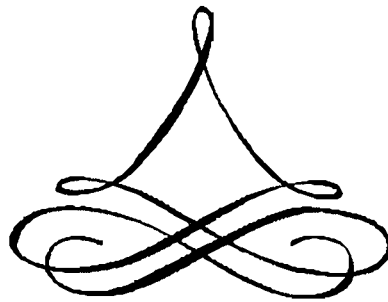


# LITERACY IN THE LIVES OF DOMESTIC WORKERS

Investigating the Impact of the Adult English Literacy  
Curriculum on the Lives of Female Adult Learners



A Thesis Submitted to the  
School of Educational Studies,  
Faculty of Humanities,  
University of KwaZulu-Natal in  
fulfillment of the requirements for a  
Doctoral Degree in Education

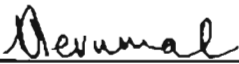
By  
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Supervisor: Professor Reshma Sookrajh

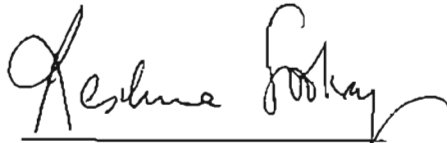
January 2004

## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Krishnaveni Perumal declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been previously submitted for any degree at any other university. All work for this thesis was completed at the former University of Durban Westville.

  
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Supervisor

January 2004

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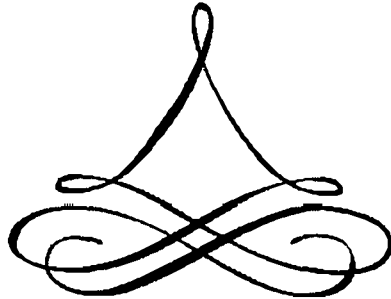
My closest buddies, Gail Venter, Nestar Joseph, Pushpee Naidoo and Sharon Moodley: Thank you for your understanding and the constant rescheduling of our rendezvous.

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Finally, my gratitude to the National Research Foundation for awarding me a scholarship for this research.



## DEDICATION



I dedicate this work to the adult learners in this study, Maria, Bongiwe, Cindy and Agnes as well as to the countless women around the world whose voices are silent and trapped and whose struggles are not heard. Maria, Bongiwe, Cindy and Agnes: you have succeeded against all odds because of your spirit and zest for life. I hope this work contributes to unravelling the truth about the lives of marginalized female domestic workers.

## ABSTRACT

This study draws on empirical evidence to examine theory on the critical question: "What is the impact of the English literacy curriculum on the lives of female adult learners?" I used the critical postmodernist and feminist lenses to examine the lived experiences of four Black African domestic workers and their journey through adult literacy. I used life history and autobiographical writings as the main methodological tools to uncover the biographical experiences of the learners. The postmodernist lens provided a framework to understand the changing identities and the complexities in the lived experiences of the learners. The critical and feminist theories provided the framework to understand the power relations and female oppression in a gendered society.

Researching adult literacy in transforming, unstable and uncertain environments is methodologically complex and challenging. In these circumstances it is often serendipity that provides tools for discovery. Thus letter writing and '*in loco*' visits into informal settlements provided me with thick description of the adult learners' life worlds, which would have otherwise been closed. In drawing up a literacy curriculum for adult learners the '*in loco*' visits became a vital source of information.

A major impact of the adult literacy programme in this study is that it provided learners with a language of criticism, hope and one with which to analyse their social and material conditions. The narrative writing and class discussions gave learners the opportunity to reflect, to be critically conscious of their poverty, to act and dream of their emancipation. The autobiographies were voices for the voiceless learners, offering them a space to explore their feelings through story telling. The story telling opened up possibilities, which was not mere reflection but a complex process of making a difference in the world through diffraction. Autobiographical writing as a narrative form provided the discursive space for learners to become reflective, conscientized and intellectually emancipated. However, they were not always able to assert their empowerment, because of the dominant mediating factors such as economic power relations and socio-cultural contexts.

Feminist and critical pedagogical approaches to mediating the curriculum can be emancipatory, in environments of poverty, oppression and powerlessness. Although learners attained critical consciousness and intellectual liberation, only two of the four were able to break the shackles of poverty.

The English language created a triple bind for the adult female learners. The dominance of the English language in the global economy, has created demands on adult learners to acquire competency skills in English in order to function optimally in society. The hegemony of the English language led to discrimination, and created class stratification as well as social inclusion and exclusion for learners. They either felt alienated or accepted. This study showed that the dominant indigenous language within their own informal community also causes social inclusion and exclusion. The first dominant pull is that of the English

language, the second is the dominant indigenous language from their own communities and finally they are caught with the need for their own language causing a threefold pull or push on the learners' identities, which I call a triple bind. The quest to acquire the dominant language also created schisms in the learners' identities.

This research has shown that the chasm between policy intentions and implementation has not been bridged. The promises of equity, redress and social justice as enunciated in Adult Basic Education and Training (from here on referred to as ABET) policy documents are far from being realized.

This study revealed that the Department of Education in KwaZulu-Natal placed too much emphasis merely on summative tests and certification and not on the needs of the adult learner. If adult education continues in the same direction there will be no good incentive to work towards a programme that has a direct impact on the lives of marginalized females in particular.

The study suggests that ABET curriculum must be situationally relevant to make an impact on learners. The adult literacy curriculum should offer programmes for critical consciousness as well as vocational training for income generation.



**This is Mpolweni Settlement. Many of the adult learners hailed from this informal (squatter) settlement. The poor disadvantaged African people inhabit the settlement.**

## PREFACE

### **My Story**

*I use Noel Gough's (2001c) metaphor of travelling text worker where one is able to generate one's own story of educational experience by thinking about educational problems and issues as stories and texts and to subject these stories to a form of narrative textual analysis, critique and deconstruction. I use 'story telling' life history as one of my methodological tools in this research. I preface my thesis by telling my story. In this study there are four adult learners whose stories are told and this plays a critical role in providing invaluable data for this research. I examine the gaps, silences in the stories and the power relations. It is in this context that I narrate my own experience as it will place the entire thesis in context, space and time and will reveal the complexities that prevailed in this study. The narrative discourse will identify whether learners felt included, excluded, marginalized or oppressed.*

### **Oops!! How did I land in ABET?**

*I joined the African National Congress<sup>1</sup> (from here on referred to as ANC) in Reservoir Hills in 1992. The ANC Woman's League is a subsidiary branch of the ANC. One of the aims of the ANC Woman's League is to empower women who have been subjected to oppression by a patriarchal regime in the home, workplace and society. In South Africa, Black women in particular have suffered three-fold oppression, first as Black women, second as females in the home and third as employees in the workplace.*

*The Reservoir Hills<sup>2</sup> ANC Woman's League set up an organization called the Asoka Adult Basic Education Co-operative, hereafter referred to as AABEC. This programme was set up to cater for the literacy needs of the large group of*

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<sup>1</sup> ANC: African National Congress is the ruling political party in South Africa (2004). The party represents Black majority rule. During the apartheid era the African National Congress was a banned organization because they were considered to be working against the aims of the ruling party.

<sup>2</sup> Reservoir Hills: this is a middle class suburb, inhabited mainly by middle class Indian and Africans from the informal settlements. People were segregated according to race during the previous apartheid government's rule of separate development.

*informal Black residents. The adult night school began in 1992. I joined Asoka Adult Basic Education Co-operative in 1994.*

*I began adult education with fourteen years of high school English teaching experience and thought I would cope adequately with adult education, but after my first literacy lesson I awoke to a new realization that I lacked knowledge and skills on how to teach this sector. In spite of much preparation, some of my lessons failed dismally because of various methodological and other factors, which I explain in Chapter Four.*

*I made many discoveries in a long journey where there are both contradictions and complementary nature of the programmes. My best-laid plans often ended in disaster, while lessons I considered to have little consequence for the learners had some relevance. To produce what was relevant to the needs of the learner became a task that required an understanding of learners, textbooks, research material, intuition, culture and the learner's home background. The adult learners who attended classes were between 20 and 45 years of age.*

*The enrolment figures at the beginning of each year were generally large but as the year progressed they dwindled. At the beginning the total school population was approximately 150. By the end of the year the number decreased to approximately 80. The class sizes at the beginning were approximately 25 or more per class. By the end of the year the number in my class was approximately 14. Learners were offered transport during the earlier years of AABEC but not subsequently because of financial constraints<sup>3</sup>.*

*Learners travelled long distances or walked up to three to five kilometres to attend classes. Katazele, an adult learner, had to take two buses to be at class. Classes terminated at 20h 30 at night, thus their return home would have been late into the night. There was a core group of learners that was consistent, made much sacrifice and attended classes punctually. Maria, one of the respondents of this research, was able to attend classes only after she washed her employer's*

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<sup>3</sup> Financial constraints: Joint Education Trust had funded the project but after the new government had come into power most non-governmental organizations were no longer sponsored. Instead the money was given directly to the government.

supper dishes. Reservoir Hills, as the name suggests, is situated in a very hilly terrain. Learners who hailed from the Mpolweni <sup>4</sup>Settlement had to trudge up a very steep hill. Learners had to work a full day as domestic workers, return home to attend to their own family needs and then present themselves at adult classes. This was something that intrigued me. This made me conscious of the need to provide a curriculum that would serve the needs of the adult learners. It was an arduous task trying to accommodate the needs of the learners and preparing for summative tests. I have travelled many roads searching for relevant curriculum material that led me to *cul de sacs*. The journey with the learners took me through many trials and tribulations where I learnt invaluable lessons about ABET. Teaching ABET was a gift I treasured because I was able to learn from adults who imparted worldly wisdom and together our interaction became a discourse of shared ideas.

I learnt much about their cultural practices and the meaning they held in their personal lives. They learnt about my culture, my way of life (through home visits) and through our class discussions. Years of separation because of the apartheid<sup>5</sup> system had left a chasm of not knowing how the other lives. Teaching ABET brought a new dimension to my life. It opened new pathways of understanding the teaching and learning situation. It also brought home the meaning of ubuntu<sup>6</sup>. I understood how in the South African context bonds of friendship could exist between one human being and another. The learners' relationship with fellow learners also strengthened with time.

Learners provided much support for each other during times of need. Moses is an adult learner who does not feature as one of the candidates in my study. However,

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<sup>4</sup> Mpolweni Settlement : this is an informal squatter settlement where mainly Africans live. It is a the land to which they have no legal entitlement. The African colloquially refer to these settlements as 'jondols' but they find such a terminology derogatory when used by members outside their community.

<sup>5</sup> Apartheid : In South Africa the previous White Nationalist Government maintained policies that ensured racial segregation which meant that Black people did not have the right to vote, live in the same area as Whites, attend same schools, attend places of worship, entertainment, and were not permitted to swim in the same beaches or sit on benches at the park or marry across the colour line.

<sup>6</sup> Ubuntu: This is a South African word derived from the IsiZulu language which refers to the special bond of love that individuals show and the dignity as well as respect that fellow human beings accord each other.

*I use him as an example to illustrate the bonds of friendship that prevailed at adult literacy classes. When Moses ran the prestigious Comrades Marathon it felt as though the class was part of the preparation. Moses shared his running schedule, his aspiration, pains and needs. Learners who had television mentioned how they sat glued to the television hoping they would see their 'hero', Moses. Moses won a silver medal in the Comrades Marathon and received an award from his club for his outstanding performance. His achievement was celebrated in class with much pomp and fanfare. As an educator I tried to meet him at least once during the 89 km. race to show him AABEC's support and encouragement.*

*As much as I am against racial stereotypes and labels, I must confess for the purposes of this study I need to lay bare 'the who I am' because this has a tacit bearing on the type of relationship that exists between myself and the learners. I belong to the South African Indian race group while the learners are indigenous Black South Africans. I am literate in the Tamil language yet I am unable to speak my mother tongue because of the way the language was taught. English is my home language whilst the learners speak one of the African<sup>7</sup> languages as their home language. As their adult literacy teacher the learners saw me as part of the 'dominant language group' because they perceived English as the dominant language. The learners were all employed by South Africans of Indian origin and in this context, Indians were viewed as part of the dominant class because they had better socio-economic status. I hope to contribute to the needs of adult learners by recommending relevant English programmes that will contribute to improving their life worlds.*

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<sup>7</sup> There are eleven official languages in South Africa, English, Afrikaans, IsiNdebele, IsiXhosa, IsiZulu, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, Siswati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga



## **List Of Acronyms And Abbreviation**

AABEC	Asoka Adult Basic Education Co-operative
ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training
ANC	African National Congress
ANCWL	African National Congress Women's League
DoE	Department of Education
IEB	Independent Examinations Board
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JHB	Johannesburg
JSS	Junior Secondary School
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
MOCEF Programme	Mother Child Education Programme for Home Based Intervention
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OBE	Outcomes Based Education
OBET	Outcomes Based Education and Training
RDP	Redistribution and Development Policy
S. A.	South African
SADWA	South African Domestic Workers Union
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UIF	Unemployment Insurance Fund
USA	United States of America

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**CHAPTER ONE**  
**A JOURNEY THROUGH THE PLAINS OF ADULT**  
**LITERACY**

**1.1 Introduction**

In this study I focus on English literacy in the lives of four adult female domestic workers in South Africa. Domestic workers in South Africa are mainly Black, African, females and are the lowest paid workers in the market. It became compulsory for employers to have their domestic workers registered since May 2003 and to pay a minimum wage of R800, 00 per month with an annual increase of 10%. It also became compulsory in 2003 for employers and employees to contribute to the Unemployment Insurance Fund<sup>8</sup>. What percentage of domestic workers are being paid the minimum wages as stipulated by the regulation, and what percentage are indeed registered with the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) is yet to be researched. My speculation is that many domestic workers are still being paid below the minimum wages. Khuzwayo (2003) writes that the contribution of domestic workers to wealth creation in South Africa has been seriously over looked. In fact, what needs to be considered is that they made it possible for many others to go to work. The voices of domestic workers themselves have not been heard though the media has often published horror stories of how they are inhumanely treated. In contrast, Jacobs (2003) writes about the success story of Johanna Baloyi, a Black female domestic worker, who washed and scrubbed floors for fourteen years. Through her perseverance and the support of her employers, she obtained a Bachelor's Degree. At the time when she began her domestic work she could not speak a word of English. However, through the slow process of adult education she soon climbed up the ladder and triumphantly went on to receive a Communications Science degree from the University of South Africa.

---

<sup>8</sup> The Department of Labour in South Africa has promulgated a new law, which regulates employment in the domestic worker sector. The law is called the Sectoral Determination for the Domestic Worker which Sector came into effect on 1 September 2002. Employers were required to pay a minimum wage from 1 October 2002 (Department of Labour, 2002).

Domestic workers in South Africa can be described as “the shadow of silent majority”<sup>9</sup>. These are women whose voices are silenced by the power of the social upper class because they are from the working class. In other words, they struggle to be given space and a voice because they are silenced by bourgeois values (Hooks, 2003). They are the women who helped raise other people’s children yet see their own just once or twice a year. Khuzwayo (2003) comments:

*...they are like guards to some homes, they take care of babies, the elderly, they make the beds, cook the meals, they contribute to understanding between cultures, they teach their employers about prejudice and the really brave one’s are able to tell their Madams to wash their own underwear (Khuzwayo, 2003: 5).*

This introduction provides a brief background of the socio-cultural context of adult learners as domestic workers in present day South Africa, as many aspire to break the shackles of the bondage of being domestic workers.

### 1.1.1 Orientation

In section A, I give a brief background to my study, by drawing from the experiences described in poems written by adult learners from Asoka Adult Basic Education Co-operative<sup>10</sup>. The purpose of this study and the critical question stated, and the scope of the study is defined by outlining its limitations. The terms used in this research could have a wide range of meaning, hence I clarify and explain the context in which they will be used.

In section B, I narrow my focus to the problems identified in this study, with global as well as South African perspectives on the problem. In the rationale I explain what led me to this journey into the vast plains of adult basic literacy.

Section C provides an overview of all the chapters in this thesis and a summary of this chapter.

---

<sup>9</sup>See Baudrillard: 1983, In *The Shadow Of The Silent Majorities*, Semiotexte, New York.

<sup>10</sup> Asoka Basic Co-operative is the Adult literacy institution at which I taught.

## SECTION A

### 1.2 Adult Literacy at Asoka Adult Basic Education Co-Operative

As an adult educator and researcher I wish to investigate the impact of Adult Basic Education (ABET) on the lives of female learners. I have been an adult literacy educator from 1994 to 2001 at an organization called the Asoka Adult Basic Education Co-operative (AABEC) in Reservoir Hills, in Durban. As an adult educator and researcher, I began my exploratory journey with four female adult learners from AABEC to unearth how the English literacy curriculum had impacted on their biographical lives. Hooks (2003) argues that women who come from materially disadvantaged backgrounds need to be given voice and we need to create spaces in the classroom to recognize their uniqueness as students. We need to make them feel valued by giving them an opportunity to write and read aloud their own stories. The four female adult learners, who were domestic workers, have written poetry about their lives as domestic workers after a period in adult education. I cite their poems, as well as poems written by other learners from the adult literacy class, to show how learners' felt about their status as domestic workers in South Africa. The curriculum allowed learners to engage in various types of writing skills. In this research I use their autobiographies and in this section, I analyze their poetry.

***Title: Being A Domestic Worker***

*When we go to bed we feel 'suffering.'  
We work very hard every day.  
We start work from 5.45  
But sadly we don't know our finish time.*

*We hate this job  
We are over worked.  
Madam is under paying.*

*Our problems are too many.  
We have children's school fees.*

*We have children's school uniform.  
We have children's clothes to buy.  
We have children's food to buy.*

*Oh! God how we love our children.  
We can find hope  
If we talk to our Government*

***By Doris Msweli***

***Title: Being A Maid***

*My madam treats me like a slave.  
She does not care about me.  
But she worries about her house.*

*No time to cook.  
No time for lunch.  
Only time for work.  
That's my life as a maid.*

*I am a woman.  
I want respect.*

*My problem is too big.  
I see my beautiful children  
Once a year.  
I have no money.*

*But I hope God  
will answer my prayers.*

***By Agnes Makatla***

***Title: Madam Please!!!***

*Please Madam  
Don't treat me  
like I am an animal.  
Please madam give me  
time to rest.  
Madam  
I have feelings.*

*Madam don't send me to the shop  
and treat me like a child.  
'buy bread, buy milk?'*

*Madam I feel so bad.*

*Madam please don't treat me like I know nothing.*

*When I clean don't follow me.*

*As if I don't know my work.*

*Madam even when I make my tea*

*You look at the amount of sugar I put in.*

*Madam I hate being a maid.*

*Oh! Madam!*

*when I go to church*

*I feel better.*

*I thank you Lord.*

***By Ggabisle Mabaso***

Poetry is an art form where one is able to succinctly convey powerful messages with economic use of language. The learners have basic literacy skills, but through classroom learning and teaching activities, they were able to articulate the depth of their feelings as domestic workers. The poems are thus an autobiographical account of the life of domestic workers in poetic style. The poetic technique is similar to this research, as I use life history and autobiography as my main research tools, to understand the adult learners' life world.

The opening lines in each poem make a compelling statement of how Black female domestic workers in South Africa are discriminated against and oppressed. It reveals the indignity they suffer by being treated as, 'children', 'animals' or 'slaves'. Doris uses the collective 'we' to embrace the problem as experienced by most domestic workers in South Africa. The poems epitomize the control of the dominant class in almost every facet of the lives of the lower class. For Freire (1998c) this would demonstrate how oppression of the lower classes is not through divine intervention but the ideological and political contexts of how people live.

