maximum face to face parent-teacher interaction to supportive simple home-based activities with little, if any face to face parent-teacher interaction, for example, the provision of story bags.

Adult education and literacy activities could be interrelated with the early childhood and related programme contents. Family literacy programmes can also include themes such as good nutrition, health and hygiene, the emotional and psychological development of the child and special needs such as information about substance abuse, family counselling etc.

It will also be the responsibility of the action team to identify and address possible challenges to participation by families. Delivery of short ('taster') programmes might also encourage parents to participate. During such 'taster' programmes facilitators can also deal with any fears and misperceptions regarding participation expectations. Discount on school fees (applicable to fee-paying schools) may also serve as an incentive for families to enrol. Providing light refreshments may encourage participation of parents who may have to choose between feeding the family or attend.

Create platforms to provide information about parenting to all families in the school: The action team of the school also needs to find ways to create platforms for families to share information about their needs with the school, their cultural backgrounds and the strengths and needs of their children. A further challenge is to provide information about parenting to all families in the school and not just the few that may attend the family literacy programme.

Keeping journals: Journal keeping is a powerful tool to give parents the opportunity to record their observations of their children during at at-home literacy activities and to plan and record changes to their family routine. Journals can also be used to facilitate ongoing communication with parents by providing feedback to the facilitators on the value of the at-home literacy activities. Journals could also be used to probe the changing beliefs and thoughts of the participants as well as document the use and strengths of strategies and activities employed in

the sessions. Journal keeping should be emphasised and facilitators should develop strategies to encourage the practice, such as incentives, regular reference to journal keeping and the provision of scaffolding to guide entries.

6.4.3   Programmes should be family-centred in design

Follow a wealth approach: To ensure that facilitation of family literacy programmes are not following a deficit approach, programmes should value input from parents and family members, provide activities and resources for the entire family, involve parents and children in interactive literacy learning activities, and try to design the learning community so that parents and children can participate in the same physical learning space. Programmes should guard against rigidity, but should rather always be responsive to parents' needs, and build on the funds of knowledge they already have.

The value of a children session: Although having a parallel children's session requires more facilitators, it proved to be extremely valuable in terms of providing excellent authentic opportunities to model interactive reading to the parents, demonstrate to parents how to play educational games and provide parents with a unique opportunity to observe their own children's behaviour during the interactive modelling sessions. Having children sessions may contribute to high attendance and low drop out for the programme. When children see their parents participate in the family literacy programme it also conveys a strong message that parents value their education, and may result in an increased motivation to learn.

Encourage father involvement: As parent involvement worldwide tends to be dominated by mother involvement, fathers' participation is often overlooked. It is important to encourage and appreciate fathers' participation, as children whose fathers are involved in their literacy learning benefit significantly and demonstrate higher academic achievement as well as social and emotional well-being. When fathers are very involved with their children at home, play with their children, assist them with homework and read them stories, it alleviates the workload of mothers and reduce stress and anxiety for the whole family.

Allow flexibility in terms of participation: Schools should allow some degree of flexibility in terms of the age groups of learners and the profile of the parents. Schools should be mindful

not to exclude any families that wish to participate, but do not necessarily meet the criteria for participation. As much participation as possible should be encouraged.

6.4.4 The use of less experienced teachers as facilitators with more experienced teachers

Having teachers to facilitate: Having teachers facilitate the family literacy programmes provides excellent opportunities for the parents to witness and appreciate the teachers' knowledge and skills as well as their commitment to and affection for their children. It also provides a platform where parents can ask about aspects of the curriculum they do not understand. The bond that develops between the teachers and the parents may well create a relationship of trust and a new level of confidence to approach the school whenever parents need to seek clarity on certain issues. This new confidence of parents benefits the school as a whole, as parents better understand the curriculum and the school system and are equipped to provide the support to their children that they most need. Having teachers facilitating also creates an opportunity for parents to develop a new respect and appreciation for the teachers and to value their input and contribution to their children's education more. Further, children will also be more comfortable and at ease with teachers who are familiar to them. Also, what is learned in the programme could be reinforced by teachers in the classroom during the week.