I use these poems as my introduction because they encapsulate the essence of the major themes in this research. The themes of the poems resonate with this thesis: poverty, suffering, exploitation of labour, female oppression and power relations. The poems conclude in a triumphant note when the domestic workers/learners seek comfort from God, who gives them hope for the future.

Through reflection and reflexivity, the domestic workers were able to face their obstacles as challenges. Maxine Greene (2003: 99) quite rightly explains that poets sometimes create *spaces* like desires, hope, and expectation. They can address questions of freedom and the call to move beyond, to break with submergence and to transform.

As the data unfolds in this thesis, I will illustrate how the adult learners responded to critical issues identified in the poems. It is against this backdrop that I foreground the purpose of this study and the critical question that will be investigated.

### **1.3 Purpose Of The Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of English literacy curriculum on the lives of female adult learners. The study will develop an understanding of the biographical experiences of the four adult learners' lives, and investigate the impact that the English curriculum had on their lives. By impact, I mean the effect it has on the social, psychological and emotional aspects of the learner.

#### **1.3.1 The Critical Question in this Research**

The critical question in this research is:

What is the impact of adult English literacy curriculum on the lives of female adult learners?

This study aims to:

- Probe more deeply the adult learner's lives
- Identify the learner's needs and aspirations for empowerment as females
- Investigate whether literacy has taken learners beyond the functional skills of reading and writing

- Establish whether the ABET English curriculum is relevant to their needs

The term *relevance* is used within the context of the ABET Policy Document:

*...ABET must seek to equip learners with skills to participate in all forms of economic, social, political and cultural activities (A National Adult Basic Education & Training Framework, 1997: 29).*

In the next section I clarify the parameters of this study and define its scope.

### **1.3.2 Limitations of the Study**

The study will be confined to adult basic education learners from the Asoka Adult Basic Education Co-operative, in Reservoir Hills, Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. Only four female Black (African) adult learners' life histories will be investigated in this thesis. I will analyze only the adult English literacy curriculum because adult learners who attended literacy classes emphasized a need for English literacy. All the respondents were domestic workers. They all hailed from rural areas and lived either at informal settlements in urban areas or with their employers, during the period of this study. The study shall focus on learners who acquire English as an additional language.

I have already used the concepts *literacy* and *curriculum* in my critical question, which have a wide range of meanings. I therefore begin by expounding these concepts. As a traveller I put on my glasses and explain the lens through which I shall view this study.

## 1.4 Words can be Loaded!!!

### 1.4.1 The Concept of Literacy

The concept *literacy* is ambiguous and shrouded with many interpretations. The various definitions will reveal that it is a concept that is still not fully understood. The term *literacy* can be understood at one end of the pendulum as having a very functional, mechanical definition. At the other end, it encompasses both the functional as well as the critical empowering definition. In this thesis I have taken an interpretation, which incorporates both the functional and critical empowering aspects, as well as the fundamental issues of upholding the dignity of any individual. I will use this definition as a guiding principle throughout this thesis. My understanding of the concept *literacy* will be unravelled as the discussion unfolds.

I examine the complexities of the term *literacy* and its various connotations. Baynham (1995), states that literacy is loaded with a cluster of associations and ideologies. He argues that what needs to be done is to problematize literacy, to show that it is not something that can be neatly and easily defined, that any definition is likely to be contested.

There is general consensus that literacy involves the ability to read and to write but that is where the consensus ends. The enigmatic questions asked are: read and write what, in what context, for what purpose, how well and in what language (Hutton, 1992). Fisher and Wrolstad (1986: 72) comment that literacy is sufficiently complex; that one can be literate in one context but illiterate in another, as described in the following text:

*You may read the New York Times with ease but find Finnegan's Wake baffling and incomprehensible. You may interpret the jumble of road signs at the most intimidating freeways with aplomb but be stumped by instruction for putting together a child's story. Even if you possess every one of these diverse forms of literacy you might*



*still be unable to read a trail some animal left in the woods* (Fisher & Wrolstad, 1986: 72.).

Literacy thus, is not just a single ability. Someone may qualify as literate on one particular test but fail on another. The examples cited above illustrate that people read and write for many different reasons, in different contexts. The relevance of literacy varies according to context. The context of being illiterate is far less serious in Zaire than they are in New York (Hutton, 1992). Hutton goes on to describe how farm workers in rural areas in South Africa can function adequately as illiterates compared to a messenger in central Johannesburg, who needs literacy more acutely.

According to Baynham (1995), the definition of literacy must be analysed within its contexts of use. He points out that the definitions of literacy are always ideological, implying ideological perspectives of what literacy is, how it should be taught and who should have access to shape definitions of literacy. He also argues that the definitions of literacy must be context-sensitive, that is, they must be sensitive to the social purposes, demands and processes within which they are constructed.

Steinberg & Suttner (1991: 8) examine UNESCO'S definition of a functionally literate person as:

*...able to engage in all activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his group and community and also for enabling him to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his own and the community's development.*

Steinberg & Suttner (1991) consider this to be a good working definition. They explain that the level of literacy required for "effective functioning" as used in UNESCO's definition, can be widely different, depending on the country, the community and the time. In a rural community it might be enough for people to write their names and letters to family, while in urban communities people need to write, read signs, advertisements and newspapers before they can function

effectively. However, Steinberg & Suttner (1991) question whether functioning effectively within the given society is all that literacy should offer.

Progressive people in the field of literacy have argued that literacy should not only involve the functional skills of reading and writing but it should also include the ability to critically evaluate information, in order to participate effectively in society (Steinberg & Suttner, 1991). At the Dakar education conference in Senegal the following definitions were considered UNESCO (2000):

*A person is literate who can with understanding both read and write short simple statements on his everyday life... A person is functionally literate who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his group and community...*

At the core of literacy is an understanding of the individual's ability to understand printed text and to communicate through print. Contemporary definitions portray literacy in relative rather than absolute terms. They assume that there is no single level of skill or knowledge that qualifies a person as literate but that there are multiple levels and kinds of literacy (e.g., numeracy, technological literacy and computer literacy). In order to have a bearing on real-life situations, definitions of literacy must incorporate skills needed in and out of school contexts and include school-based competencies.

Hutton (1992) explains that the definitions of literacy are much more about what is regarded as possible than what is regarded as ideal. In South Africa, definitions are complicated by the fact that knowledge of a second language, usually English, is as vital as the ability to read and write in an African language. The term *literacy* is sometimes used loosely to include basic competency in English (Hutton, 1992). Harley, Aitchison, Lyster & Land (1996) also state that it is reasonable to assume that for most South Africans, English is not a home language but the dominant language of the future. Steinberg & Suttner (1991) in their clarification of the term *literacy* explain that they use the term *literacy* to mean basic literacy skills in the person's own language and in English. Once the person can speak, read and

write the basics of English, they are functionally literate for the purposes of life in South Africa.

A broader definition was recognised at an International Symposium for Literacy held in 1975 at the 'Persepolis Declaration' of literacy in Iran. A whole new approach to the thinking about literacy was presented. *Literacy* was defined as:

*...not just the process of learning the skills of reading and writing and arithmetic, but a contribution to the liberation of man (sic) and his full development. Thus conceived, literacy creates the condition for the acquisition of a critical consciousness of the society in which man lives and of its aims; it also stimulates initiative and his participation in the creation of projects capable of acting upon the world, of transforming it and of defining the aims of an authentic human development. It should open the way to a mastery of techniques and human relations. Literacy is not an end in itself. It is a fundamental human right (Steinberg & Suttner, 1991: 9).*

For the purposes of this study I do not limit myself to the notion that there is one best or one right definition. Rather I am inclined to take an eclectic understanding of this concept, which seems to be summarized in the above account. This exposition presents literacy not in the strict technical sense of reading and writing but encompasses numerous other skills for the development of human potential such as behaviour and critical knowledge (for example, critical consciousness, participation, action and authentic human development).

I take the view that literacy is not only involved in the functional skills of reading and writing but we need to consider the learner's social uses for literacy, the context in which it is taught and the ideologies that underpin it. Literacy must also involve critical thinking. The main vehicle through which literacy is articulated is the programme or curriculum. This concept is clarified in the following section.

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1.4.2 “Curriculum Will Not Be The Race Course, But The Journey Itself”<sup>11</sup>

**The ‘Curriculum Matrix’**

The curriculum or content of education is at the heart of the educational enterprise (Griffin, 1983). Curriculum plays a pivotal role for an empowering and emancipatory adult education programme. The mind is not a passive mirroring of nature, since we have the ability to actively interpret and transform concepts in ways to make lived experiences meaningful and useful. From this perspective, curriculum will allow students and their teachers to engage in conversations and dialogue to create more creative, complex structures of subject matter in an open system. Curriculum is part of the process and not an end in itself: ‘curriculum will not be the race course, but the journey itself’ (Doll, 1993, xi). In this context Doll (1993) offers his vision of curriculum where everyone has the right to be understood and no one owns the truth, but are equal members of a community of learners. The new conception of educative purpose, planning and evaluation should be open-ended, flexible and focuses on process and not product. I adopt Doll’s (1993) four Rs, ‘rich, recursive, relational and rigorous’ vision for an emancipatory and empowering adult education. The richness refers to curriculum depth, to the multiple possibilities or interpretations. *Recursions*, lies in the heart of a transformative curriculum, one that has no fixed beginning or ending where ending is a new beginning, curriculum segments are arbitrary chunks of opportunities for reflection. Test, portfolios and projects will not be viewed as completion of a task but as a means to explore, discuss and inquire for further development. The curriculum should be eclectic, interpretative and open. *Relations*, are the conditions or situations, which are always changing, the present does not recreate the past although it can be influenced, nor does the present determine the future, yet that too can be influenced. Curriculum needs to be created by the classroom community and not only by textbook authors as the source of all authority. *Rigor* keeps transformative education from falling into a mode that is anti-measurement or non-measurement. Curriculum rigor in this

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<sup>11</sup> Doll, 1993, *A Post Modern Perspective on Curriculum*, pg xi

context is not to close too early or finally on the rightness of an idea but to throw all ideas into various combinations. Rigor means purposely looking for different alternatives, relations and connections. Dialogue between reader and text is a two-way process and grants each a voice. Dialogue means allowing for a range of possibilities from which actualizations appear, it does not mean arbitrariness. The teacher's role could be viewed as transformative (Doll, 1993). In this research I do not take a very parochial, mechanistic, closed view on curriculum as stated in the ABET document (A National Adult Basic Education & Training Framework, 1997).<sup>12</sup> Using Doll's (1993) metaphor of the curriculum matrix, I explain how the curriculum needs to be open-ended and non-deterministic construction. The curriculum matrix is one that is constructed through the action and interaction of the participants; it is not set in advance except in broad and general terms. Like the matrix, the curriculum has no beginning or ending: it does not have boundaries but points of intersections. Thus, it is non-linear and non-sequential but bounded by intersections with webs of meanings. A rich curriculum would have more points of intersections and connections constructed with deeper meaning.

In most adult education literature the term *programme* rather than *curriculum* is used. In this study I use the term *programme* interchangeably with *curriculum*. Through the curriculum or programme, the learners gain a totality of experience as a consequence of attending a particular institution. Without a programme or curriculum, adult education has no vehicle, nothing through which to transmit its messages, meanings and values. My next port of call would lead me to where the problem of adult literacy is focused in this study.

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<sup>12</sup> A learning programme could be a short course that focuses on a very specific area of study, or could be a longer course that might integrate a number of learning areas. According to the outcomes based model, learning programmes should generally bring together a number of unit standards, which could be from different learning areas. A unit standard states the level and range of competence, and what evidence can be used for assessment (A Qualification System and Placement Procedure, 1999: 1.6).

## SECTION B

## 1.5 Literacy Rates: A Gloomy Picture For Women

Table 1.1 Census 2001: Gender by Highest Education Level Recorded By Population Group for Person weighted in South Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2001)

	Black African		Coloured		Indian or Asian		White		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
No schooling	2499401	3342967	167397	178179	24437	42315	66158	68789	2757393	3632250

Cells in Table 1.1 have been randomly adjusted by Statistics South Africa (2001) to avoid the release of confidential data.

According to the census, Statistics 2001 (see Table 1.1 above) a vast majority of South African citizens are illiterate. There are about 6389643 (6,4) million adults who have had no schooling whatsoever. The largest percentage of those who have been excluded from literacy are Black female adults who constitute 52,3%, which account for about 3342967 (3,4) million (see Table above). In South Africa the pattern of illiteracy include those who are most excluded from power, information and wealth. The majority of illiterate adults are poor and Black, with the highest found in rural areas. From the census it can be noted that when compared to all other race groups in the country Black women were by far the most excluded from basic education.

There is a higher percentage of females who are illiterate. The figures quoted show the need for adult education in South Africa and in particular for Black women. I decided to focus on women in view of the fact that one billion adults lack essential competency skills worldwide and the majority of them are women. The challenge for new definitions makes its mark and what becomes imperative is how curriculum developers attempt to promote adult literacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In South Africa, a large percentage of the population, especially marginalized women, lack essential competencies to function effectively in society. This study

will help fill the gaps in providing information on the essential competencies that female learners require to function in a South African society.

Bhola (1994), a renowned authority on ABET, emphasizes that one of the underlying principles of ABET is that education is a fundamental human right. To meet the demands of equity and redress, selective target groups such as rural constituencies and women who have been historically disadvantaged, should be targeted for adult education.

The Department of Education (A National Multi-Year Implementation Plan, 1997: 13) in South Africa has also acknowledged women as part of the target audience with specific needs:

*Disadvantaged women [sic] are women, who have been unable to access or complete primary schooling and who are unemployed or under-employed, and who are over the age of 30 years. Special attention will be placed on women living in rural areas and in squatter settlements...*

Torres (1993: 23) notes that most literacy programmes all over the world have women as the majority. Women in need of adult basic education who predominate in underdeveloped rural areas often have to “struggle with oppression in the workplace, in the home and in broader society”. Wagner (2000) points out that one of the most significant factors affecting literacy rates worldwide is that of gender disparity. The global picture that emerges from illiteracy is the fact that women make up the majority of all illiterate adults. Wagner (2000: 17) predicts that if educational trends do not change dramatically in the next few decades the male/female parity in literacy will not be reached for over a century. Within these global figures lies the fact that 63% of women are illiterate, a proportion which is rising. The rate of increase is largest in Africa where 54% of the adult population is estimated to be illiterate (The International Encyclopedia of Education, 1999).

It must be noted that the principal historical reasons given for the submergence of women’s interests and needs in the adult education field is that education and its systems reflect male thinking and have been designed primarily for the needs of a

dominant socio-economic group in society. Women experience with men the technological advancement and dependence and exploitation of poverty. In addition women are subjected to the cultural and social pressures of being women (Oglesby, 1999: 609). According to the Adult Basic Education Act (2000: 2) the preamble states that it is desirable to:

- *Restructure and transform programmes and centres to respond better to the human resources, economic and development needs of the Republic*
- *Ensure access to adult basic education and training and the workplace by persons who have been marginalized in the past, such as women, the disabled and the disadvantaged*
- *Provide optimal opportunities for adult learning and literacy, the creation of knowledge and development of skills in keeping with international standards of academic and technical quality*
- *Respond to the needs of the Republic and the labour market and of the communities served by the centres*

Policy is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two. However, I briefly respond to the adult education policy in this section. The intention of the above Act is to redress the inequities of the past and improve the education of the marginalized. Whether policy intentions are implemented is a moot point. Policy (Adult Basic Education Act, 2000) makes special mention of giving redress to women by ensuring “access to adult basic and training by persons who have been marginalized in the past, such as women” (see excerpt above) however, reality mirrors something far from what the Education Policy Act (2000) sets out. The South African census figures for 2001 (see Table 1.1) indicate that Black women are by far the most excluded from ABET, (Statistics South Africa, 2001). This figure stands in contradiction to the policy document, which purports to pay particular attention to the needs of marginalized women.

ABET policy (A National Adult Basic & Training Framework, 1997) supports the need to provide optimal opportunities for adult learning and literacy, the creation of knowledge and development of skills, in keeping with international standards of academic and technical quality. ABET policy sets out an ideal, which seems a utopian dream. In this study I wish to investigate how to achieve part of the



utopian dream in providing opportunities for learning and literacy that could improve the creation of knowledge and development of skills required especially for Black female learners who hail from informal settlements.

From the policy document (Adult Basic Education Act, 2000) it is clear that ABET policy responds to the needs of the Republic and the labour market and not of the communities served by the centres. It is also evident that in the South African context the new curriculum policy has been driven to serve the demands of globalization rather than to cater for the individual needs of learners. This study recognizes the demands of globalization and the need to become a part of the global village but it also stresses the needs of learners in the South African context as a primary issue in developing programmes for ABET. However, the neo-liberal policies inherent in globalization have not done much to improve the lot of the poor and the marginalized.

According to (Courtney, 1992: xiii), women are increasing in frequency in the work force and are taking up positions that were once the domain of men. They are also forced to work to supplement the family income. Courtney (1992) asks the following questions: What motivates them to return to the classroom? What are their goals and how do they achieve them? Why do some seem such eager learners whilst others, who are similar to them in many ways, seem not to care? Why do adults learn? I, too, have had similar burning issues and questions that this study hopes to investigate. Not all of the questions can be answered in this thesis but many may be clarified at some point in my methodology, literature review, theoretical considerations and data analysis. I hope to finally arrive at some insights or theoretical conceptions in the final Chapter on adult literacy. When I say *arrive* I do not mean a final destination, as I believe realities are not fixed; they occupy a particular space and time until new knowledge and new conceptions are constructed.

On the issue of motivation, Courtney (1992:3), advances the following reasons why people learn: for cultural enjoyment, to become more useful to the

community, because friends or family urge one, boredom, desire for the company of others, to change, to gain confidence or to meet everyday challenges.

McLaren (1985: 9) adds that women's lives are changing, have changed before and will keep changing in the future. In answering the question as to why women engage in adult education, she examines, *inter alia*, the issues of the women's liberation movement. She asserts that this powerful ideology stressed the need for women's independence and equality as opposed to the 'ideal' of the submissive female. McLaren (1985: 18) examines the experiences of women who are attempting to change their lives through adult education. She states that without an "understanding of women's experiences and aspirations in the field of adult basic education, it will continue to suffer from major misconceptions" (McLaren, 1985: 18). She suggests that a feminist perspective has much to offer in the field of adult education. McLaren (1985) argues that although the majority are women in adult education, the structure and techniques of learning and content of programmes have rarely been aimed specifically at the needs and interests of women. Egbo (2000) adding to this point acknowledges that literature has suggested that for women's voices, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, have been largely ignored.

I will be giving voice to four materially disadvantaged women by using their lived experiences as my main data source. I use the term *materially disadvantaged* because they may be grappling with the ravages of poverty though their spirits are triumphant. Investigating the impact of the English literacy curriculum from the perspective of those who actually live with it, should to some extent, provide a critical lens on viewing this issue.

It is clear that the interest and significance of adult education for women is growing. The feminist perspective is one of the multiple perspectives I use in this thesis so that women's experiences and aspirations can be understood in the field of adult basic education (more of this in Chapter Two). The reasons that motivated my studies as a journey to be explored together with four adult learners will be elucidated in the next section.

From the Nexus search conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council<sup>13</sup> in South Africa, there is some evidence to suggest that there has been little research conducted in KwaZulu-Natal on adult basic education. This study will therefore provide information in a field that has not been given much focus.

### **1.6 Why I Undertook the Journey?**

I have been an adult education facilitator from 1994 to 2001 at Asoka Adult Basic Education Co-operative. AABEC is a non-governmental organization (NGO) that initially conducted its classes at the Asoka Hotel in Reservoir Hills and then moved to Reservoir Hills Secondary School, in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. The organization has provided adult basic education for approximately 100 domestic workers from the surrounding areas and informal settlements. Reservoir Hills is a middle class suburb of mainly Indian residents and also mainly African informal dwellers.

From my inception into adult basic education there have been many claims about what literacy does for the individual. As an adult educator I constantly found that what was being professed in the policy documents was not evidenced in the classroom. I became increasingly reflective of my own teaching practice and the course materials. I felt an increasing desire to enquire whether programme materials were suitable for adult learners and to investigate whether the programmes had any impact on their lives.

From my observations I noted that many learners attended classes without any consistency. Many learners who attended night classes very enthusiastically initially, dropped off after a short stint of approximately six months to a year. Only a few remained consistently through the programme. This led me to question why they attended literacy classes. What motivated them to engage in studies at an older age? What did they hope to achieve? What difference was literacy making to their lives? Was I bringing any meaning to their lives?

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<sup>13</sup> Human Sciences Research Council: is a South African research institution that provides empirical information on various issues.

As a facilitator of the English literacy class, I observed the learners with much interest and found that they struggled with reading especially at the beginning of the lessons. I questioned my teaching methodology and needed to find new approaches to reading. The resource material was not adequate to meet the needs of the learners. I established that in order to meet their needs I had to research and prepare the contents of the lesson, which was time consuming, required a lot of planning and resources. I found that there was a lack of resource material catering specifically for the needs of domestic workers. Tutoring adults made me realize that with limited time at literacy classes, something needed to be offered not only to improve their spoken and written English, but also to offer life skills that could help them in the real world.

The reason for limiting my studies to women is that more women are illiterate in the world than men. I feel strongly about the need to give voice to women who have been oppressed and silenced and hope this research goes some small way in doing so. This is not to say that I am advocating for some women. I do not claim to be able to articulate for the learners. My voice should not overshadow theirs. I therefore use the autobiographical approach as one of my tools so that their voices are heard (more of this in Chapters Four & Five).

I focus my research on what English literacy programmes are taught at adult education classes and the impact they have on learners. In my examination of their biographical experiences, I investigate the impact of literacy on their lived experiences as domestic workers, parents, members of society and families.

This study could contribute to literature by providing a clearer insight into the way adult learners view literacy. It is hoped it will offer insights into the type of programmes relevant to women in ABET, especially domestic workers from the informal settlements. According to the literature, adult basic literacy is under-researched in this country; this study thus hopes to contribute to the body of knowledge in this field.

Rigorous research necessitates grounding in theoretical frameworks that validate its claims. The theoretical frameworks will be discussed briefly in the next section. Chapter Two will offer a more detailed account.

### 1.7 Theoretical Frameworks

The theoretical frameworks used in the study are the feminist, critical, postmodern and the anthropological/socio-linguistic perspectives. I used an eclectic theoretical approach because it allowed me greater latitude to gain deeper understanding of the four adult learners in this research. The theoretical frameworks provide the lens through which this study is guided. I will discuss in detail these frameworks in Chapter Two. I briefly mention these perspectives to show how my research was conducted.

The feminist lens gives me an opportunity to examine the lives of women from a transformative agenda. The ABET policy document (Adult Basic Education Act, 2000) professes government's intention to give redress to marginalized women in terms of ABET. Mackinnon in Code, Mullet and Overall (1988) speak of the feminist perspective as consciousness-raising, and Reinhartz (1992) adds that consciousness-raising enables women to discuss and understand their experiences from their own viewpoints.

I use critical theory to examine the way in which privileged groups have an interest in maintaining the *status quo* to protect their advantages. Subordinate groups, in contrast, have an interest in removing their disabilities. Injustices and inequalities are laid bare. The reason for using critical theory in this research is its claim to be emancipatory. It sets the subordinate groups free (Gibson, 1986: 6). The underpinnings from these theoretical frameworks allowed me to discover the complex realities of each adult learner. From the Freirean perspective, the aim of literacy is conscientization, i.e., making people aware of the structures that oppress them (Steinberg & Suttner, 1991). I used the Freireian approach because it focuses on bringing about the transformation of society and the empowerment of oppressed people through adult literacy programmes.

The anthropological and socio-linguistic perspective helped me as the researcher to take into account how learners actually thought about literacy and how they applied literacy skills in their day-to-day lives. Without deeper insight into how literacy impacts on their lives, it is not possible for providers to offer meaningful education (Kulick & Stroud, 1993).

## SECTION C

### 1.8 Summary and Overview

In Section A, I explained the purpose of this study and how I arrived at my critical questions. My critical question in this research is: What is the impact of English adult literacy curriculum on the lives of female adult learners? This delimitation helped to clarify the parameters of this study. I defined terms used in this study because they have a wide ranging implication both on the international and local scene. I concluded by explaining my position in terms of understanding the concept *literacy* and *curriculum*. I clarified my theoretical underpinning so that my positionality would be understood.

In section B, I briefly looked at ABET policy in South Africa and the need to redress the inequities of the past in relation to women. In this section I also skimmed through the literature on women and literacy, explaining how I arrived at my rationale and provided a brief overview of the theoretical underpinnings of this study. Having given a broad overview of the problem, I focused my lens on the central issues that led to this study.

In Chapter Two I discuss the new policy frameworks in ABET. I explain the National Qualifications Framework and the domain that ABET occupies. The new outcomes based model is reviewed. I survey the literature on ABET to obtain greater insights on how literacy impacts in the lives of female adult learners. As a qualitative researcher I use the life history and the autobiography as my main methodological tools. This is explained in Chapter Four. This research is an impact study, which necessitated gaining the biographical details of the learners

from early childhood to adulthood. It is through their life history interviews and their autobiographies that I was able to gather greater insight into their life worlds. This knowledge was vital in investigating the impact that adult education had on the lives of learners.

In Chapter Five to Nine I analyze the data using my theoretical frameworks as guides for my data analysis. From the mountain of data that I collected certain themes emerged. These themes are encapsulated in Chapters Five to Nine. I used the iterative process in my analysis. There was a constant moving back and forth with data as data presented itself. In the last Chapter I conclude by offering insights, recommendations and implications for further research.

In the next chapter I journey into the realms of literature in order to gain further insights that will guide and inform this study.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

# **TRAVELLING THE INFORMATION HIGHWAY AND BYWAYS**

### **2.1 Orientation**

In Chapter One I explained briefly my theoretical position and why I undertook this study and what I hoped to achieve. In Chapter Two I travel through the realms of the literature highways and byways in search of insights to illuminate the issues that affect the researcher and that which has been researched in relation to my critical question. In section A, I review literature on theoretical conceptions, which provide insights into the ideological, political and economic underpinnings that shape adult literacy. These theoretical frameworks guide my thinking and provide a lens through which my research will be analyzed. Drawn from the critical pedagogical, feminist and anthropological/socio-linguistic perspectives, they provide tools that assist me in investigating the impact of adult literacy on the lives of adult learners. The way these frameworks assist in my investigation into the impact of the adult literacy curriculum will be discussed below. In section B, I travel through literature that will offer greater insight into the impact of English literacy on the lives of female adult learners.

### **SECTION A**

#### **Searching for the Road Maps: Theories to the Rescue**

### **2.2 Introduction**

While attempting to unravel the theoretical conundrum I found that no single theory was able to provide the tools to make sense of the field in ABET. Each theory that I used illuminated only part of the picture. When I used the theories together I began to get a clearer and fuller picture. Therefore I opted to use an eclectic approach in this study. A postmodern lens allowed me the space to use a



compendium of theories. I also found a blurring of the boundaries of the theoretical frameworks, which are all part of the postmodern perspective (Kanpol & McLaren, 1995). The following are some of the theoretical conceptions that undergird my thinking and experiences in adult educational basic literacy practices:

- Critical and Critical Pedagogical theory
- Freirean theory
- Feminist theory
- Anthropological / socio-linguistic theoretical conceptions

There are no watertight compartments in understanding adult literacy (Street, 1993); hence, my theoretical conceptions can also be viewed as literacy approaches. However, in this section I have chosen to use these conceptions as frameworks to understand the theories that guided this research. Gibson (1986: 3) asserts that theory and practice are indivisible, that there is always theory underlying and embedded in any practice. Ainscow (1999: 39) concurs with Gibson (1986) explaining that the relationship between theory and practice as dialectical rather than prescriptive. This means that practice is not always treated as dependent on theory to tell it what to do. However, both theory and practice confront and question one another in an ongoing dialogue. I support the claims that theory and practice have an ongoing dialogue and that practice is embedded in some underlying “theoretical presumptions”. Practice should not be viewed as a separate entity but in an interdependent and interrelated, dialectical relationship into theory. In this study, I take Ainscow’s (1999) position in that theory and practice are not dependent on each other but that both confront and question one another in an ongoing dialogue. The theoretical frameworks offer me insight into educational practices especially of oppressed disadvantaged females, which this study examines. There are subtle nuances to the principles underlying these theoretical conceptions that I will explain in the discussion that follows.

The reason for arranging the theoretical conceptions in the sequence used is that each one exposes a different dimension to the conception of adult literacy. I use the metaphor of the traveller on a journey seeking new frontiers to explain how each of the theoretical conceptions illuminates its unique dimension, which adds to the richness of the traveller's journey in her quest for understanding. The traveller visits small towns and quaint villages, which cannot represent the whole country, yet it is part of the country. When the English poet, John Donne, said, "No man is an island entire in itself" he used the metaphor to explain the interconnectedness of life and the universe. But this interconnectedness does not mean that the whole is the sum of its parts. That is the old dictum; the new dictum according to postmodernism is that the whole is more than the sum of its parts (Doll, 1993). In the same way each approach offers a unique dimension, yet lacks some elements which when combined give a greater understanding of literacy practice. This helps elucidate my reasons for adopting an eclectic theoretical approach.

Kanpol & McLaren (1995: 151) differentiate between a postmodern lens as one that focuses on the relationship of the self to society whilst a critical postmodern lens deconstructs race, class, sex, gender differences and other power relations. I have used theories to highlight the diverse voices and concerns of people. Among the missing voices in adult education literature are women, people of colour, people from different classes and the poor. Critical postmodernists view the theories as open systems, transformative, with change and instability a buzzword in their essence. The open systems need challenges, mistakes, disruptions, chaos, which are a *sine qua non* of the transformative process, unlike closed systems, which are mechanistic, have cause and effect and find disruptive qualities too decentring (Doll, 1993). In an empowering and emancipatory open system, disruptions and the "chaotic mess" are looked upon as challenges to be transformed.

### 2.3 “The Postmodern Paradigm is like the American Freeway or British Motor Ways always under Construction”<sup>14</sup>

The critical postmodern paradigm posits that individuals are more than the product of historical and social forces that are controlled by the dominant classes and are further reproduced through the socializing forces such as family, state, politics and school. Peoples’ voices are shaped through their culture and their relationship to power. I trail the plains with full knowledge of the paradoxes of postmodernism. I do not claim that researching through such a lens is utopian. Just as the true search for personal authenticity, which is part of postmodernism can enhance self-development, it can easily become self-indulgence (Hargreaves, 1995: 72). In this case the self can become narcissistic with the emphasis on teacher’s stories, teacher’s narratives and the teacher’s lives. Hargreaves (1995) warns that such preoccupation with the personal, which is a chronic condition with postmodernism, can lead to the neglect of the social and political aspects.

### 2.4 Critical Theory

#### 2.4.1 Paradox of Power: Power Liberates & Power Oppresses

I use critical theory to question taken-for-granted assumptions of familiar beliefs, conventional practices, ideas and ideals. In critical theory the prime characteristic is its emancipatory endeavour, which enables learners to gain control over their own lives and challenge many practices, ideas and ideals. It criticizes social malformation, inequalities and injustices and is committed to transformation.

Social fact is value-free, language is always loaded, and objectivity depends where you happen to be standing in the social world. Privileged groups have an interest in maintaining the *status quo* to protect their advantage (Gibson, 1986: 2). Critical pedagogy evolved out of a yearning to give shape to the theoretical

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<sup>14</sup>Hargreaves A, 1995, Changing Teachers Changing Times, pg 71 Redwood Books, Great Britain

landscape of radical principles, beliefs and practices that contributed to emancipatory ideals (Darder, Baltodano & Torres, 2003).

I explain how a particular gender, race, language and culture are given dominance, one over another and the consequences these have. The term *ideology* has a wide range of meanings, through which critical theory investigates the relationships of individuals and society. McLaren (2003a: 79) refers to ideology as a way of viewing the world with complex types of social practices, rituals and representations that one tends to accept as natural and common sense. It can signify beliefs or false beliefs, values, passions, systems, political dogma, styles of thought or feelings, ideas or ideal. Critical theorists do not reserve *ideology* to describe major systems of political, religious or social beliefs. Ideology examines the common sense assumption and *everyday language* that often serves to maintain certain interest groups at the expense of others. Critical theory shows us how common sense distorts true interest and gender injustices. It prevents groups and individuals from controlling their lives. Critical theory argues that such common sense beliefs are not natural and that this is the first step towards enlightenment and emancipation (Gibson, 1986). Thus critical theory offers me another lens to unpack the central issues from my critical question, namely, language, power and gender.

In South Africa, the previous South African government prevented Black South Africans from receiving basic adult education, which had dire consequences for the nation. The adult learners in this research are all Black females who experienced the ravages of the apartheid system of government. This system of Government with White Nationalist<sup>15</sup> rule meant that Whites were the dominant ruling class and Blacks<sup>16</sup> were subordinate to them. The education system during the apartheid years (pre-1994) was legislated such that Black education received

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<sup>15</sup> White Nationalist rule: prior to 1994 in South Africa, during the previous apartheid Government, the country was governed only by a White government, with only a White electorate

<sup>16</sup>Blacks: during the apartheid era when the government referred to Blacks they meant Africans because they were the one's most excluded and most discriminated against in all facets of life.

the least amount of income per learner (Christie, 1985). The psychological, emotional baggage of the influence of the 'dominant class' over their psyche and identity is significant. Critical theory explains the various influences that impact on adult learners' lives. McLaren (2003a: 76) sees hegemony as the domination of one social class over others and how that process is affected through ideology. Hegemony is the condition where subordinates believe something to be true or common sense when in fact that 'common sense' is against their own best interests. In this 'active consent', which shows the effectiveness of hegemony, subordinates accept their inferior position as 'natural'. Critical pedagogy evolved out of a yearning to give shape to the theoretical landscape of radical principles, beliefs and practices that contributed to emancipatory ideals (Darder, Baltodano & Torres, 2003). Gramsci and Foucault (in Darder, Baltodano & Torres, 2003) extended the existing understanding of power and its impact on the construction of knowledge. Gramsci did not consider hegemony to be a neat, clean act of one-dimensional reproduction but a process of what he termed contradictory consciousness. Whilst for Foucault, power did not represent a static entity but an active process constantly at work on our bodies, relationship, sexuality and the way we construct knowledge and meaning in the world. Power for Foucault was not conceptualized solely within the context of domination but also in the context of creative resistance. A critical understanding of students' resistance within the classroom has opened the doors to better understanding power relations within the context of teaching practice.

Bourdieu's (in Gibson, 1986: 55) notion of symbolic violence and cultural capital is closely related to Gramsci's concept of hegemony. Symbolic violence refers to the subtle process whereby subordinate classes, i.e., the working classes, come to take as 'common sense' ideas and practices that are actually against their own best interests. That subtle process is culture, which includes beliefs, knowledge, customs, language and behaviour. For Bourdieu this represents symbolic power, which is used by schools as necessary and inevitable, rather than as man-made and changeable. Hence, working class learners find their home culture devalued and disconfirmed, but come to accept that rejection as legitimate whilst the

dominant culture represents itself as 'natural'. By using critical theory I am able to examine the way in which privileged groups have an interest in maintaining the *status quo* to protect their advantages. Subordinate groups in contrast have an interest in change to remove their injustices. Injustices and inequalities are laid bare. Critical theory claims to be *emancipatory* and to set subordinate groups free.

According to Gibson (1986), critical theorists emphasize that understanding can come about through self-reflection. It is important that as researcher and adult educator, I become reflective of my teaching practice. The self-reflection must be seen as a consciousness-raising exercise where the educator and the learners are in a dialogic relationship that could lead learners to become more aware of their actual conditions and to emancipatory action.

Critical theory points to the need to develop an equal sensitivity to certain aspects of culture. These include working class students, Blacks and women's need to affirm their own histories through the use of a set of language, set of social relations and knowledge that critically reconstructs and dignifies the cultural experiences that make up the tissue, texture and history of their daily life (Giroux, 2003: 52).

### 2.5 Freirean Theoretical Perspective

#### 2.5.1 'Education is Suffering from Narration Sickness'<sup>17</sup>

Paulo Freire was considered by many to be the most influential educational philosopher in the development of critical pedagogy ( Darder, Baltodano & Torres ,2003). Because of his influence on critical pedagogy and particularly adult literacy I present the Freireian approach, which focuses on bringing about transformation of society and the empowerment of people through adult literacy

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<sup>17</sup> Education is Suffering From Narration Sickness: the line is borrowed from Freire, P, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in Darder *et al*, 2003 *The Critical Pedagogy Reader*, Routledge, Falmer, New York.

programmes. Literacy *per se* will not be able to bring about transformation of society. Freire's theoretical premise thus seems a little utopian. For transformation of society to take place it would require far more than just literacy development. However, I present some Freirean principles that have a basis for adult literacy, showing how Freire's theory can be of value in the South African context in this study.

Freire's literacy work in Brazil in the early 1960s led him to develop new ways of doing literacy work, which he called the conscientization method. Freire believed that the aim of literacy was conscientization, i.e. making people aware of the structures that oppress them (Steinberg & Suttner, 1991). The narration sickness that Freire (in Darder *et al*, 2003: 57) refers to is what educators 'fill' learners with, the contents of her or his narration. Such content, according to Freire (2003) are detached from reality and disconnected. Words are emptied of their concreteness and become "hollow, alienating verbosity" (Freire, 2003: 57). A characteristic of this narrative education is the "sonority of words". The words that adult learners use should be from their own their own local language or from their own frame of reference. In a sense they should be about their life, culture and the context from which they have come. The local language refer to the various "indigenous" languages used by particular communities which have their own social norms, culture, politics and other facets of life which maybe different from the dominant language of the country. It must be noted that language is a crucial aspect in each of the theoretical frameworks presented. Because it requires a detailed discussion and is a part of my critical question, I focus specific attention on this issue later. Freire (2003:59) asserts that the oppressed are not 'marginals', who live on the 'outside' of society. They are in fact 'inside' the structure, which made them 'beings for others'. The answer is not to 'integrate' the oppressed into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become beings for themselves.

Freire's (2003) central premise is that education is not neutral, whether it occurs in the classroom or in a community. The interaction between the teacher and

learner does not take place in a vacuum. Learners bring with them their cultural expectations, life experiences of social discrimination and life pressures. Education starts from the experiences of people. Freire challenges men and women who are becoming literate to take ownership of the written code and to conscientize themselves. The way in which reading and writing is taught can be used either to domesticate people or to liberate them. The term *to domesticate* refers to education that makes individuals conformist and docile. Critical pedagogy claims to liberate people, to make them critical thinkers and to empower them to challenge the world.

Learners could either accept the world as it is or lead others to challenge the world. For literacy to be a force for liberation, the work has to follow certain principles. The content of the lessons has to be relevant to people's lives. The lessons need to deal with the concerns that people have in their everyday lives. Freire's method rejects learning of parochial phrases without relating them to everyday life. Literacy method was designed not as an end in itself but as part of the larger goal of conscientizing the Brazilian peasants so that they could also read the world and connect the world with the word.