Staff development: My study had indicated that schools should not assume that their teachers are able to work with parents. Even the teachers facilitating the children's sessions, to my surprise, were unable to provide the kind of feedback I was interested in. Although teachers may be well qualified and have some years of teaching experience, it should not be assumed that their professional knowledge is adequate to facilitate with parents. In-service training programmes equipping teachers to work with parents should be very directive, not just in terms of facilitation but also in terms of observation skills.

6.4.5 Principal buy-in

The active participation and leadership of the school principal in this study was a striking feature and made a major contribution to successful implementation of the programme. To ensure successful implementation of family literacy programmes, is important that the school principal should realise the value and benefits thereof for the school, the parents and their

children and the broader community. The principal should provide a strong example of leadership and support for the rest of the staff and should ensure that all structures in terms of planning and budgeting are provided for. The leadership, support and possible participation of the principal sent a powerful message to the staff, the parents and also to the children of how much their participation in the programme is valued.

In summary, strong leadership and active participation by the school principal or a community leader is recommended for future implementation of the Wordworks programme and similar programmes.

6.4.6   Database of family literacy programmes

The overview of family literacy programmes available in South Africa made me realise the importance of having a detailed data base of family literacy programmes. An internet-based database should be compiled of all family literacy programmes with contact details and a synopsis of content and structure. This would go far to address fragmentation and would be a useful resource for prospective sponsors, teacher professional associations, schools, families and welfare services.

6.5   LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

When considering the research findings, the limitations of the study need to be taken into account. As this action research study using qualitative techniques of data gathering and analysis involved only a small number of parents, children and teachers linked to a single school situated in a specific community, the findings cannot be generalised (cf. 4.9.2; 4.9.3). However, the findings of this study suggest strongly that family literacy programmes in general can create spaces for individuals and communities to explore and challenge existing practices and provide families with the kind of knowledge they need to successfully support the emergent literacy development of their children. Further, the findings suggest that South African schools which share characteristics with Rainbow Rising may also benefit from a family literacy programme such as the modified Wordworks programme implemented along similar lines.

6.6   AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

If family literacy programmes are to be a viable means of improving the literacy development of young learners in South Africa, additional research is required. The following suggestions are made.

a)   **Investigate the long-term effects of family literacy programmes**
This study only focussed on the effects of a family literacy programme as observed during a six-week implementation period. Although the study indicated medium-term improvements such as a greater sense of community and a strengthened fund of knowledge and social capital, less tension experienced around reading activities and homework, a raised awareness of literacy activities that can be explored, and an improvement of the quality of interaction between participating teachers, parents and children, more research is necessary to establish the long term effects of family literacy programmes, especially on the academic achievement of children.

b)   **Comparative studies to ascertain the size-effect of progress:** Further research is needed to assess and compare the literacy progress of children who attend family literacy programmes against other children within the same school. Quasi-experimental designs could be helpful to ascertain how the progress of the children in the family literacy programmes compare with the progress made by other children with similar characteristics.

c)   **Extend to other subjects and other grades**
This study focussed only on the effects of family involvement in the emergent literacy development of young learners. Future research could possibly explore the effects of family literacy programmes designed to fit families with learners in higher grades and with content focusing on other subjects such as maths, science or life skills orientation. Specially designed family literacy programmes which focus on learning areas such as mathematics, science or life skills, especially across grades, might prove valuable since the South African education system experiences very specific challenges in improving poor performance in mathematics and science. The education system also experiences formidable problems in equipping learners with positive life skills that will enable them to cope with social problems.

6.7   CONCLUSION

Although family literacy programmes cannot be seen as a quick fix, home-school partnerships are definitely a powerful way to strengthen the emergent literacy development of learners. Unfortunately parent involvement practices in South Africa are generally restricted to a few types of parent involvement and inadequately provided for in policy frameworks. Medium term impacts of this study already indicated promising benefits for the participating teachers, parents and their children. It is hoped that communicating these benefits would succeed in strongly advocating for a coordinated national approach towards family literacy programmes, as strong home-school partnerships are a key determinant of children's literacy attainment.