Freire (1998a) believed that when oppressed people talk and write about their own lives they begin to value their opinions, which gives them confidence. He used the problem posing approach in literacy to create dialogue and pictures to introduce problem situations into lessons. The pictures formed the basis of discussion and then for learning to read through what he called "generative" words. He argued that literacy is not a mechanical skill that people accept. The wide range of definitions I cited in Chapter One and the position I have taken resonates with the Freirean theoretical framework. The main task of literacy and adult education is to bring about a process of critical consciousness that leads to action and change. Instead of rote learning of the alphabet and spelling, Freirean programmes use a process of critical reflection through discussion and conscientization (Steinberg & Suttner, 1991).



According to Freire (1998c) the basic educational process through conscientization is called dialogue. Through dialogue the traditional role and function of the teacher is greatly transformed. The teacher who was once seen as the grandmaster and purveyor of all knowledge and the learner with no knowledge does not exist. The teacher is no longer seen as the custodian of all knowledge. Instead, the teacher participates with the group in a two-way dialogue with learners. Hence, learners will be a part of the co-construction of knowledge.

What is lacking in this theoretical position is that one is not given deeper insight into how literacy impacts on their lives. Freirean techniques are aimed at teaching basic literacy to people whose own language is Portuguese; however, they are not always suitable when people are learning to be literate in a second or new language. Engaging in dialogue requires basic communication skills. Hence, there is the need to have basic communication before engaging in dialogue. The conscientization method makes high demands on educators who need to be highly skilled and flexible. In South Africa there is a problem to recruit especially trained and qualified educators in ABET. Presently many adult educators are also day-school teachers teaching at public Government schools. One needs to ask, is that the ideal situation? Are day-school teachers necessarily qualified to teach adult education? According to a Houghton, & Aitchison (1999: 48):

*Eighty percent of the tutors at the centres are day-school teachers... Ideally, in line with national policy, the Sub-directorate would like to phase out these teachers, but to take that route implies protracted labour relations negotiations and, because of budget delays and constraints, this is not an easy option.*

Freire accuses some educators of refusing to deal with issues of class privilege when they say they need to empower learners. They reduce their pedagogy to a form of middle class narcissism (Freire, 1998c). Educators who indulge in their own voice do not enable oppressed students to empower themselves. He asserts that educators who proclaim the need to empower students often strengthen their own privileged positions. He emphasizes liberation from oppression as the central reason for engaging in literacy work, believing that his approach to literacy would

bring about these goals. Freire's theory that literacy can bring about these goals is indeed an idealistic one, which literacy educators can work towards but cannot easily achieve. His comment is significant to this study as many disadvantaged oppressed learners who attend adult literacy classes need to be taught according to the principles of adult education and not according to the educator's privileged voice proclaiming to empower learners.

The Black female adult learners in this study have suffered oppression under the previous South African government and Freire's Brazilian learners were also from disadvantaged backgrounds. The Brazilian learners used the Freirean theoretical approach to overcome their oppression and liberate themselves. In a transforming South African society, the Black oppressed people seek redress to attain human liberation. In this study I use the Freirean conceptual framework to understand how literacy can be used to conscientize, empower and liberate the individual and move towards transforming society. The features that will be of particular value to this study are as follows:

- *Making adult learners aware of the structures that oppress them*
- *Challenging learners to understand that they are themselves the makers of culture, leading them to learn the meaning of culture*
- *Showing learners that their oppression and lower status is a result of economic, political and ideological contexts in which they live and not by divine order*
- *Making imperative that learners begin with their home language and then proceed with any other language that they need*
- *Ensuring, teaching-learning situation is a two way dialogue between educator and learner*
- *Recognizing prior learning (Steinberg & Suttner, 1991; Freire, 1998a, 2003).*

The Freirean conceptual framework is a powerful force for developing a participatory democracy in South Africa, though literacy alone does not liberate people:

*Adult education, no matter how radical it is, cannot change society (Steinberg & Suttner, 1991: 25).*

Critical theory also examines the issues of gender, which I present in the next section. Females as well as those not from the dominant culture are born into language thus they have little choice in what they speak. They are also born into history, society and ideology. Therefore beliefs and 'common sense' were largely 'given' to them by society. For example, if a girl's 'common sense' tells her that she is 'naturally' inferior to boys, she is in the grip of ideology. In order to understand the grip of such ideology one cannot blame the victim but to use various strategies to create awareness for their liberation. The various theories that I use in this study explore different methods with slight nuances to achieve similar goals. Feminist theory as located within this study demonstrates how women and in particular Black women in South Africa have been oppressed and marginalized. In both feminist and critical theory, education is used as a tool to raise the level of consciousness of the oppressed so that they can be empowered and emancipated.

### 2.6 Why A Black Feminist Perspective?

I introduce this Chapter by reiterating the dearth of research in the field of female adult literacy and the need for empirical research. The leading theorists who influenced the development of critical theory and critical pedagogy have all been men, with the exception of Maxine Greene (Darder *et al*, 2003). In critical theory and critical pedagogy, women's experiences are not interrogated strongly. I thus use the feminist theoretical framework so that I can engage forthrightly on female experiences and knowledge production. I am acutely aware that feminist critical theory can lapse into a parochial (Darder *et al*, 2003), sectarian discourse; however, I do not position myself exclusively in a feminist theoretical framework but adopt an eclectic model.

In this study the adult learners are all Black female learners who have suffered oppression from the previous South African government. To illustrate the feminist perspective in this study I will draw from literature sources the experiences of women who have been long been over-looked, repressed, ignored or denigrated. It

is in feminist philosophy that women's experiences are highlighted and used as material for philosophical discussion (Code, Mullet & Overall, 1988).

The Personal Narratives Group (1989) explains how feminist philosophers are in the process of understanding some of the complex and subtle ways in which socially constructed institutions and theories have contributed to the invisibility of women and hence to the inaudibility of women. Feminist theory emerges and responds to the lives of women (The Personal Narratives Group, 1989: 4). Feminist theory is grounded in women's lives and aims to analyze the role and meaning of gender in those lives in society. Life histories and autobiographical writing are essential primary sources for feminist theory. Feminist philosophy realizes that there is a need for new ways of thinking and it is important to find these ways instead of trying to accommodate women by simply making semantic changes such as 'he' and 'man' to 'she' and 'woman', which cannot give redress to women's concerns. It is imperative to give redress to women's experiences through a feminist perspective of consciousness-raising, which can be transformative. Reinharz (1992) clarifies the principles of consciousness-raising as enabling women to discuss and understand their experiences from their own viewpoints. Hence, consciousness-raising can be defined as a political, therapeutic or educational activity. According Weiner (1994) radical feminism:

*...is that of the 'universal oppression of women'? It necessarily follows that if all men oppress women, women are the oppressed class, though there are some disagreements about how patriarchal relations were/are created and sustained. Consciousness-raising can be defined as a political, therapeutic or educational activity (Weiner, 1994: 55).*

In order to be aware of the effects of male domination, women have to undergo a process of women-focused re-education, which is known as consciousness-raising. This consciousness-raising is a means of education for women sharing information about female experience.

Weiner (1994) stresses that the most important challenge to radical feminism comes from Black feminism which criticizes not only the White patriarchal

society for oppressing Black women thrice over on the basis of sex, colour and class but also the oppressive nature of the White women's movement which had glossed over economic and social differences between women in its attempt to articulate authentic female experiences. Carby (1994) argues that the concept of 'patriarchy' has different meaning for Black women:

*We can point to no single source of our oppression. When White feminists emphasize patriarchy alone, we want to redefine the term and make it a more complex concept. Racism ensures that Black men do not have the same relations to patriarchal/capitalist hierarchies as White men (in Weiner, 1994:58).*

As a South African Black I identify with Black British feminist experiences. Brah and Minha (1994) present their feminist position as follows:

*We start from the position that any discussion [of education] ... must be understood in the context of the complex social and historical processes, which account for the subordination of black groups in British society. Social relations between white and black groups in Britain today are set against a background of colonialism and imperialism (in Weiner, 1994: 59).*

What is of major concern to the British Black feminist is the exploitation and unjust treatment of women. South African Black women undergo triple oppression first in their home, then in the work place and society (ANC Newsletter, 1993).

According to Weiner (1994), it is important for the researcher to position herself or himself within educational discourse and to promote a critical awareness. My position in this research will be discussed in my research methodology Chapter Four.

As I travel through the literature it becomes essential to understand how critical theory, critical pedagogy and feminism intersect. The boundaries are sometimes blurred as they deal with similar issues with nuances in meaning. The next step in my journey through the literature is the anthropological and socio-linguistic perspectives on literacy. These perspectives shed some light on how literacy is

practised in various countries. There has been a lack of critical postmodern critique in adult education (Flannery, 1995) and these perspectives offer views on the new approaches.

## **2.7 The Anthropological and Socio-Linguistic Perspectives**

In my introduction to this section I outlined that theory and practice are viewed as confronting each other and not as separate entities. It is within such a framework that I present the last perspective, which reveals much about perspectives of literacy from many countries. The researchers in this field try to investigate through ethnographic study how literacy is used in different contexts, for different purposes and the consequences literacy has on the adult learners' own lives. Street (1993) argues that the field of literacy has expanded. There is a:

*...new more anthropological and cross-cultural framework has been developed to replace those of the previous era, in which psychologistic and culturally narrow approaches predominated ( Street , 1993: 1).*

I believe that this theoretical perspective, which takes into account the adult learners' psychological, cultural and personal views on literacy, would be able to make a meaningful contribution to adult literacy. It also points out the ideological imperatives involved in shaping adult literacy. Using this theoretical perspective I wish to investigate how literacy is given meaning within the social practice of society and how literacy is closely related to its actual uses and is specific to the cultural context.

Kulick & Stroud (1993) explain that previous researchers failed to take into account how learners actually thought about literacy and how they applied literacy skills in their day-to-day lives. Without deeper insight into how literacy impacts on learners' lives it is not possible for providers to offer meaningful education.

Street (1993) through his ideological model of literacy, explains that there is no neutrality in education. But a distribution of power and authority, which has consequences for the acquisition and meaning of the institutions in which it is embedded, that is, how and why it is used in a particular context. Literacy is then seen as ideological: how and what is taught reflect the social structure and reflections of power within society. What is taught could depend on the dominant language/culture that prevails in society. The various adult literacy institutions are vested with different kinds of authority and power, which could subordinate learners to support the needs and interests of the dominant class or their own vested interests. There are various types of adult literacy classes operating, for example, in religious institutions, industries, political organizations, government institutions and social institutions. Education from this perspective can be seen as a form of social control. Street's (1993) view, as articulated above, falls within the critical perspective.

Through the anthropological and socio-linguistic perspective I will narrow my lens by using Street's (1993) ideological model to demonstrate how the power of politics in literacy can reflect on practice and the power of the oppression of women can place a double bind for women to act upon their desire for change. To do this I will use Kathleen Rockhill's (1993) experience of Hispanic immigrant women in the United States of America (USA). The dominant language in the USA is English. Here a certain kind of cultural capital,<sup>18</sup> that of the dominant culture, is confirmed, legitimized and reproduced. For the Hispanic immigrant women, English is their second language. There are many different literacies in the Hispanic community. According to Rockhill (1993), multiple literacies have different dialects within the same language. These dialects are embedded in many communicative patterns that have different cultural meanings as well as different language structures. Rockhill (1993) maintains that the mainstream culture differs from and is invested with more power than those in the community and the home.

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<sup>18</sup>The English language gains what Bourdieu in Gibson (1986) calls 'cultural capital': the concept cultural capital means the notion of everyone possessing some form of language, meaning, thought, behavioural styles or values.

Rockhill (1993) goes on to argue that often all learners are not treated the same. Literacy is established as a measurable thing, a skill, or commodity that can be acquired in literacy programmes. Literacy is often recognized only in terms of the dominant language and culture. Even though individuals are literate in other languages these are not given cultural capital. The preceding discussion demonstrates how power relations can affect the powerless, oppressed women in the classroom. The following quote clearly affirms the point made:

*In expressing his concern on the rate of illiteracy in America, the director of the Mayor's Committee in Philadelphia made the following statements on adult literacy: "Frightening because adult illiteracy costs billions ...Frightening because it is embedded in the social landscape of crime, drug abuse and hopelessness in a land of plenty...But frightening, too, because of the debilitating effect of illiteracy has on our ideals of citizenship and liberty. Is it any wonder that with one of five adults unable to fully read a newspaper that voter turnout has steadily fallen to record low? (New York Times in Rockhill, 1993: 157).*

This quotation expresses the underlying political reasons as to why literacy should be deemed necessary. America, which is a first world country, where everything is plentiful, cannot be seen as having illiterates. The questions one should ask are: Illiterate from whose perspective? Are other literacies given recognition when the claim is made of being illiterate? To be literate in the USA, does that mean to be literate in the dominant language and culture of that country? As a politician the mayor's comments on the need to have adults literate because voter turnout was poor indicates vested interests in promoting adult literacy. Literacy is treated as though it is outside the social, political relations and ideological practices in which it is embedded, when paradoxically it is situated within those practices.

According to Rockhill (1993), Hispanic women experience a struggle for power on the broader sphere, i.e. against the dominant culture, but there is also a struggle for voice in their own personal lives. They need to liberate themselves from female oppression at home. Rockhill's (1993) study of literacy development among Hispanic woman showed the following:

- Literacy is embedded in power relationships in everyday life



- It is socially constructed
- It is ideological and has cultural significance

This study draws many parallels to Rockhill's where the women are Black, oppressed and feel the need to study English, which is their second language. However, in South Africa, English is not compulsory according to statements made in the Language in Education policy(1999). However, some researchers have suggested the need for English to be part of the South African ABET curriculum. In the next example I demonstrate how literacy is situated within the social practice of society, is closely related to its actual uses and is specific to the cultural context.

### 2.7.1 Literacy: Relationship to its Actual Uses and Cultural Context

Scribner & Cole (1981) conducted extensive research in Sierra Leone in North-western Liberia on literacy practices of the Vai people. Scribner & Cole (1981) assert that:

*Literacy does not simply mean knowing how to read and write a particular script but applying this knowledge for specific purposes in specific contexts of use (Scribner & Cole, 1981: 236).*

The Vai people had access to three scripts, an indigenous Vai script, the Quranic script and the English alphabet. Many Vai people are multiliterate in, Vai, Arabic, and English. Although they are multiliterate, literacy rarely leads to the acquisition of new bodies of knowledge. Scribner & Cole (1981) point out that unlike industrial countries the meaning and uses it has among the Vai had been related to the cultural and social context.

The Vai people have developed diversified uses of writing, which are based on pragmatic, ideological and intellectual factors and these sustain literacy. Peers and family informally taught Vai script writing and its purpose was pragmatic, mainly for personal letters and keeping of sales. Scribner and Cole (1981) concluded that Vai script literacy was no vehicle for introducing a new way of life. They called it

literacy without education because it did not open new bodies of knowledge, did not lead to growth in new intellectual disciplines and did not cause any social change. Literacy needs to be critical, to challenge “new ways of thinking about major life problems” (Scribner & Cole, 1981: 239). I differ from Scribner & Coles’s (1981) view because I believe it is possible to use language for functional purposes with critical consciousness. Personal writing of letters can be self-reflective and offer scope for critical consciousness. The Vai script assisted learners to keep records of sales. This could have contributed to some rudimentary accounting practice, assisting learners on acquiring knowledge on profits, losses, auditing books and could have given them life skills in entrepreneurship.

Quranic literacy was a vehicle to learn to read and recite from the Quran. The method of teaching was mainly recitation with little explanation of the texts being read. Religious ideological practice seemed to be at the heart of learning the Quran.

English literacy was used for its intellectual factors as well as its cultural capital and was taught formally. It was the official language of commerce and government affairs and was given much recognition in society, as “*it was important that every town have at least one literate person in English to act as town clerk for purposes of dealing with government*”(Scribner & Cole,1981:70). English youngsters attending school achieved a status of ‘being schooled’.

Scribner & Cole’s (1981) research suggests that literacy is culturally organized systems of skills and values learned in a specific setting. Castell, Luke & Egan (1986) explain how the context in which literacy is taught is significant because it has an impact on the cognitive possession of skills and the uses to which they can be put. Literacy is taught for various purposes, as Scribner & Cole’s (1981) research indicated. Each type is taught in a different context and for a different purpose, which affects the level to which literacy skills are acquired. Baynham (1995), analyzing Scribner & Cole’s research, explains why it is important for

literacy to be a purposeful activity in social interaction. He says literacy needs to be understood in terms of the social power relations that are operating and the values and ideologies, which could be expressed implicitly or explicitly.

The anthropological and socio-linguistic perspective clearly demonstrates the need for me as a researcher to take into an account of how learners actually thought about literacy and how they applied it in their everyday lives. The deeper insight to the adult female domestic learners' lives will help provide information on how literacy impacts on them. The examples I have cited have much significance for this study because they illustrate the impact of English literacy on adult learners.

Theory and practice work hand in glove. Hence, I present practice not as a separate entity but as part of theory. In the next section I examine literature that will reveal insights into the practical issues that affect adult learners when acquiring literacy.

## **SECTION B**

### **2.8 Introduction**

Critical pedagogy places strong emphasis on human interaction so that theory is not cut off from practice to become an abstraction or simple verbalism. Praxis is an authentic union of theory and practice. It is within this context that I present my literature review on practice. In an ABET programme the adult educator plays a significant role in the teaching and learning situation. Therefore I begin with the role of the adult educator.

### **2.9 The Role of the Teacher**

The educator's race, gender and economic status have a bearing on the power relations between the teacher and adult learner. The teacher's identity plays a significant point in determining the role of the educator.

### 2.9.1 Teacher Identity

The way the adult educator positions herself or himself to the learner will determine the kind of relationship that develops and the type of teaching-learning situation that will prevail. The educator's identity, the 'who am I', plays a significant role in determining the kind of interaction in which the educator engages with the learner. Therefore the teachers and the learners, race, gender, class, socio-economic factors and language, will affect the teaching-learning scenario.

Freire (1998c) proposes the term *facilitator* rather than *teacher* and sometimes frowns upon the very use of the word *teacher*. To him the title *teacher* connotes authority and power, while the term *facilitator* shows more empathy. Others like Draper & Stein (1989), Bhola (1994) and Rogers (1994b) are comfortable with the title *literacy teacher* or *adult educator*. Bhola (1994) explains that the *literacy teacher* is the most important person in the programme. If the *literacy teacher* does the task well then she/he will be an agent of community development and there will be cultural change and renewal. Learners should be in control of deciding what to learn and how to learn. The *teacher* should be a *facilitator*, not a director. With control comes responsibility. Greater responsibility for learning must be shifted to the learners themselves. Bhola (1994) does concede that in real life these suggestions can be found to be impractical because adult learners may have to be coerced into coming to classes. Thus the methodological principles where learners should be in control of their learning, deciding what to learn, when and how, must be kept in mind as an ideal to be achieved. Freire (1998c) espouses similar values when he challenges learners to understand that they are themselves the makers of culture.

### 2.9.2 Cultural Diversity

Draper & Stein (1989) in their text, *The Craft of Teaching Adults* explain why the teacher, who wishes to be sensitive to the cultural diversity of the learners within

the classroom, must not only be aware of her/his own culture but also have knowledge and understanding of the similarities and differences of others. It is important for adult educators to be aware that culture does impact on one's identity, behaviour, values and learning. Cultural identity could enhance literally any content, yet classroom cultural differences are rarely considered as a resource. Dadzie (1993) contends that Black staff and students and local communities are an invaluable asset yet they are often an overlooked resource. Disadvantaged adult learners have many unique skills: they could provide mother tongue advice, demonstrate traditional handicraft or perform traditional music or poetry. She stresses that this resource ought to be encouraged and Black ethnic cultural identity should be positively reflected in the content of the curriculum. According to Dadzie (1993), an institution cannot be expected to be taken seriously if it publicly declares its commitment to anti-racism, yet fails to reflect this commitment in the make-up of its staff and the contents of its curriculum.

### 2.9.3 Empathy /Ubuntu<sup>19</sup>

Rogers (1994b) explains how friendliness is important, but it only reduces part of their anxieties. Therefore it becomes important for the facilitator to reward learners when they get something right, to see that everybody is drawn into the discussion and to draw up tasks where it is possible for everyone to get something right. Rogers(1994b) also warns that facilitators could go to the other extreme of becoming over friendly that little learning takes place. From educational research, Rogers(1994b) cites the following as being the characteristics of a good effective adult facilitator:

- *A warm personality – ability to show approval and acceptance of students*
- *Social skills: ability to weld the group together and control it without dominating it*
- *'Indirect' manner of teaching which generates and uses learner ideas*  
*Organizing ability so that resources are booked, administration is smoothly handled*

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<sup>19</sup> Ubuntu: the word has an IsiZulu derivation that accords all fellow human being dignity and respect

- *Skill in spotting and resolving learner problems*
- *Enthusiasm – for instance an animated demeanor, plenty of eye contact and varied voice inflection (Rogers, 1994b)*

Wlodkowski (1985) stresses that it is important to create components in the learning environment that tells learners that they are accepted and respected participating members of the group. It therefore becomes imperative for facilitators to learn and use the names of the adults during the lesson. People like to be addressed by their names. It makes them feel acknowledged and gives them a sense of importance. It is also important for learners to know one another's names. The facilitator must offer opportunities for responsible attainment of knowledge skills and learning goals that relate to the esteem needs of the learners. According to Wlodkowski (1985) this ought to be the facilitator's number one priority because it improves self-esteem. The facilitator can do this by planning activities that allow learners to share and publicly display their projects and skills, which will motivate them in their learning tasks. Public attention and evaluation will increase their self-esteem. Some methods and activities for this strategy are as follows: a publication of a collection of the learners' works in a course, book or magazine; photographs; a collection of learners' projects; open-house activities that invite wider community participation; observation, discussion, role playing and simulation; public displays on tables, walls and bulletin boards; oral presentations and classroom demonstrations.

### **2.9.4 Educator 'Positioning' can it Create Power Relations?**

The seating arrangements of adult learners are very important. If adults are seated as in the classroom context with rows of desks and the teacher in front, this can sometimes be intimidating. It is better to have a discussion where learners are seated in a circular manner and the facilitator is part of the group as one of the members and not an authoritarian figure listening to the group. It is important for learners to be encouraged from the beginning to question and debate what they read. There is no one correct methodology in adult literacy. Bholá (1979) recognizes the importance of instructional settings and explains; that what is

learned and how it is learned, is influenced considerably by where it is learned. To facilitate discussion it would be better for learners to be seated in a semi-circle than in rows. Rogers (1994) finds where and how learners sit has enormous influence on how they interact and suggests the following:

- Keep the space between chairs to a minimum
- Remove redundant chairs
- Establish 'eyelines'
- Let everyone be able to see everyone else without having to twist or turn
- Think carefully about where you are going to seat yourself

Wlodkowski (1985) adds another dimension to the seating arrangement by stating that it could be either in a circle or a V-shape. For him this gives value and respect to the adult learner because everyone can see and hear.

From a critical theoretical perspective the seating arrangements can demonstrate how power relations can be perpetuated in the classroom. The formal seating arrangements in rows may lend itself to uneven power distribution and authority where the facilitator seems to hold greater power.

The adult educator uses the programme to translate the desired outcomes outlined in policy into achievable classroom outcomes. In the next section I discuss the issues involved in adult literacy programmes with particular emphasis on programmes for women.

### **2.10 Learner Motivation**

Learner motivation is one of the key elements in any literacy programme because a major problem consistently mentioned by service providers and policy makers is that participation levels drop off rapidly after the first few weeks or months of the programme. The reasons cited for this problem are varied: inadequate programme quality; lack of time; and poor quality textbooks and pedagogy (Wagner, 2000: 19). I isolate the importance of programme quality in motivating learners to participate in ABET.

**2.11 Curriculum According to the Needs of the Learner**

According to Bhola (1979), Kamper (1999), Wigg (1994) A National Adult Basic Education & Training Framework (1997) and Freire (1998a) there is concurrence that the adult literacy programmes have to be tailored as close as possible to the student's needs if they are to be successful. They also state that to hold the learner's attention one must use material that is relevant to their lives. Learning should be linked to real-life. Every course of study should be linked with a course of action that improves life in the community.

In the first example I cite Rogers (1994a) women's literacy programmes, which he asserts must be based on a desire to promote equality and justice to help oppressed women obtain liberation. He also calls for increased female participation in community and national affairs. Skills are to be given to both the rural and urban poor. Women are to decide for themselves what is best so the aim of the programme should be to help women to do what they want to do. Rogers (1994a) makes a salient point: if people learn what they desire, they will be intrinsically motivated and learning will be successful.

According to Rogers (1994a), literacy comes second only to income generation activities. He argues that they will only learn to read and write something effectively if during the learning process they can see the relevance of the skills that they are learning for the task, which they have set themselves. The women should determine literacy-teaching programmes for themselves, according to their local context and not according to what men prescribe. This is in keeping with the Freirean and the anthropological/sociolinguistic theories that place emphasis on literacy taking place within a certain social context and for specific purposes in the adult learners' lives.

From Rogers' (1994a) standpoint, the best way to promote literacy with groups of women learners is to accept their sense of priority and therefore adopt the literacy-comes-second-approach. The income-generation programmes provide the best possibility for developing literacy programmes on a literacy-comes-second



model. Rogers(1994a) states that literacy agencies in Egypt, India, Bangladesh, and Kenya view literacy as a development, as a tool must be mastered first. He views literacy not as an essential but useful tool, which can help people cope with situations more effectively. An income-generating programme would provide the basis for literacy.

Wigg (1994) concurs with the need to use materials relevant to the learners' lives and to give incentives in a way that will impact on the outcome. The literacy material is what keeps the learner interested in the lesson. The content should have utilitarian value. The income-generating scheme is the most motivating incentive for adult literacy.

The problem as Rogers (1994a) himself finds, for income-generation activities, is that they do not provide adequate material for learning in the class. Secondly, most income-generation activities do not call for the use of literacy. Such programmes may regard the women in negative terms as ignorant or unable to help themselves. According to Rogers (1994a), such views are outdated. Thus skills training should be the focus in these literacy programmes. They should be built on a desire to promote equality and justice to assist oppressed women to obtain liberation. Women who are seen to be in need are to be given assistance from the outside. Although income-generation activities are stereotyped to what is assumed to be woman's roles, there are examples of women breaking the mould (Rogers, 1994a). In Andhra Pradesh, India, some women were taught to repair television sets and in Kenya women were learning to maintain and repair pumps which supply safe, clean water. In both the cases the women were encouraged to use their literacy skills for the task.

In the second experience I demonstrate how literacy teaching material has serious implications for literacy programmes. Rogers (1994a) cites, for example, the hand pump workers in India, who will not be motivated to learn through a general primer that uses child-oriented words, which deal with family or health. They will learn best through a hand pump manual that is relevant to their needs. The real

material that learners require in literacy programmes are more than just the primers but that which learners can use in their everyday lives: namely, newspapers, magazines, government forms, ration cards, bank withdrawal and deposit slips, advertisements, political notices, technical leaflets and public notices.

According to Gugunani & Dikskit (in *The Encyclopedia of Education*, 1999), literacy does not automatically empower women but it does offer keys for unlocking closed doors. In the case of the Eastern African women, participation in literacy programmes was because of the changes in the social and rural environment for men and women. The literacy programmes that motivate learners to participate are those that have practical benefits such as the following (adapted from Gugunani & Dikskit, 1999):

- Those that have links between literacy and health through nutrition and hygiene
- The prospect of greater self-reliance and control over their personal life
- A wish to participate in society in the same way as men
- A desire to help their children study
- A clearer monitoring of financial affairs
- The development of skills
- To have productive outcome in terms of income-generation

The positive factors, which promote and increase the of success of literacy programmes for women include the following (adapted from, Oglesby, 1999):

- Community support from local leaders
- A curriculum relevant to the social and political context in which the women are working
- Programmes which promote confidence in the women
- Programmes which create awareness of civic and social rights
- Clearly defined priorities and objectives
- Acknowledgement of the women's previous experience

Oglesby (1999) asserts that despite the diversity of the economic, political and cultural factors affecting motivation to attend courses, which is common in the developing countries of Asia and Africa there, is the need for vocational

education. Thus is designed to generate more income. However, the curriculum considered suitable for women is limited in range. The use of participatory training methodology and integration of women in community development projects through education would appear to be more successful in maintaining participation rates. Some of the activities involved local needs, for example, the farmer's group, sewing, clothing design and fruit preservation (The Encyclopedia of Education, 1999).

The Centre for Adult Education in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) conducted an informal survey of learning among people at Mboza, a rural community in KwaZulu-Natal (Steinberg & Suttner, 1991). The following findings revealed the kind of adult literacy programmes that might be relevant for learners in similar situations in South Africa:

- Generally people were more interested in practical skills which would make an immediate impact on their day- to -day lives
- Women said they would like to learn skills like cookery and sewing and about health and forming women's groups
- Men said they would like to learn about farming methods, carpentry, block making and driving
- Some said they wanted to learn how to read and write Zulu and to speak English.

Steinberg & Suttner (1991) assert that adults from Mbosa have practical needs, which may or may not include literacy. According to Draper & Taylor (1989), women need reading and writing skills as well as survival skills such as communication, nurturing and decision-making. They also found that women needed skills in the not so traditional roles as protectors of family and specialized skills for working.

In Turkey the Bogazici University conducted a ten-year research project for women and their families on literacy (Wagner, 2000). They developed a programme called the, Mother Child Education Programme (MOCEF), which functions as a home- based intervention project aimed at providing early enrichment to young children and literacy education for their mothers. MOCEF

targeted mothers of 6 year olds who met for 25 weeks, approximately three hours a week. They discussed issues on child development, health and nutrition; creative play activities, discipline, parent-child interaction and expressing feeling. This educational programme targeted women living in low-income areas of Turkey they graduated some 9000 former illiterates since 1995 (Wagner, 2000: 24). Studies comparing this curriculum to the traditional curriculum show substantial advantages of MOCEF participants. The researchers attribute the success of the programme to the sensitivity of the instructors and material designers to the needs of the women in the programme. There was an integrated curriculum design incorporating not only functional applications of literacy skills, but also comprehension of text and critical thinking. The lesson that can be learnt from the successful implementation of the MOCEF programme is the manner in which special attention was prioritized for women in low-income areas. Women in ABET require redress and Turkey has contributed to an *avante garde* literacy programme. The practical needs of the women have been taken into account to sustain learner consistency in the programme: learning is home-based and the programme meets with the needs of the learners and also caters for the children of the adult learners.

Nepal is one of the world's poorest countries and has a very low literacy rate amongst women. However, literacy rates have risen from 12% in 1981 to 28% in 1999. Wagner (2000: 24) explains that although these statistics are below the 35% reported average of adult men in Nepal, there has been some improvement. The Women's Empowerment Programme was designed to increase women's literacy in the legal environment for females and encourage women's participation in the market economy. Eight international partner organizations carried out one or more of the programmes through the Nepalese NGOs in 28 districts. The programme was based on the idea that women's education and empowerment enables them to become effective agents of change in their household and communities, which has a domino effect because this enhances the well-being of their families and society at large. The women from this programme reported an increase in self-confidence and greater autonomy within their daily lives; they

showed a greater involvement in the care of their children, birth control and the control of finances at their home. As a result of this programme it was found that that there was an increase in women's involvement collectively in community and social issues. The support of outside agencies in financing such a project would have been a major contributing factor in sustaining it. From this programme that championed the cause of disenfranchised women, many were freed from oppression. This programme empowered them with legal literacy and basic literacy and encouraged them to participate in economic activities.

In the Lao People's Democratic Republic the people had undergone many years of war, isolation and widespread economic political reform and are in the process of opening to the outside world. In the countryside, the rural poor and especially the ethnic minority have little opportunity to participate in the new nation's formal education. The problem is further compounded because these disadvantaged groups speak many different indigenous languages, some of which are not written. The Minority Women's Literacy and Basic Skills Project has implemented a non-formal education programme to provide a means for disadvantaged minority women aged 15-45 years to learn one or two years of the basic elements of the primary curriculum. They are also trained in skills, trade and related activities, such as weaving, sewing, health, hygiene, agriculture, gardening and principles of income-generation. In this situation the women are encouraged to develop and market their traditional and regional handicrafts and employ modern designs and sales strategies. By selling their wares in the market place they have an opportunity to interact and participate in Lathan society. The interest in money-making is also a vehicle for introducing literacy and numeracy, which benefits all aspects of their lives (Wagner, 2000: 26). From the literature reviewed income generation skills appear to be a salient factor, contributing to a successful literacy programme. The Minority Women's Literacy and Basic Skills Project has the right combination of literacy, critical life skills and income-generation for women especially in the rural countryside or low-income areas such as the

informal settlements. This programme recognizes the rich diversity of their indigenous crafts and creative talents and develops their potential.

### **2.12 Curriculum Women and Empowerment**

The experiences of women in ABET programmes illustrate how the curriculum can prejudice women. The women of Andhra Pradesh, India, who repair television sets and the women in Kenya who learn to maintain and repair clean water, are cases where women are forced to break barriers and enter new frontiers. From a critical feminist perspective, this demonstrates power relations and how ABET programme are often controlled and dominated by men. The ideological belief that is perpetuated in such a system is that women are ignorant and cannot help themselves. In order to deconstruct the negative stereotypes that have been entrenched by society, ABET programmes must focus on issues that highlight the need for women's emancipation and their basic constitutional rights in society, home and the workplace.

The critical question in my study explores the impact of the English literacy curriculum on the lives of female adult learners.

Literacy skills help individuals develop feelings of autonomy in the sense that literate persons have better alternatives to find the information they need without having to rely on others. Literacy skills empower individuals in the management of information. Literacy results in changing the self-concept of the learners. It invariably leads to changes in lifestyles and to improving quality of life, as well as communication. It develops their intellectual and practical skills (Draper & Taylor, 1989 and Oglesby, 1999).

Literacy does not liberate people. In fact, "Adult education, no matter how radical it is, cannot change society" (Steinberg & Suttner, 1991: 25). They go on to say that it is not easy to teach in an empowering way or to put such principles into practice. Hutton (1992) concurs with Steinberg & Suttner (1991) that literacy does

not automatically lead to development or economic improvement on a national or individual level, although it does help when related to other structural changes. Literacy per se is not an agent of social change nor does it necessarily lead to economic improvement for individuals or groups. However, where literacy was effectively taught, it has an impact, which cannot always be quantifiable. It is a myth to think that literacy automatically leads to an improvement in people's quality of life. The aim of all literacy programmes should be to enable learners to use literacy to benefit their lives, i.e. they must gain confidence to put their reading and writing skills to use in the everyday situation. A good literacy programme will result in the individual being able to cope independently. The evaluation of the programme can be determined by whether learners have been able to achieve things that they would not have done previously. This could boost their morale and self-esteem.

Oglesby (1999) notes that although the income-generation factor affects motivation to attend courses which is common for women in developing countries like Africa, the impact of such programmes on living standards has been limited and has not reached the poorest and most educationally disadvantaged women. Abadzi (in Wigg, 1994) finds that literacy gives women power and voice especially in traditional male dominated societies.

Reading is part of the bedrock to sustain any literacy programme. I discuss next the role of basic readers in ABET.

### **2.13 The Role Of Basic Readers In ABET**

Readers play a significant role in consolidating reading skills, which learners acquire in literacy. Such readers are often called "bridging literature" or "easy readers" (Harely, Aitchison, Lyster & Land, 1996). French (1992: 240-241) defines easy readers as:

*...any reading matter in any language which makes concessions to a lack of proficiency in reading skills or to the difficulties with mastering the language of the text.*

Lyster (1992) makes two points about readers. One is that there is too little reading material accessible in mother tongue literacy and the other that while there is material mainly in English, there is a further need to develop easy reading for adults. French (1992) cites many reasons why easy reading material should be promoted as a priority. He acknowledges that the provision of appropriate reading material should precede any well-planned literacy programme. The following countries have promoted the use of easy readers: Nicaragua, Tanzania and South Africa. Laubach (1992: 241) states that “without easy reading material, newly literate people usually fall back into illiteracy”. Laubach stressed the need for a wide variety of texts to satisfy many interests.

Freire as cited in (French, 1992), initially emphasised that learners generate their own text and virtually forbade an elite to interpret the world for learners. This position changed when he recognized and endorsed prescriptive learning materials in the Nicaraguan literacy campaign. In literacy work it is difficult to evaluate the impact that reading has on learners. Also middle class efforts to “civilize the working class through moralistic books in 19th century Britain were a clear failure” (Hutton, 1992).

The preceding discussion outlined relevant literacy programmes and readers that are relevant in adult literacy programmes. In the next section I explain how the sites I travelled could contribute to adult literacy research.

According to Wagner (2000), much more is needed to be done in order to build knowledge in adult education. It has been noted that relative to other areas in education, few research studies have been produced in adult education in developing countries and particularly in evaluation studies. As a step in the new millennium, what is needed in literacy is to enquire what works and what does not. Wagner (2000: 30) explains that institutions of higher education, which train



teachers should become more involved in literacy and basic education and provide up-to-date professional training. In the next section I explain how this study would help fill the gaps in research in adult literacy.

### 2.14 The Need for Research in the Field of ABET

From the literature surveyed, (Hutton 1992, Harley *et al* 1996 and A National Multi Year Plan,1997), there is consensus on the issue that there is a world wide paucity of critical material on literacy and a great need for research and development in the field of ABET in South Africa. The National Multi-Year Implementation Plan (1997) states that the field of ABET is under-researched and that there is a national need to build capacity for research into ABET. What is required is an analytical report and evaluation from learner records. Current research and development are particularly important to the new outcomes based education curricula, learning programmes and materials. The Policy Document (A National Adult Basic Education & Training Framework, 1997) and the National Multi-Year Implementation Plan (1997) make specific reference to promoting research on controlled, longitudinal impact studies on ABET learners. My critical question focuses on the impact of English literacy curriculum on female adult learners. It is clear from literature sources that this research will fill a gap in the much needed field of ABET. Harley *et al* (1996: 500) aptly sum up the concerns on adult literacy:

*Clearly, something needs to be done about enhancing the existing weak research base and building it up where it does not exist.*

### 2.15 Conclusion

As a traveller venturing through the sand dunes of literacy, I visited many sites of interests. The first visit was to the theoretical frameworks wherein this study is located. I adopted an eclectic position, which allowed me the flexibility to understand the value that each gives to this research, as well as contradictions. I turned my lens particularly on emancipatory and consciousness-raising knowledge, which Lather (1991) points out as an increasing awareness of the

contradictions distorted or hidden by everyday understanding and in so doing it directs attention to the possibilities for social transformation.

From the literature reviewed, there is overwhelming evidence to show that income-generation activities benefit adult literacy programmes. Literature shows that ABET programmes prejudice women and are often dominated and controlled by men. From the various successful international and African literacy experiences, the following were noted:

- If people learn what they desire they will be intrinsically motivated
- Literacy only comes second to income-generation activities
- Relevant literacy material is what keeps learners interested in the learning
- Content should have a utilitarian value
- Literacy programmes are more than just primers but those programmes that they can use in everyday life, health through nutrition and hygiene, so that women participate the same way as men, to help their children study, to understanding the financial affairs, and entrepreneurial skills, and to promote indigenous skills
- Curriculum relevant to the political and social context in which the women are working is essential
- The programme should promote confidence, civic awareness and social rights
- Home-based programme catering for the needs of children

Findings from the literature reveal contradictory perspectives in a curriculum for adult literacy. Authors who take the critical and postmodernist perspective emphasize literacy for critical consciousness and empowerment while the proponents for income-generation advocate adult literacy for financial gain.