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APPENDICES

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

LETTER OF CONSENT

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT RISING RAINBOW SCHOOL

Dear _____

I am currently busy with my DEd (Socio-education) studies at UNISA. The title of my thesis is: **The role of family literacy programmes to support emergent literacy in young learners.** This study has been approved by the Ethics Committee of the College of Education, Unisa.

I would like to invite your school to participate in this research. All teachers from your school will be invited to participate and I will request teachers to volunteer to co-facilitate the activities as outlined below. I would also like to invite families who have children enrolled at your school to take part in the project. Benefits of participating in the research are the:

- Improvement of literacy outcomes for children participating in the study,
- Strengthening of home-school connections in your school,
- Support of parents in building on and strengthening existing literacy practices in the home and
- Professional teacher development of participating teachers.

Participating teachers and parents will be requested to attend 6 workshop sessions (one session per week for 6 weeks) to be held at the school with your kind permission. Each session will be 2½ hours and comprise training and practical activities with short breaks between activities (outline of the sessions attached). An estimated number of 10 families are expected to participate. I will be responsible for light refreshments and the tidying of the venue after each session as well as all workshop materials. The programme to be followed is the Wordworks home-school programme. A copy of the programme will be made available to you for your perusal prior to the programme implementation. Children will engage in word games, storytelling, book reading and drawing activities and will be thoroughly observed. Families will be requested to implement family literacy activities at home with their children after each workshop session.

There will be no risks involved to any of the participants. Participation is entirely voluntary and all information will be kept confidential. The families, teachers and school's name will not be revealed. No monetary rewards are given to participants. Participants are free to withdraw from the study at any point without being penalised. Participants are expected to indicate whether they agree or disagree to participate by completing a consent form (see attached letters).

The results of the study will be made available to the school in a special information sharing session with teachers and parents. The results of the research will form part of my doctoral thesis and may be published as an article or series of articles in a scientific journal or presented at suitable conferences.

This research is conducted under the supervision of Prof Eleanor Lemmer at UNISA (Department of Educational Foundations). Prof Lemmer can be contacted on lemmeem@unisa.ac.za. Please feel free to contact me if you have any queries regarding the research or any other related matter.

Your support and willingness to allow the school to participate in this research is appreciated.

Thank you

 Signature: _____   Date: _____

E-mail: Phone: Cell:
babette.leroux@absamail.co.za   012-9988 735   083 608 3461

INFORMED CONSENT FROM THE SCHOOL GOVERNING BODY (SGB)

I have been given the chance to read this consent form. I understand the information about this study. Questions that I wanted to ask about this study have been answered. My signature (on behalf of the SGB) indicates our wholehearted support for the study.

PRINCIPAL (NAME IN PRINT)	SIGNATURE

DATE_____

APPENDIX B

PERMISSION OF TEACHERS

LETTER OF CONSENT

TEACHER PERMISSION FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Title: The role of family literacy programmes to support emergent literacy in young learners

Dear teacher

I am currently busy with my DEd (Socio-education) studies at UNISA. The title of my thesis is: **The role of family literacy programmes to support emergent literacy in young learners**. This study has been approved by the Ethics Committee of the College of Education, Unisa.

The purpose of this form is to invite you to participate in my research and to provide you with information that may affect your decision as to participate in this research study. If you decide to be involved in this study, this form will be used to record your permission.

If you agree, you will be participating in a research study on the implementation of a family literacy programme to enhance emergent literacy in Gr R learners. The purpose of this study is to **explore how a family literacy programme can assist families in strengthening existing literacy practices in the home to support emergent literacy of young learners, and to make recommendations with regards to professional teacher development.**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

- Attend a one day training and orientation session to be held at an agreed upon venue
- Co-facilitate a 6 week family literacy programme. The Wordworks home-school programme (outline of the programme attached) will be used. The full programme will be discussed in detail during the training and orientation session.

The programme is divided into 6 workshop sessions attended by parents, children and teachers (one session per week for 6 weeks). It is expected that more or less 10 families will participate. Each session is 2½ hours and comprise training and practical activities with short breaks between activities. All sessions will have focussed time for parents, and focussed time for children. Children will engage in word games, storytelling, book reading, and drawing activities and will be thoroughly observed. Your role will be to co-facilitate the sessions. All workshop materials will be provided free of charge. I will also provide light refreshments and take responsibility for tidying up the venue after the sessions.

There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study. The possible benefits of participation for your school and the participants are:

- Improved literacy outcomes for children participating in the study,

- Strengthened home-school connections,
- Support for parents to build on and strengthen existing literacy practices in the home, and
- Your own professional development regarding family literacy

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to participate or to withdraw from participation at any time. You will not receive any type of payment participating in this study.

Your privacy and the confidentiality of all data will be protected by not using your name in the data collected as well as the report. The anonymous data will be allocated to teacher one, two, etc. As participating co-researcher, you will have access to this data. You will be asked to keep data confidential. The data resulting from your participation may be made available to other researchers in the future for research purposes not detailed within this consent form. In these cases, the data will contain no identifying information that could associate it with your participation in any study.

Prior, during or after your participation you can contact the researcher, **Sarlina Gertruida le Roux** at **012 9988 735** or send an email to **babette.leroux@absamail.co.za** for any questions or the study supervisor: Prof EM Lemmer, Department of Educational Foundations, Unisa, email: lemmeem@unisa.ac.za.

You are making a decision to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to participate in the study. You will be given a copy of this document.

_____   _____
Signature of Teacher   Date

_____   _____
Signature of Researcher   Date

APPENDIX C

PERMISSION OF PARENTS AND CHILDREN

LETTER OF CONSENT

PARENTAL PERMISSION FOR FAMILY PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Title: The role of family literacy programmes to support emergent literacy in young learners

Dear parent

I am currently busy with my DEd (Socio-education) studies at Unisa. The title of my thesis is: **The role of family literacy programmes to support emergent literacy in young learners**. This study has been approved by the Ethics Committee of the College of Education, Unisa and permission for the study has been given by the principal of Sungarden Nursery School.

The purpose of this form is to invite you to participate in my research and to provide you with information that may affect your decision as to participate in this research study. If you decide to be involved in this study, this form will be used to record your permission.

You and your family are invited to participate in the implementation of a family literacy programme to enhance emergent literacy in Gr R learners. Emergent literacy refers to early behaviours children display when interacting with print materials (pretend reading and writing). It describes the process of how children learn to read and write before formal instruction. The purpose of this programme is to **assist families in strengthening existing literacy practices in your home.**

If you allow your family to participate in this study, your family will be asked to:

- Agree to an informal interview that will take about 45 minutes to complete prior to the programme at a venue and time of your choice.
- Attend a six (6) week family literacy programme held at a suitable time at the school. Attendance will involve at least one parent and one or more preschool children in your family.
- Keep a diary for the duration of the programme. I will provide a print diary or you can record your experiences electronically as preferred.
- Engage in weekly home-literacy activities that will be supplied free of charge.

This programme followed is the Wordworks programme (guideline attached). It will be presented in 6 sessions (one session per week for 6 weeks) to be held at the school. Each session is 2/½ hours with training and practical activities as well as short breaks between activities. All sessions will have focussed time for parents and a focussed time for children. Children will engage in word games, storytelling, book reading, and drawing activities and will be thoroughly observed. Light refreshments will be served during each session. Each family will receive a Parent Guide containing a summary of the programme, as well as weekly resource

packs with photo-copiable little books, charts and handouts including games and activities. There will be an estimated number of 10 families in this study.

There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study. The possible benefits of participation are:

- Improved literacy outcomes for your children participating in the study,
- Strengthened home-school connections, and
- Support for you as parents to build on and strengthen existing literacy practices in the home

Your family's participation in this study is voluntary. Your family may decline to participate or to withdraw from participation at any time. You can agree to allow your family to be in the study now and change your mind later without any penalty.

Neither you nor your children or any family member will receive any type of payment participating in this study.

Your family's privacy and the confidentiality of all data will be protected by not using your family or your child's name in the data collected as well as the report. The anonymous data will be allocated to family one, two, etc. Only the researcher and the teachers participating as co-researchers will have access to this data. The data resulting from your family's participation may be made available to other researchers in the future for research purposes not detailed within this consent form. In these cases, the data will contain no identifying information that could associate it with your family, or with your family's participation in any study.