In this study I hope to delve into the lives of adult learners and hear their voices on what they perceive as relevant to their lives. The critical question of this study

## **Chapter Two: Travelling the Information Highway and Byways**

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necessitates an analysis of ABET policy. ABET policy will expose the espoused curriculum and reveal the realities of literacy as experienced in present day South Africa. In the next chapter I discuss policy issues in South Africa.

## CHAPTER THREE

### POLICY ANALYSIS: A TRAVELLER IN SEARCH OF MEANING

#### 3.1 Introduction

Policy influences the curriculum and in this chapter I interrogate ABET and education policies to examine the impact of policies on the English literacy curriculum. In my rationale, I explained some of the ABET policies that seemed difficult to effect in my classroom practice. In this section I clarify the bold claims that policy professes and critique its relevance in relation to South Africa's position in the global village. I also point out how the principles from the theoretical frameworks within which I have positioned myself in the previous section can be linked to the ABET policy framework (A National Adult Basic Education & Training Framework, 1997). In the first section, I critique the ABET language policy (A National Adult Basic Education & Training Framework 1997) and in the second section, I interrogate the National Qualifications Framework and the outcomes based model.

#### 3.2 English Language: A Rugged Terrain

ABET in South Africa locates itself within the framework of the Language in Education Policy in terms of the National Education Policy Act (1999). This policy emphasizes language diversity in South African society, recognizes the need to nurture language diversity (multilingualism) as a national resource and to work against the dominance of certain languages. It promotes communication, learning as well as personal growth productivity through different languages (A National Adult Basic Education & Training Framework, 1997: 47).

According to policy, learners should use a language, which they feel confident and competent because outcomes based education curricula require learners to engage in much discussion and skills based approach to learning. Policy illustrates, for example, that the outcomes assessed in English, as an additional

language should be the same as assessed in the mother tongue in level one. Policy acknowledges that language is central to the learning process and that it is through language that thoughts are clarified and communicated. ABET promotes the development of multilingual models of learning because it wishes to contribute to multilingualism in South Africa. It wishes to promote awareness that informal learning and communication takes place in languages other than English, for example, in the workplace. It makes explicit that the constitutional right to learn and communicate in the language of one's choice is an essential aspect of the democratization of society and the principles of integration and access.

Policy promotes all South African languages to the benefit of the learners, and states that English will no longer act as a barrier to learning. In addition, the development of multilingual courses and materials will also assist the learning process. Policy states that the adoption of a multilingual learning model will also have implications for the National Qualifications Framework. It requires that standards are written in all languages and that people have a choice to demonstrate outcomes in the language of their choice. The aim of the curriculum is to develop full competence in at least two languages. What is made clear in ABET policy is that there should be no distinction between first and second language in terms of curricular aims. Policy recognizes the negative connotation of the use of the words *first and second language speaker*. There is an implied deficit view of language competence, with outcomes in the second language being at a lower level and therefore 'lower grade' as compared to the outcomes in the first language. According to the multilingual model, all languages should be assessed equally at all levels. Policy illustrates, for example that the outcomes assessed in English, as an additional language at Level one should be the same outcomes assessed in the so-called *mother tongue* at Level one. Policy stresses that the common outcomes approach draws a distinction between teaching and learning methodologies and assessment of outcomes and accepts that for the purposes of teaching and learning, there are differences between first and second language acquisition and the development of literacy skills in either context. However, at the provincial level it must be noted that language has been viewed

differently from national policy. According to a provincial policy document (A Qualification System and Placement Procedure, 1999: 1.25) the issue of language is contentious:

*English is clearly of importance to and progress in the FET band; if the fundamental language credits are acquired in their mother tongue/ home language (unless the home language is English), access might be limited*

The Language in Education policy in South Africa, moves away from its claims, and responds to the demands of globalization and the economic forces, by making the Grade Twelve examinations, which is a vital career exit point to be written in either English or Afrikaans. The hegemony of English over other languages has been demonstrated by its social uses, as well as the use of English as a language in higher education institutions. There are proponents who promote the idea of (indigenous) languages for the citizens of South Africa to be used as resource in an effective manner for the full development of all people in South Africa Alexander (1999). Whilst there are those who promote English as the global language of access.

In South Africa there are eleven official languages. English is one. The ABET Policy advances the right of the learner to choose his or her medium of instruction and the language he or she wishes to study, but the literature reviewed as well national adult basic education and training policy document (A National Adult Basic Education & Training Framework, 1997) reveal that English in the South African context goes contrary to what it professes.

The English language is a *karo*<sup>20</sup>, pungent, *kuyababa*,<sup>21</sup> hot chillie; I use this mixed metaphoric language to illustrate the richness as well contradictions of the languages in our diverse, colourful South African rainbow nation. I am immensely aware of the richness of the indigenous languages and its invaluable contribution to the nation. I am a proud literate Tamil individual, yet equally

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<sup>20</sup> *Karo*: means pungent in the Tamil language,

<sup>21</sup> *Kuyababa*: in IsiZulu means pungent

conscious that without competency in English I will not be able to compete in the market place.

The English language in the South African context is controversial. The Language in Education policy (1999) maps out a plan with much political correctness. However, the economic realities and the needs of the people in the South African situation reveal that it is not easy to translate policies into practice. I argue that the complex realities of the people who are affected by policy should be given a voice and their needs should be advanced. I will use the critical theoretical perspective to explain how positioning of certain languages gives hegemony to some while marginalizing others. Hutton (1992) explains that the definitions of literacy are much more about what is regarded as possible than what is regarded as ideal. In South Africa, definitions are complicated by the fact that knowledge of a second language, usually English, is as vital as the ability to read and write in an African language. The term *literacy* is sometimes used loosely to include basic competency in English (Hutton, 1992). Harley *et al* (1996) also state that it is reasonable to assume that for most South Africans, English is not a home language but is the dominant language of the future. Steinberg & Suttner (1991), in their clarification of the term *literacy* explain that they use the term to mean basic literacy skills in the person's own language and in English. Once the person can speak, read and write the basics of English, they are functionally literate for the purposes of life in South Africa.

Stromquist (2002: 70) argues that English is by far the main language of the global economy. It is used not only in market transactions but also in science, international politics and even sports. There are about 1,5 billion persons who speak English, and about three billion (one-third of the world) are exposed to it. However, others:

*...see the dominance of English as carrying with it the hegemony of particular ideas and ways of looking at the world. They see the international use of English not as a simple adoption of the lingua franca but as another way to diffuse Western, primarily U.S. ideas (Stromquist, 2002: 70).*

Clifford & Kerfoot (1992) note that in South Africa, English is generally considered the language of access. The prevalent use of English in the following areas illustrates its dominance in politics and economics:

- *Politics: The English language is used in government and administration*
- *Legal: The English language is used at the courts and in all legal documents*
- *Education: The Grade Twelve examinations are set in English and all higher education institutions have instructions through the medium of English*
- *Science and technology: English is the language for access to international information*
- *Trade and industry: The English language is used mainly at places of work, trade unions, international and regional trade*
- *Media: The language of radio, TV, newspapers, magazines and advertisements is English*

In recognizing the importance of the English language for the literacy needs of the people in South Africa, Clifford & Kerfoot (1992) look at a policy of regional bilingualism. The preceding discussion revealed that English has been acknowledged as the dominant language in the country.

The language in education policy has recognized the past inequities and articulates the states intention to provide redress by giving all languages equal status. However, the state has made no deliberate attempt to advance the development of African languages by funding language development initiatives and providing infra-structural support of these languages (Cele, 2001). The African languages enjoy political liberation without any political and economic power. Cele (2001: 183) writes:

*Lamenting about the shady past of English will not help South Africans to rise above the present occasion of globalization and ever shrinking global boundaries. The recognition of all South African languages as official languages is a major step towards full political liberation of South Africans, but without a deliberate repositioning of English, this policy will lead back to economic underdevelopment that was historically promulgated by the apartheid regime and denounced by the liberation movement.*



The preliminary findings for adult learners attending ABET in this research have been to improve their English. The theoretical perspectives provide me as 'text traveler' with road maps to explain whether the acquisition of English literacy skills will be in their true interests and will prevent injustices towards certain groups and individuals who may gain greater control over their lives. In the preceding paragraphs I discussed the way English as a language in South Africa is a political hot potato. There are no neat prescriptions as set out in Language in the Education Policy that could be followed. From the literature reviewed, English is given greater cultural capital than the other official African languages in South Africa because of the manner in which society reinforces the dominant culture's language, making it a requirement for the market place. This forces adult learners to acquire English and legitimize its power as natural. The analysis demonstrates how language, like other social practices, serves particular interests. Gibson (1986) and Freire (2003) point out that language is often used to exploit, domesticate and dominate. During the apartheid regime, the Smuts Education Act of 1907 made English the official language and teaching of English compulsory: every child had to learn English at school. In the political landscape of South Africa it would have been unthinkable at that time to have even considered an African language for official purposes (Cele, 2001).

While policy today justifiably articulates redress of past injustices through colonization in South Africa it must also be counter-veiled by the present complex realities of the needs of the change and changing South African landscape given the global demands (Cele, 2001). South Africa presently (2003) stands on a stage as part of the global village of the 21<sup>st</sup> century competing in a technocratic, highly industrialized world of consumerism. In this context as my preliminary findings revealed, the marginalized people themselves indicate a need for the English language. (Cele, 2001:191) writes:

*Without this radical paradigm shift in the medium of instruction, our system will continue to wallow in the abyss of political correctness entrenched in government policies that seek to solve the crisis of three hundred years of cultural misrepresentations in one piece of legislation that ignores realities of our society.*

I position the English language within the South African context and reveal how globalization and market-led forces compete in determining the status of English. The literature reviewed shows the contradictions faced by a society caught up with political correctness, equity, justice, need for transformation from the old apartheid education to a new multilingual multicultural education system. This is reflected in an impressive compendium of new education policies. However, the policies have demonstrated that they are mere symbols and not being translated into practice. It is within this context that a very politically correct, most democratic and liberated Language in Education Policy (1999) is made. The problem is in that there are very few fundamental changes in the South African education system that go hand in glove to support such a system. With no changes being made to the medium of instruction at tertiary institutions, the grade twelve examinations written mainly through the medium of English, examinations in all learning areas in adult literacy written through the medium of English, most textbooks written in English and the dominance of the English language in the global and local economic front, it is no surprise that English is a sought-after commodity by adult learners. Embroiled within these competing and contradictory forces I try to make sense of my critical question in this study.

In the next section, I examine what the South African ABET and education policies espouse and evaluate its implementation.

### **3.3 The Myth, Fantasy and Reality of Impressive Policies<sup>22</sup>**

The formulation of policy in ABET (A National Adult Basic a Education & Training Framework, 1997) is shaped by three policy frameworks, which are already in place: the White Paper on Education (1995), the South African Qualifications Authority Act No.58 of 1995 (SAQA) and the National Education Act No. 27 of 1996.

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<sup>22</sup> Policies: In South Africa after the new democratic government, there has been a flurry of new educational policies to replace the old apartheid education policies.

Table 3.1. Structure of National Qualifications Framework

NQF level	Band	Types of Qualifications and Certificates	Locations of Learning for units and qualifications			
8	Higher Education and Training	Doctorates Further Research Degrees	Tertiary / Research / Professional institutions			
7		Higher Degrees Professional Qualifications	Tertiary / Research / Professional institutions			
6		First Degrees Higher diplomas	Universities / Technikons / Colleges / Private / Professional institutions / workshops, etc.			
5		Diplomas, Occupational Certificates	Universities / Technikons / Colleges / Private / Professional institutions / workshops, etc			
<b>Further Education and Training Certificate</b>						
4	Further Education and Training	School/College/Trade Certificates Mix of units from all	Formal high schools /	Technical / Community Police / Nursing / Private colleges	RDP and Labour Market schemes / Industry Training Boards / Unions Workplace, etc.	
3		School/College/Trade Certificates Mix of units from all	Private / State schools			
2		School / College / Trade Certificates Mix of units from all				
<b>General Education and Training Certificate</b>						
1	General Education and Training	Senior Phase	Formal schools	Occupation / Work-based training / RDP / Labour market schemes / Upliftment / Community programmes	NGO's / Churches / Night schools / ABET programmes / Private providers / Industry Training Boards Unions / Workplace, etc.	
		Intermediate Phase	(Urban / rural / farm / special)			
		Foundation Phase				
		Preschool				

Adapted from, Understanding the National Qualifications Framework (Elliot, & Pahad, 1996: 24)

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) is a new approach to education and training, which provides opportunities for one to learn regardless of one's age, circumstances and level of education and training. It allows one to learn on an ongoing basis. This new system will provide access to nationally accepted

qualifications. Different types of learning, such as full-time, part-time, distance learning, work-based learning and life experiences will be recognized and credits allocated and registered on the NQF. The key principles of the new government are equity, quality, access to opportunities and redress of past inequalities. The NQF has grand schemes to recognize informal and formal learning situations through courses offered by NGOs, churches and the workplaces. In reality, however to gain accreditation by South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) is a long and difficult process. I foreground in Table 3.1 the broad framework of education and position ABET on the NQF so that a clearer understanding is gained. A critical discussion of the NQF will follow later in this section.

### **3.3.1 Principles that Apply to ABET**

I argue that there is an impressive compendium of ABET policies as well as some sound philosophical and transformative agenda, but its implementation is poor. In Section 3.3.1, I discuss the philosophical principles that apply to ABET. In Section 3.3.2, I analyze the impact of globalization and the new changes in curriculum development on ABET policy.

The ABET policy on curriculum asks the critical question: What knowledge and skills are essential for ABET and what should be optional? The ABET policy (A National Adult Basic Education & Training Framework, 1997) makes reference to Freire's problem posing adult education methodology, which promotes critical consciousness together with literacy skills through a style of reflection and action leading to social change. This helps adults link their own experiences to historical, local and global contexts and to develop a critical understanding of their location in the world and how to work for socio-economic and structural changes in society. Learners begin with an analysis of their own situation or experiences; discuss underlying causes and then move on to planning for action and reflection on action. Policy recognizes the value of the Freirean approach when it illustrates the centrality of the adult learner's experience, and contextual needs in prioritizing learning programmes for study or action. The ABET curriculum as

conceptualized in the policy document (A National Adult Basic Education & Training Framework, 1997) states that it must cater for a range of interests and combine the need for income-generation, with a need to access and cope with the demands of further education. The policy reveals a splendid plan for the cause of the marginalized adult learners in South Africa. However, there is a lack of political will to make a conscious effort to implement the policy as per the document.

#### **3.3.2 The Pied Piper Calls the Tune for the Globe Trotter**

The South African ABET curriculum policy has recognized the impact of globalization on the world. Globalization has shaped international educational policies. World economies are seen to be moving in the information-led technological revolution. There is an economic shift to trade; export-led economic growth, specialization of regional and local economies.

According to policy, education within the above context can no longer locate itself within national states but must serve the economic interests of first world economies. Policy also states that education and development are influenced by international agencies because they have profound implications for national policies. It is within this context of globalization that workplace and vocation literacy unfolds itself.

The ABET curriculum policy recognizes that literacy is a commercial activity which is in fact the fastest growing international “educational industry” (A National Adult Basic Education & Training Framework, 1997: 6). In trying to meet the challenges and demands of globalization, the South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF) was introduced as the key feature to offer knowledge, skills, and attitudinal demands for a democratic and transforming economy. The NQF tries to respond to the pressures of globalization, especially information technology and increase in types of jobs, as well as their effects on the South African labour market and social and political arrangements. Samson &

Vally (1996) cite Kell's interesting metaphor of the jungle gym to describe the new NQF system. The system itself is seen as a confusing and mysterious jungle, while its various structures comprise the bars of the gym. For some adult educators in fulfilling outcomes based education (OBE) they could find it like the mysterious and confusing jungle. Trying to find a way out by making sense of the new OBE literature that they are confronted with is not easy. They describe the new curriculum policy as a game of snakes and ladders and suggest that NQF policy does not hold up much promise, especially with regard to career opportunities.

According to Samson & Vally (1996), the theoretical underpinning of the NQF can be identified as human capital theory. This theory is based on the belief that there is a link between education and economic growth because education is an investment for the country. Learners and workers are value-added products and the means by which the economy grows. It is assumed that the investment in people and technology will increase productivity and skills on the shop floor. What happens to education under human capital theory? The value of education is reduced to an economic payoff for the individual and the economy as a whole. The major shift in ABET curriculum policy is based on economic development. Research points out that there is no shred of evidence in almost 80 years of curriculum change literature to suggest that altering school curricula leads to changes in national economies (Jansen, 1997). Jansen (1997) states that to make connections between curriculum and society has political goals and that these have no foundations given the accumulated research on curriculum change. Samson & Vally (1996) also point that there has been extensive international research, which has failed to establish a clear link between education, training and redress.

According to Jansen (2001: 42b) until 1990 education policy in South Africa was a simple matter where the state maintained control of education policy, which was bureaucratically, centrally, racially exclusive and politically authoritarian. The apartheid state established White political power since 1948. All this changed on

02 February 1990 when the then president, F.W. de Klerk, announced the unbanning of the liberation organizations, and the release of political prisoners, which culminated in the first democratic elections on 27 April 1994. Since 1990 there has been an accelerated flurry of changes in education policies. Sayed & Jansen (2001b) argue that even after four to six years of democracy in post-apartheid South Africa (after 1994) there have been very few tangible changes in the lives of ordinary people. The most visible area is education, where delivery has been extremely poor. South Africa has the most impressive compendium of education policies, but there is very little evidence of implementation. The preceding section has shown briefly the underlying principles and idealistic goals of ABET policy in a transforming educational South African context. Especially after the uhuru (jubilation) of the South African 1994 elections and following the 1999 elections, much was expected from education policies, but little has changed on the ground.

Jansen quoted in Kraak & Young (2001: 46) offers the following explanation of policy development during the ten year period, 1990-2000:

*The making of education policy in South Africa is best described as a struggle for achievement of a broad political symbolism that would mark a shift from apartheid to post apartheid society. We search in vain for logic in policy making connected to any serious intention to change the practice of education 'on the ground'. Therefore, a focus on the details of implementations will not be fruitful since it will miss the broader political intentions that underpin policy making after apartheid. Every single case of education policy making demonstrates, in different ways, the preoccupation of the state with settling policy struggles in the political domain rather than in the realm of practice.*

What is exposed of South African education policy is that there is an over-investment in political symbolism at the expense of practical considerations, which explains the lack of change in the South African education system after the demise of apartheid. Jansen's theory of political symbolism explains educational policy as mere symbols.

According to the Bill of Rights<sup>23</sup> in the South African constitution (1996), the state is obliged to provide basic education. A right cannot remain unfulfilled or ignored. The failure to deliver basic rights could well be regarded as a breach of the constitution (Motala & Pampallis, 2001: 19)

Sayed & Jansen (2001: 78) explain how susceptible education policies are to different economic, ideological and political impulses and how these differences are mediated through the governing discourses of economics. Ota (in Sayed & Jansen, 2001: 79) argues that the education transformation project in South Africa is indeed beset with difficulties. What can be seen in policy is much contradiction, which is characterized by the dominance of the commodification of education over other elements of the system such as the right to free access to education. In the context of a transforming South African political landscape are tensions on the one hand between a formal democracy bound constitutionally by development of a rights led public culture and on the other, a market-led economy. The problem is heightened because of the past colonialism and racism, which has created a great divide between the privileged and the underprivileged. South Africa has suffered race, class, gender, oppression and exploitation which has:

*...generated shifting hierarchies of privileges and opportunity, it has produced for the black people a state of almost permanent subordination (Soudien, Jacklin, & Hoadley, 2001: 80).*

From a critical feminist research perspective, I have demonstrated in Chapter One how policy makes special reference to the need to give redress to women, but the Census 2001 statistics literacy figures for women (see Table 1.1 Chapter One) did not indicate any effective change to address the concerns of disadvantaged women. The contradictions between the policy and practice are that policy advances a rights-led approach but in practice market forces serving the interests of international agencies and globalization lead it.

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<sup>23</sup> Everyone has the right to a basic education, including adult basic education; and to further education, Motala & Pampallis (2001:19).



Bhola (2000) points out that Adult Basic Education in South Africa has become ABET: Adult Basic Education and Training. The new policy framework gives greater emphasis to training for the job market and neglects the educational aspects. ABET emphasizes education for economic skills. The skills demand to be taught, and learned and should be testable, certifiable and portable and that there should be recognition of prior learning. The emphasis on certification and qualification in the NQF could result in a paper chase amongst adult learners (see Table 3.1).

Bhola (2000), goes on to state that in practice ABET focuses almost exclusively on training of labour for the formal economy and this has in essence squeezed out the adult needs of the majority who are not in the formal economy. With a new democratic dispensation in South Africa, some of the communities and ABET institutions have been sidelined. Bhola (2000) states that there is a considerable amount of time allocated to the establishment of standards, listing of outcomes and developing of tests which come out of curriculum embedded in teaching materials. However, in South Africa there seems to be almost a lack of relevant teaching material. The ABET curriculum is geared towards training for the job market but the job market is virtually non-existent. He predicts that if the ABET curriculum were to continue with too much formalism and routine, isolated from the realities of South Africa, the ABET programmes may collapse.

The new OBE approach to ABET provides the philosophical and organizational framework to guide development of learning. Common outcomes do not mean a common curriculum. This will place an enormous burden on providers to make choices about curriculum construction, on the basis of their instructional contexts and learners' needs. The OBE approach to curriculum is flexible. The actual curriculum that the learner can follow to attain the outcomes will be left to the initiatives and creativity of curriculum developers, material developers, educators and learners. It is this flexibility that can create too wide a choice and leads to further problems for the adult educator. The difficulty is that while the flexible

OBE approach could allow too much freedom if taken in a rigid mechanistic manner, then learning will not reach its desired critical outcome.

Jansen (1997) points out that the same set of learning outcomes can be exposed to a wide range of interpretations by educators, for example, the outcome of a good citizen goals could mean one thing in a conservative setting and another thing in a broad democratic setting. Within the OBE framework, there is nothing “to prevent such a latitude of interpretation that would mute even the modest directions signaled in an outcome” Jansen (1997: 72). He expresses the view that the language used in OBE approach is too complex, confusing and contradictory to educators. It is inaccessible for most adult educators to give any meaning in the classroom. When one analyses the critical outcomes as set out in the ABET curriculum it requires highly qualified adult educators who are needed to make sense of such challenges to existing practice. Jansen (1997) points out that policy requires not merely the application of a skill but understanding theory and demonstrating a capacity to transfer such application across different contexts.

Samson & Vally (1996) argue that the critical outcomes of solving problems and making decisions are by no means natural, neutral or consistent across different contexts. The ABET curriculum is shaped by what is seen as critical outcomes in all learning areas. The critical outcomes are considered to contribute to the full development of learners and the social and economic development of society at large. These are grandiose theoretical assumptions and in practice difficult to translate. Policy demands that all learning programmes include critical outcomes because it is these outcomes which are assumed to make learners develop entrepreneurial opportunities, become more culturally sensitive across a range of social contexts, explore education and career opportunities and participate as responsible citizens in the life of local, national and global communities. The critical outcomes are too broad and become difficult to unpack. The critical outcome is political and idealistic. Canadian and Australian critics argued that there is no such thing as critical outcomes (Samson & Vally, 1996).

In conclusion the, NQF with the new OBE approach to learning and teaching, has some progressive features: portability, where qualifications can be transferred between different learning situations; training institutions and employers; recognition of prior learning; learners could accumulate qualifications over time and transfer credits received between the fields of education and training. However, there is too much emphasis on vocation, certification and qualification, which could result in a paper chase for some adult learners. Samson & Vally (1996) point out that in Australia, critics of the OBE approach assert that it is a model for manipulating and controlling behaviour. In order to establish that learning is taking place, only the outward visible and observable changes in behaviour are taken into account, not the values and goals that underpin this behaviour. This could have a serious impact on ABET in South Africa. As a researcher I recognize some of the merits of the OBE approach and as much as I critique the value of certification, I am cautious to admit that for some adult learners certification has helped improve their status and assisted their entry to other career paths (see Chapter One and Bongwiwe's Text). However, I must also be quick to add that too much emphasis on certification without the achievements of critical learning outcomes is of little value to the learner. The certificate must offer the learner skills and values that the learner could use to gain entry into the job market or to enable learners to better their standard of living otherwise the certificate is of little value.

#### **3.4 Conclusion**

In this Chapter I examined the new ABET policy (A National Adult Basic Education & Training Framework, 1997) through the lenses of critical pedagogy, critical theory and feminism. Through critical theory I foregrounded the political, ideological agendas of the ABET policy. The latter demonstrated how the interests of first world countries, globalization and international agencies for example, World Bank, international monetary fund, UNESCO, influence policies. The analysis revealed promises of grand transformational policy agendas for

disadvantaged females, yet there was a huge gorge that divided actual policy and implementation.

The Freirean and anthropological perspectives located major shifts in policy. It revealed the need for a non-racist, non-sexist, democratic, learner centred approach, which will establish a new South African national identity. This was a move away from the so-called traditional approaches to a new transformational outcomes based approach and new language policies. The English language in South Africa was exposed as contentious and having hegemony over other languages. The literature reviewed revealed the contradictions faced by a society caught up with political correctness, equity, justice and the need for transformation from the old apartheid education to a new multi-lingual multi-cultural education system. This is reflected in an impressive compendium of new education policies. It is within this context that a very politically correct, democratic and liberated Language in Education Policy is made. The problem is in that there are very few fundamental changes in the South African education system that go hand in glove to support such a new system. I position my studies against these competing forces to unravel the hegemony of English and the need for English as a world filled with contradictions.

In the next chapter I discuss my research methodology and the methodological issues of this study.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY SELECTING THE VEHICLE FOR THE JOURNEY

#### 4.1 Orientation

In Chapters Two and Three I journeyed through different sites of literature, which guide my research methodology and analysis in Chapter Five. Chapter Four offers the methodological exposition of how I attempt to answer my critical question:

*What is the impact of adult English literacy curriculum on the lives of female adult learners?*

In the first section of Chapter Four, I discuss my research design and theoretical positioning, as well as expose the influence that it would have in shaping this study. As a qualitative researcher using the critical postmodern paradigm, I explain that there is no tangible reality but multiple realities. Research is non-linear and constantly changing under the influences of complex dynamic forces. The researcher and the researched interact in multiple ways with the realities of society. I construct meaning using mainly the feminist and critical lens not as a neat clinical researcher but as someone who engages with all its messiness to attain credibility. As researcher I advance my reasons for adopting a qualitative research method. I personify my methodology as a journey into which I breathe life to reveal the parallels that I have drawn from my own experiences. I use metaphors because it helps me to see “what we don’t see” (Doll, 1993: 169).

In the next part of Chapter Four, I discuss the various data sources used in this research: interviews, autobiographies, and classroom observation. In the final section I give an account of the technique I use to analyze my data and the methodological challenges I faced as a qualitative researcher.

## 4.2 Research Design

From the discussion that follows it will become clear why the qualitative method, the interpretative, naturalistic and critical postmodern paradigm were better suited to answer my critical question. I point out how the above methods assisted in life history research, which was one of the main tools of this study.

### 4.2.1 Tuning the Vehicle for the Journey Ahead

Denzin & Lincoln (1998c) aptly describe the qualitative researcher's design as similar to the dancer's three stages of warm-up, exercises and cool-down. Just as dance adapts to life, qualitative design adapts, changes and is redesigned as one's study progresses because of the social realities of doing research. As a qualitative researcher I am not the choreographer but the driver who tunes up her or his vehicle for the journey.

As the driver I choose the type of vehicle for the journey ahead. There are myriad vehicles available but I have chosen the four-by four, which would be able to traverse both rugged and ordinary plains. I believe, as much as I am largely from the qualitative paradigm, there are times in this research where I borrow from the ethics of the positivist tradition. All the statistical data quoted in this research are taken from the positivist paradigm. Hence, as much as the two paradigms have different methodologies, the objective of the researcher is the search for the elusive truth, which is part of the complex reality with which researchers are engaged. Paradigms are not always boxed into fixed categories. Reality exposes the many complementary and contradictory forces that come into play.

Qualitative research is multi-method in focus. I use the critical postmodern and naturalistic<sup>24</sup>, approach to the subject matter. As a qualitative researcher I study things in their natural setting and attempt to make sense or interpret, the

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<sup>24</sup> Naturalistic: in their natural setting, one of the instruments I use to evaluate the impact of the English literacy curriculum on adult learners, is the classroom observation of lessons done in the natural classroom setting.

phenomena in terms of the meaning that they bring. Qualitative research is difficult to define clearly because it does not belong to a single discipline nor does it have a distinct set of methods that are entirely its own. As a qualitative researcher I argue that reality can never be fully understood, that objective reality can never be captured.

I use the postmodern paradigm, which calls for a critical reappraisal of the rigid binaries that have been created in society. These rigid dichotomies such as objective reality and subjective experiences, fact and imagination or cause and effect that society has imposed on it are rejected by postmodernist thought. In post modernist framework such binaries are viewed as offering a parochial understanding of reality because society is far more complex than those, which can be boxed into fixed neat labels. The exciting feature of postmodernism is its eclecticism, one that combines the scientific with the aesthetics. Postmodernism is too varied and has become the in word that has pervaded the arts, humanities, literature, management, mathematics, philosophy, science, the social sciences and theology (Toulmin in Doll, 1993). Interpreting human action through the postmodern paradigm is to understand that it is in a dynamic, more complex pluralistic, unpredictable system or network like life itself. Things are less ordered and more fuzzy (Doll, 1993). Habermas (1993) stresses the potential power of dialogic conversations, of transforming both participants and that being discussed. Open, interactive, communal conversation is the key to understanding adult learners' life world.

Another feature of postmodernism is the concept of multi-layers of interpretation. The postmodernist looks to the past, in order to code its loose ends with a future vision. The postmodern framework is a mix of codes within one structural matrix, which is a paradoxical and a challenging play of ideas. Hargreaves (1995) adds that it is this aspect of postmodernism, the paradoxes, ironies and perversity that reveal the trends that are not clear or consistent. The roles that one plays in society is blurred, and there are no fixed interpretations of the function an individual plays. Through postmodern interpretation, I see the paradox of adult

learner's lives in society; those trying to make sense of 'bloomin, buzzin,' confusion we call life (Doll, 1993). The paradox lies in the complex interplay between desire for openness and closure (resolution, definiteness). It is this uncertainty or doubt of the human experience that causes people to dialogue and communicate with one another. There are marginalized female voices that are silenced and not heard to which I wish to give articulation in this study.

In life history research I engaged in the adult learners' story telling in such a manner that I become aware of their multi-layered contexts and to discover the insights of "the figure under the carpet" (Edel cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 1998c: 95). This mixed metaphor aptly illustrates how the researcher (re) constructs a pattern from the data one has of the life of the person studied and written about. In this study the adult learners who are under the carpet are not so much found as constructed. I use critical and feminist approaches through the critical postmodern paradigm and argue that there is no clear window into the inner life world of the adult learners. As such any gaze is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race and ethnicity.

I assert that there are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of the observer and observed. According to Cohen & Manion (2000), the interpretative paradigm is characterized by a concern for the individual. Since life history is one of my major tools, the concern is for the adult learners in this study. The main focus is to understand their subjective world of the human experience. I need to get inside the adult learners and to comprehend from within in order to retain integrity of how adult English literacy impacts on their everyday life. In the interpretative approach the researcher begins with the individual and sets out to understand her or his interpretations of the world. This method relies upon the subjective verbal and written expressions of meaning given by individuals studied, which are like windows into the inner life of the person. By using this approach I would be able to have a clearer understanding of the adult learners' world in co-constructing their life histories.



Through the interpretative paradigm I demonstrate that there is no tangible reality. I see reality as a construction in the minds of the adult learners and I believe that there is no single tangible reality out there. Thus there are an infinite number of interpretations that might be made; there are therefore multiple realities. The qualitative method allows me more flexibility in dealing with the multiple realities of the learners' life worlds because the methods expose more directly the nature of the relationship between the researchers and researched. They allow for my own posturing in terms of bias because the qualitative methods are more sensitive to the mutually shaping influences and value patterns that may be encountered (Lincoln & Guba, 1998c: 40). In their story telling I interpret, (re)construct their stories and give meaning to their realities. In the life history research there is a co-construction of reality between the researchers and researched. Truth is an elusive concept. In constructing women's life stories Denzin & Guba (1998c: 11) quote from the text *Interpreting Women's Lives*, referring to the Personal Narratives Group (1989) truth here implies:

*...the multiplicity of ways in which a woman's life story reveals and reflects important features of her conscious experience and social landscape, creating from both her essential reality.*

Qualitative researchers reject the positivist method that there is only one way of telling a story about society. I seek alternative methods of researching as my study includes human conditions such as emotionality, personal responsibility, multi-voiced texts, an ethic of caring and dialogue with the subjects. At the end of Section A, I will explicate how trustworthiness is established in qualitative research so that this research can achieve credibility.

As a qualitative researcher I get closer to the subject's perspective through detailed interviewing, observation and confronting the everyday social world. My research is emic, case-based position, which directs attention to the specifics of a particular case, the Asoka Adult basic Education Co-operative. I believe that rich description of the social world is valuable (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998c: 5-11).

### 4.3 Sampling the Vehicles

I chose the vehicles (adult learners) using purposive sampling. This is different from conventional sampling; it is based on informational and not statistical considerations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The purpose is to maximize information, which is so intimately tied to contextual factors and to detail the many specifics that give the context its unique flavour. In order to attain the above Cohen & Manion (1986: 100) demonstrate how purposive sampling yields such results:

*In purposive sampling, the researcher handpicks the cases to be included in his sample on the basis of his judgment of their typicality. In this way, he builds up a sample that is satisfactory to his specific needs.*

The general cohort of adult learners I taught was both men and women, although there were more women than men. From a class of 25 there were only 6 to 8 men that enrolled at the beginning of each year, while the rest were women. Not all the learners wrote the Independent Examinations Board (IEB) examinations; only learners who felt equipped or those that acquired sufficient English literacy skills wrote the examinations. Although many of the females who attended were domestic workers, a few held other jobs or were unemployed. Many adult learners were not consistent and dropped off from the adult literacy class.

I chose the four adult learners from the general cohort of 25 for the following reasons:

- Female, because there is a paucity of research specifically on women in ABET. I decided to limit my studies to Black domestic workers so that the analysis will have contextual relevance.
- I decided to choose from the advanced group of learners who already had basic skills in reading, writing and speaking English. The sample offered me adults from different English literacy levels: Ignatia completed Level one, Independent Board Examinations (IEB), which is equivalent to grade 3; Bongwiwe completed Level Two IEB, which is equivalent to Grade five;

Cindy failed Level Three IEB, which is equivalent to Grade Seven<sup>7</sup> and Maria completed Levels Two and Three IEB.

- Since the attendance at classes was very erratic I chose learners whose attendance was satisfactory and who would be available for interviews over a protracted period of time
- The learners also represented different age groups that would enhance understanding of the impact of English literacy on the many who attended

#### **4.3.1 Reasons for Anonymity of the Adult Learners**

I have subscribed to the fundamental principles for ethical acceptability of confidentiality and anonymity, although the learners themselves were eager to have their names ‘published’ and their autobiographies recognized with their true identity. The nature of some of their comments could have been controversial, hence, I chose to have pseudonyms. Although every effort is made to protect confidentiality and anonymity, the criterion is unfortunately double-edged (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The task of maintaining confidentiality is far more difficult when the audience and respondents are part of the local situation. Keeping the identity of the adult learner who complained about her employer may be difficult as the nature of the complaint may reveal the identity to the ‘*cognoscenti*’.

I obtained informed consent from the adult learners who were informed about the nature of the research. Anderson’s (1993) six basic elements to informed consent are:

- An explanation of the purpose of the research
- Description of any foreseeable risks or discomforts to the subjects
- Description of any benefits that may be expected
- An offer to answer questions concerning procedure
- A statement given that participation is voluntary

Consent forms, which described the purpose of this research, the nature of the tasks, the rights of the participant and the names of the person and institution

conducting the research, were signed by those learners who participated in this research and given to the researcher. The following table provides a profile of the sample of adult learners. The grid provides a quick overview of the four learners who were chosen for my study.

**Table 4.1: Profile of Sample of the Adult Learners**

Respondents	Date/Birth	Race	Gender	IEB English literacy	Employed as	Attendance at AABEC
<b>Maria</b>	28/8/52	South African Black	Female	Passed Levels 2 & 3	Domestic worker	Excellent
<b>Bongiwe</b>	16/4/72	South African Black	Female	Passed Level 2	Domestic worker	Good
<b>Agnes</b>	18/2/63	South African Black	Female	Passed Level 1	Domestic worker	Good
<b>Cindy</b>	24/6/69	South African Black	Female	Failed Level 3	Domestic worker	Very good

#### 4.4 Life History: The Vehicle used in the Journey

As the traveller I needed to have a plan (research design) of how I intended to travel through the various sites of interest. The vehicle used for the journey sets the parameters for the type of journey undertaken. Research works on the same principles: the researcher and the researched are constantly being exposed to complex multiple issues. Society is not an ordered structured entity but is constantly in flux. The four-by-four vehicle (life history) offers this research the positioning and space required as a traveller (researcher), to undertake an adventurous journey with the four adult learners.

I used life history as a methodological tool to obtain rich data. The life history research afforded me time to do rigorous long-term studies that uncovered the meanings of events in the adult learner's lives. As a qualitative researcher I gain the discursive space using life history methodology to become immersed in a study that requires passion for people, passion for communication and passion for understanding people. It is a contribution of qualitative research, and can only enhance educational and human services practice (Denzin & Guba, 1998a). The postmodern, critical and feminist theoretical lenses offer me the opportunity to gaze at the life histories of the learners. Life history research gives voice to the voiceless domestic female adult learners and illuminates my understanding of the lived experiences in their journey in acquiring the English language.

As a researcher I had to probe how the adult learners made sense of the English language in their day-to-day lives and to examine the impact that English literacy had had on their life world. The life history approach using the in-depth interview provided an excellent research technique. Tuckman in Cohen & Manion (1986: 292) succinctly describes the interview as providing access to what is "inside a person's head" it makes it possible to measure what a person knows, the "knowledge or information" that a person likes or dislikes, values and preferences, and what a person thinks.

The life history assisted me to draw an in-depth portrait of the adult learners and capture their interpretation of life. The learners, who were also domestic workers, had an opportunity to tell their story through the life history approach. Storytelling is a fundamental human quality, which is imperative for researchers to recognize as a significant contribution to research. The women's life histories in *The Personal Narratives Groups* (1989) provide an entry point for the examination between the individual and society in the construction of gender. Women make their own lives (and life histories); however, they do so under conditions not of their own choosing. Life histories can be helpful in understanding hegemony because they document a variety of responses to hegemony. Life histories especially of women and racially or ethnically oppressed

people are often rich sources of counter hegemonic insight because they expose the viewpoints embedded in the dominant ideology.