Prior, during or after your participation you can contact the researcher, **Sarlina Gertruida le Roux** at **012 9988 735** or send an email to **babette.leroux@absamail.co.za** for any questions or the study supervisor: Prof EM Lemmer, email: lemmeem@unisa.ac.za.

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to participate in the study. If you later decide that you wish to withdraw your permission for your family to participate in the study you may discontinue your participation at any time. You will be given a copy of this document.

_____
Printed Name/s of Child/ren

_____   _____
Signature of Parent(s) or Legal Guardian   Date

_____   _____
Signature of Researcher   Date

ASSENT OF CHILDREN

Researcher: Sarlina Gertruida le Roux
Contact details: babette.leroux@absamail.co.za
Cell: 083 608 3461
Title of Research: The role of family literacy programmes to support emergent literacy in young learners
UNISA
Supervisor: Prof EM Lemmer
lemmeem@unisa.ac.za

LETTER OF ASSENT

Dear

My name is **Babette** and this is a picture of me.

I am a student at a big university, and want to learn more about how children learn to read and write.

Together with Mommy and Daddy, and your teacher, you are invited to take part in a programme where you will:

Read books

Tell stories

Play games

Draw and paint

Mommy, Daddy, you and your teacher, and me, will meet at the school every week, for six weeks

to tell stories, read, draw pictures and play. We will only do so, if you want to. If you, after a while, don't want to do it any more, you can say so. I promise to keep your name secret. I also promise to answer all your questions about what we do and why we do it. I will give you a copy of this letter.

If you want to come to the programme, you can tell me so by writing your name here (or ask Mommy or Daddy to write your name):

_____

Mommy and Daddy will also have to agree

_____   _____

Mommy's name   Daddy's name

This is how I write my name:_____

This is how I sign my name: *[signature]*

This is today's date: _____

PERMISSION FROM WORDWORKS

PERMISSION TO USE THE WORDWORKS HOME-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAMME IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Title: The role of family literacy programmes to support emergent literacy in young learners

Dear Dr O'Carroll/Mrs Comrie

I am currently busy with my DEd (Socio-education) studies at UNISA. I have special interest in: **The role of family literacy programmes to support emergent literacy in young learners,** at the school site. The aim of the study is:

- To explore the impact of home literacy contexts on the development of pre-schoolers' emergent literacy,
- To describe how family literacy programmes can assist families in strengthening existing literacy practices in the home,
- To explain how a family literacy programme can strengthen partnerships between home and school,
- To make recommendations in terms of teacher development.

The envisaged participants are families with pre-school children, and their teachers. Participation is entirely voluntary and all information will be kept confidential. No monetary rewards will be given to participants. As researcher, I will also receive no monetary rewards from either the school or the participants. Participants are free to withdraw from the study at any point without being penalised. Participants are expected to indicate whether they agree or disagree to participate by completing a consent form. Permission will be obtained from learners' parents, and teachers. As required, the results of the study will be made available to the school. The results of the study will be discussed at school in a special information sharing session. The results of the research may be published in a scientific journal or presented at a conference.

On your invitation, I have attended a training session held for facilitators of the Wordworks home-school programme and are convinced that your programme will best serve my research. I therefore request permission to use the Wordworks Home-School Programme.

If you are willing to give permission to use the programme as requested, I will send Wordworks a summary of the main findings at the completion of the study.

As you have a lot of experience in the field of family literacy, I would also be honoured if you would agree to critically read my research before I submit for examination.

This research is conducted under the supervision of Prof Eleanor Lemmer at UNISA (Department of Education). Prof Lemmer can be contacted on lemmeem@unisa.ac.za. I can be contacted at babette.leroux@absamail.co.za or 083 608 3461. Please feel free to contact either one of us if you have any queries regarding the research or any other related matter.

Your support and willingness to allow me to use the Wordworks programme in this research is appreciated.

Thank you.

_____   _____

SG LE ROUX (RESEARCHER)   DATE

APPENDIX E

APPROVAL FROM THE ETHICS COMMITTEE

UNISA | university of south africa

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

14 October 2015

> Ref # **2014 SEPTEMBER/32068336/MC**
> Student#: Mrs SG le Roux
> Student Number #: 32068336

Dear Mrs SG le Roux

> **Decision: Ethics Approval**

Researcher:
Mrs S G le Roux
Tel: +2712 9988735
Email: babette.leroux@absamail.co.za

Supervisor:
Prof EM Lemmer
College of Education
Department of Educational Foundations
Tel: +2712 460 4548
Email: lemmeem@unisa.ac.za

Proposal: The role of family literacy programmes to support emergent literacy in young learners.

Qualification: D Ed in Socio Education

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the College of Education Research Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Final approval is granted for the duration of the research.

> *The application was reviewed in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics by the College of Education Research Ethics Review Committee on 10 September 2014.*
>
> *The proposed research may now commence with the proviso that:*
>
> 1) *The researcher/s will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.*
> 2) *Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study, as well as changes in the methodology, should*

be communicated in writing to the College of Education Ethics Review Committee. An amended application could be requested if there are substantial changes from the existing proposal, especially if those changes affect any of the study-related risks for the research participants.

3) The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study.

Note:

The reference number **2014 SEPTEMBER/32068336/MC** should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication [e.g. Webmail, E-mail messages, letters] with the intended research participants, as well as with the College of Education RERC.

Kind regards,

Dr M Claassens
CHAIRPERSON: CEDU RERC
mcdtc@netactive.co.za

Prof VI McKay
ACTING EXECUTIVE DEAN

APPENDIX F

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW: FAMILIES

Semi-structured interview: Interview guide

Family:_____   **Date:** _____

1. Would you like to tell me about your family?
2. Can you tell me about your educational experiences?
3. Would you like to tell me about your expectations for your children?
4. What do you think they will achieve at school?
5. What do you want for them in life?
6. Do you think parents can teach their own children?
7. Tell me about the literacy activities your family often engage in.
8. Can you tell me about "good talking time" with your children?
9. Tell me about the leisure activities you engage in as a family.
10. What is your child's favourite story?
11. What is your child's favourite song?
12. What is your child's favourite book?
13. Does your child pretend to read or write while playing?
14. What are your expectations of the programme?

APPENDIX G

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

FOCUS GROUP SCHEDULE

Session: _____   Date:_____

1. What activity did you enjoy the most in today's session (as a parent; as a facilitator)?
2. What activity did your child enjoy the most? Why?
3. What activity did you enjoy the least in today's session (as a parent; as a facilitator)?
4. What activity did your child enjoy the least in today's session? Why?
5. In what way will today's session help you support learning at home?
6. In what ways does this programme influence or change your family routine?
7. What suggestions would you like to make regarding the homework activities?

Do you have any comments on keeping the family diary?

APPENDIX H

OBSERVATION GUIDE

Observing Children's Interaction with literacy

Session: _____ Date: _____ Facilitator:_____

Observer: _____ Family: _____

Number of participants in the session: _____

1. The participant's readiness to engage in the session
2. Participant's response to activities (level of interest and participation):
3. Participant's attention span
4. Participant's response to storybook reading
5. Level of talk (vocabulary, sentence construction, language play)
6. Knowledge of concepts of print and literacy skills (pretend reading and pretend writing)

APPENDIX I

FAMILY JOURNAL

EXAMPLE OF A FAMILY JOURNAL

Please jot down your thoughts on your participation in the Wordworks programme at least once a week in the diary which has been provided for you. I have provided the following points to guide you; however, you are welcome to make your own notes.

1. Reflect on the routines you follow as a family.
2. Reflect on the 'good talking times' your family enjoys.
3. What every day activities did you use to model literacy?
4. In what ways did you create opportunities for your child to 'pretend' or practise reading and writing?
5. Reflect on the homework activities you carried out this week. Think of things you enjoyed the most/least as a family.

In what way were the homework activities helpful/not helpful in guiding literacy activities in the home?

APPENDIX J

THE WORDWORKS HOME-SCHOOL PROGRAMME

APPENDIX K

CHILDREN PROGRAMME