In constructing the life story it is important to be reminded of the subject's own self-definitions about their lives, in contrast to the definitions imposed by the constructor of the story and by the subject's own society. Marks (1989) agrees that it is critical to understand the political and socioeconomic relations that shape a life. There are power relations that surround the production of knowledge between the subject and researcher. Marks (1989) emphasizes that it is important to acknowledge and address the realities and conditions of inequality affecting life history work. The examples they cited include literacy/illiteracy and poverty/economic security. When the researcher emphasizes only the interests and purposes that share with the subject of the life history, such emphasis obscures complex ethical, practical, and political issues. Life history must be multiple to ensure that the interests of the subject and her community are advanced. In this research learners engaged in a warm-up session before actual recording where issues about their lives were dialogued. Each of these frameworks provides a different lens through which a life story is viewed. Shostak (1989: 239) states that:

*...the most important ethical message regarding life histories is not a restriction but an obligation: we should make every effort to overcome obstacles, to go out and record the memories of people whose ways of life are preserved only in those memories.*

Life history describes the human condition of ordinary people living ordinary and not so ordinary lives, etched from their memories and experiences and the meaning life have for them. The stories express modes of thought and culture often different to the researcher. They are therefore complex, telling of worlds sometimes foreign to the researcher's world or worlds that no longer exists. The stories are also familiar as they reveal the complexities and paradoxes of human life.

The life history as a methodological tool, probed deeply into the adult learners' lives to understand how other factors shaped and were influential during the process of acquiring the English language. In the life history study, I conducted extensive interviews with the adult learners for the purpose of collecting a first person narrative (Biklen, 1992). Over time, the content of the life history interviews became more revealing as I probed deeper and deeper into their lives. The data collection process was ongoing over the six-year period (1998-2003), I was able to understand and get to know the learners in far greater depth. The theoretical frameworks play a significant role in life history research, as will be explained in the next section.

### 4.5 Theories

I used the critical postmodern, feminist lens because it enabled me to understand learners' lives and challenged many practices, ideas and ideals through emancipatory endeavour. These theories are critical of social malformation, inequalities and injustices and are committed to transformation.

Through critical theory I focused on the inequalities in adult education. It gave me the discursive space to investigate the following issues: the state's neo-liberal new education policies, the impact of globalization on adult education, power relations in society, inequalities and how it affects the marginalized and how poverty impacted on the lives of the adult females, especially for those who live in informal settlements.

I use feminist research methodology because it gave voice to the experiences of women who have long been oppressed, repressed, ignored or denigrated. It is in feminist philosophy that women's experiences are highlighted and used as material for philosophical discussion (Code *et al*, 1988). From the literature reviewed (Harding, 1987; Reinharz, 1992; Walford, 1994; Weiner, 1994; and Seale, 1998) it is clear that there is little agreement on the issue of whether there is a distinctive feminist method of inquiry. However, there seems to be some

consensus on features that would characterize feminist research. The features of its methodology are clarified in the discussion that follows:

Firstly, Walford (1994) explains that the subjects of enquiry are usually the forgotten and the less privileged, which are often women. The distinctive power of feminist research is that it generates its critical issues from the perspective of women's experience. The purpose of feminist research has an emancipatory goal, where research and analysis should provide useful information that will empower people so that they can challenge and fight their manipulation and exploitation. Feminist inquiry goes beyond the innovations in subject matter in a crucial manner, in that:

*...it insists that the inquirer her/himself be placed in the same critical plane as the overt subject matter, thereby recovering the entire research process for scrutiny in the results of the research (Harding, 1987: 9).*

In feminist research, there are no universal women. Thus feminist analyses always have categories within every class, race and culture. It is difficult to find one set of feminist principles or understandings with which every class, race and culture will agree. It needs to be stressed therefore that not only gender experiences vary across cultural categories but vary within an individual's experience. I illustrate this point by citing my own example of the changing role experiences as a South African Indian researcher, member of an extended family and educational leader. I am able to articulate my identity as an emancipated, empowered female in academic and educational circles while my role in the Indian family circle is influenced by my South African Indian cultural values. My identity, i.e., my class, race, culture, gender, beliefs and behaviour as researcher and educator has to be placed within the context of this research. I need to position myself as researcher and educator in terms of the power relations in this study. I am a South African Indian female from a middle class, mainly Indian suburb, Reservoir Hills. This is one of the legacies of the Group Areas Act, inherited from the previous apartheid government to place residents in areas according to their race. Reservoir Hills presently (2004) has a fair percentage of Black informal residents. My first language is English and I am literate in my vernacular language, Tamil. As much



as I have imbibed Western influences I am closely rooted in my Indian culture. As stated the females in this study are all Black adult learners who are domestic workers. They either live with their employers or in the informal settlements. This declaration exposes some of the power, educational, economic and cultural differences that exist between the researcher and the Black female adult learners.

The women's life stories encompass the multiplicity of ways they reveal and reflect important features of their conscious experience and social landscape, from both their essential realities. Prell (1989) cites Myerhoff's life histories where she talks about the reflexive nature of culture. She was interested in finding out about cultural settings where people created their identities. For Myerhoff (Prell, 1989) the human/cultural process of finding stories within stories was an example of reflexivity, which is the capacity to arouse consciousness of ourselves as we see the actions of others and ourselves. Reflexivity allowed me to understand persons as active and self-conscious narrators of their own lives. According to Myerhoff's reflexive moments were the richest because they framed the process of meaning and made narrator's aware that they were makers of meaning. In life history, people talk about their lives. They lie, sometimes, forget, exaggerate, become confused and get things wrong yet they are revealing truths. They do not reveal the past as it actually was to a standard of objectivity using the logic of mathematical deductions of the scientific ideal. But they give, instead, the truths of lived experiences. The stories reveal truths but they do not necessarily provide access to other times, places or cultures.

Feminist researchers choose multiple methods for various technical reasons (Reinharz, 1992). In this research I make use of the life history methodology and the primary instruments are interviews, autobiographies, classroom observation, document analysis. The letters and *in loco* visits are serendipitous tools. In order to explore the complex realities and to discover the 'figure under the carpet' I had to make use of multiple methods in this research. It was not always easy to obtain lengthy interviews or at times make any physical contact with some of the adult learners. This necessitated that I use more creative methods to obtain information

from those who could not be contacted physically. As domestic workers the adult learners had long hours of work and were only available to be interviewed late in the evenings or at night. This meant that I had to make numerous visits to the informal settlements. Interviewing the learners in their own familiar environment brought further enlightenment about the lives of the women in different contexts. Lincoln & Guba (1995) argue for the legitimating of this tacit knowledge in addition to knowledge expressed in language form because multiple realities can be gleaned in this way. Tacit knowledge also reflects more accurately the value patterns of the researcher and researched. In order to obtain thorough data and a desire to be open-ended, feminist researchers must take risks to link the past and given present information of the subjects (Reinharz, 1992).

There is a need for feminist researchers/educators to consciously reflect on practice, in particular, to the way it relates to inequalities in power relations and to encourage critical consciousness amongst students so that they can learn to live their values (Weiner, 1994). Code *et al* (1988) emphasize that if a researcher/educator recreates class division within their teaching, their analysis will be devoid of form. Thus it becomes critical as feminist researchers/educators to not only examine their teaching methodology but to be critical of what they teach. As a researcher/ educator I must attempt to create a consciousness-raising environment, which is emancipatory, transformative and empowering in order to create counter-hegemony.

How can the educator and researcher reach these above objectives? (Weiner, 1994) argues that a feminist research pedagogy emphasizes the changing views of classroom methods to reflect three main areas of concern: the roles and authority of the teacher, the source of the claims of knowledge and truth in personal experience and feeling, the goals of providing the learners with skills to continue feminist principles after they have left the educational institution. There are major problems in how we create critical consciousness without implying ideological correctness or a clash with the complex desires and subjectivities of the learners. There are no easy answers to these complex situations, but Lewis (cited in

Weiner, 1994) suggests that there are critical incidents or illuminating instances, which can be used in the transformative feminist research pedagogy to enable greater understanding of the inequalities in power relations. Feminist research theory emerges from and responds to the lives of women. Feminist theory is grounded in women's lives and aims to analyze the role and meaning of gender in those lives and in society.

#### **4.6 The Site of the Study: Asoka Adult Basic Education Co-operative**

As a novice researcher I had lofty ideas about using the interpretative paradigm and how I could answer my critical question. In my first research proposal I set out to investigate a greater number of adult education centres and subjects. Through my readings I realized that that the task at hand would have been colossal. I thus settled on a single research site, the Asoka Adult Basic Education Co-operative (AABEC) where I taught adult literacy. AABEC, an adult basic education centre, is a non-governmental organization (NGO) that began classes in 1992. As an NGO, one of its goals was to empower the community by improving its literacy levels. The African National Congress Women's League of Reservoir Hills set up AABEC. The ANC Women's League is a sub-body of the African National Congress, which is the current ruling party in the Republic of South Africa. One of the main aims of the ANC Women's league is the "empowerment of women who have been subjected to oppression by a patriarchal regime, in the home, workplace and society" (ANC Women's League Newsletter, 1993).

Classes were initially run at the Asoka Hotel, which was how the adult school obtained its name. After a year AABEC moved to the neighbouring high school, Reservoir Hills Secondary. The ABET facilitators initially tutored voluntarily but later when funding was available, they were remunerated.

#### 4.6.1 Staff Composition

There were three female co-ordinators of whom two were South African Indians and the other a South African White. AABEC had nine South African Indian female facilitators and two male Africans who taught IsiZulu. The co-ordinator was responsible for supervision, evaluation of programmes and curriculum matters, organizing staff development programmes, staff meetings and finance. Facilitators<sup>25</sup> taught and attended staff development workshops, staff meetings, learner-representative meetings. They arranged fund raising activities, sporting activities, excursions, produced items for annual concert and some facilitators were sub-examiners for the Independent Examination Board examinations.

Learners were encouraged to write the Independent Examination Board examinations when they felt equipped to handle the challenges of writing an examination. The curriculum offered was as follows: mother tongue literacy in the foundation phase, English literacy, numeracy and vocational skills in the intermediate and advanced phases. Learners also participated in the following activities: excursions, sports, concert/awards ceremonies, lifeskills programmes such as: AIDS awareness, practical demonstrations on cooking, sewing, typing, fund raising and learner representative meetings.

AABEC adopted its own constitution, had a board of trustees and later enjoyed private funding from Joint Education Trust<sup>26</sup>. The enrolment figures at the beginning of each year stood at about 100, mainly Black domestic workers. However, classes usually dwindled to approximately 80 during the latter part of each year.

In 1994 I joined AABEC and taught the advanced English Literacy class. Most of the learners were semi-literate in English, i.e., they had a very rudimentary

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<sup>25</sup> Facilitators: as discussed in Chapter Two the concept teacher has many connotations therefore at AABEC the term facilitators was adopted.

<sup>26</sup> Joint Education Trust in South Africa: this was one of the most powerful funders in the field of ABET (Harley *et al.* 1996).

knowledge of English, which included reading, writing and communication. They were literate in their home tongue. Their main reason for joining AABEC was to acquire greater competency in English, especially in communicative skills.

AABEC was born out of the ANC Women's League. However, not all the facilitators were affiliated to the league, neither were they obliged to join the league. It cannot be denied that it might have been possible for some form of political biasness to influence the institution although the constitution and the contracts stated that AABEC is an apolitical organization. Adult learners were requested to sign a contract when they joined AABEC (See appendix).

### 4.7 The Question of Validity: A Reliable Vehicle

For any study to be considered trustworthy, the data needs to be reliable. The human instrument, which is the main instrument, used in my studies does fall short of guaranteeing scientific objectivity. However, there is a system of useful checks and balances. The need for objectivity can sometimes lose perspective and skews the research object's beliefs and practices on the display board if one makes the researcher's cultural beliefs and practices invisible (Harding, 1987). Harding (1987) goes on to challenge traditional research by emphasizing that feminist researchers and behaviours are part of the empirical evidence whether for or against the claims advanced in the results of the research. The credibility of the evidence of this study will certainly be open to scrutiny. What is important to note here is that introducing the 'subjective' element into analysis in fact increases the 'objectivity' of the research and decreases the 'objectivism', which often hides the true evidence from the public. In order for data to be trustworthy I elucidate, how this study will meet the following criteria (Lincoln & Guba, 1985):

- Credibility (data must demonstrate truth)
- Transferability (must provide 'thick' description)
- Confirmability (the construct used to counter the term *objectivity* in naturalistic research; in order to confirm the data one can use external

auditing, triangulation techniques and reflexive journals) to confirm the data

The way these constructs apply to this research is explained in the discussion below.

#### 4.7.1 Triangulation

I use the process of triangulation, which allows for cross-checking data and interpretations through the use of multiple data sources and data collection techniques. Triangulation helps one to reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation and clarifies meaning. It must be noted that no observation or interpretation can be perfectly repeated; however, triangulation serves to clarify meaning by identifying different ways in which the phenomenon can be seen (Flick in Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

The technique of triangulation with multiple data sources endeavours to establish credibility, dependability and confirmability. It is important as the study unfolds and information is gathered that steps be taken to counter check the data against at least one other source. Anderson (1993) explains that triangulating to interpret converging evidence points to a clear conclusion. Hence, conclusions derived by different data sources are far stronger than those suggested by one alone. The different data sources in this study that are used to triangulate the information are:

- Interviews with learners
- Autobiographies
- Lesson observation
- Learners' written work

In the next section I discuss how I collected the various data sources and how it helped me to reduce investigator bias and to make the data trustworthy. In my research I was able to establish credibility by engaging in life history, where there was persistent observation. I also triangulated with multiple data sources. The lengthy period of study (1998-2003) allowed me to learn more about the learners'

culture and to build trust. It also assisted in detecting distortions that might have crept into the data. This lengthy involvement also helped me to detect whether the learners' answers were merely to please me as the investigator (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Building trust is a developmental process and time-consuming. The life history approach falls within the naturalistic paradigm where the human instrument is the primary data-gathering source. All instruments are value-based and interact with local values, but it is also the human being who is in a position to identify and take into account the biases of the world.

#### **4.7.2 Transferability**

As a naturalistic enquirer I needed to demonstrate as accurately as possible the multiple realities of the learners' life world. For the data from such a source to be credible, it must demonstrate the truth. To make generalizations from such a data source would not be possible because there are always differences in context from situation to situation and even a single situation differs over time. However, for transferability to take place, I provide a 'thick' description on the focus of inquiry, which is necessary to enable someone interested in trying to make the transfer to reach a conclusion about whether such transfer can be possible. The person who is making the transfer needs to accumulate sufficient evidence about contextual similarity. The individual who may wish to make a judgment about transferability would need information about both contexts to make that judgment. It is not possible for me as an inquirer to know all the contexts to which someone may wish to transfer my findings. Hence, it is not reasonable to expect the range of contexts to which there might be some transferability. As a naturalistic inquirer I provide in-depth information that is context specific and context bound. Transferability can take place because I used purposeful sampling which, among other reasons provided the widest possible range of information for inclusion in 'thick' description (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The description details everything about the focus of inquiry that a reader may need to know in order to understand the findings. The adult learners are hand-picked and a full description of their profiles will follow in Chapter Five.

### 4.7.3 Credibility

In a rapidly changing society such as South Africa, individuals are forced to make sense of competing ideologies, values and beliefs. In my life history research, which spanned six years (1998-2003), there were many changes that occurred in the lives of the respondents. Reinharz (1998) comments that in studies that are especially of long duration, researchers may have to find new ways of doing research; or may discover that the circumstances of people that they are studying have changed. This will require alteration of data collection plans and research methodologies. In this study some of the learners' circumstances had changed. Thus to track learners and to keep up with the new 'data gathering' and action of the individual behaviour, meant that I had to use other methods to discover their experiences. As a researcher the multi-method approach allowed me to fill in some of the pieces of the jig-saw puzzle in my search for understanding critical women's issues. The multi-methods add new information by using one type of data to validate the other. I was able to increase the credibility of this research by ensuring commitment to thoroughness. In addition to writing their stories the learners were asked to bring along pictures or photographs that they could paste alongside their story to jog their memories or to assist them when words failed. In the next section I discuss the data sources that ensured transferability, credibility and confirmability.

### 4.8 Data Sources

The following are my data sources:

- Written autobiographies
- Letters sent by learners
- Interview schedules (1,2,3)
- Reflective journals
- ABET policy documents
- Classroom observation



### 4.8.1 Research Instruments

In this section I map out a work plan on how I used the various instruments, largely in response to the critical question, to define what has been done, why, when and how. My role as an adult educator and researcher meant that I had privileged insider information. According to Lincoln & Guba (1985), for meaningful human research to take place there has to be an authentic relationship between the investigator and the respondents. Only with the full co-operation and understanding of the respondents can the data uncover the truths about themselves. By being their adult educator and researcher, it was easier for me to gain their co-operation. The adult learners were able to communicate spontaneously because we had established a good rapport prior to the interview and this led to an authentic relationship. The researcher must seek to understand human experience and must be prepared to deal with conflict and contradictions. As their adult educator, I was responsible for their curriculum and preparation for the examinations. This did not mean that as educator I drew up the curriculum independently of the adult learners. In constructing the curriculum the main factor was listening to the needs of the adult learners and attempting to provide a curriculum that could be relevant to meet their needs in real-life world. Although this seems easy as an adult educator I found providing such a curriculum much like doing a trapeze act on a tight rope. I was privy to some of the issues that affected the adult learners and facilitators at the institution.

There are also disadvantages of being an insider researcher. Having worked with them over a long period of time, I became close to the learners and in this way I could have jeopardized the 'objective' space needed between researcher and learners. Being a teacher and researcher meant critiquing my own lessons and this could lend itself to certain biases. However, in this study the main focus is on what sense the adult learners made of the adult English curriculum and how they applied it to their day-to-day lives.

### 4.8.2 Interviews

The interview and the autobiography were the two main data sources. The other data sources were used to triangulate the information so that trustworthiness could be established. One of the most important aspects of the interview is its flexibility. As a researcher and adult educator I had the opportunity to observe the adult learners in the total situation in which they responded, i.e. their different environments. Doing the interviews at home meant that I could press for additional information when a response seemed incomplete or not entirely relevant. As a researcher I had time to reflect and process information within the interview situation itself.

I used mainly unstructured and semi-structured interviews because they had greater flexibility and freedom than the structured interview, which is too specific and lacks the freedom to explore deeper. Elliot (1991) adds that the semi-structured interview allows respondents freedom to digress and raise their own issues. The interviewer's main task is to ask questions in such a manner so as to obtain valid responses and to record the responses accurately and completely.

In order to ensure that adult learners' responses were accurately and completely recorded, a tape recorder was used in the interview process. The tape recorder is according to Lincoln & Guba (1985: 271), an unimpeachable data source. It assures completeness, provides an opportunity to review as often as necessary so that full understanding can be achieved. It also provides material reliability checks. Ethics demanded that I obtained permission before any interviewing could be undertaken.

As a researcher and literacy educator, it was difficult for me during the interview process to immediately remove myself and enter a research mode. I therefore had to have a warm-up session before recording. The interviews were conducted in English and this sometimes created a barrier to understanding the questions. The learner's home language is not English; therefore I had to often probe to gather

more information because the questions required elucidation. Although I had a semi-structured interview schedule, it was not always possible to follow it strictly.

All interviews were audio-taped, transcribed and analyzed. In transcription I provided a read as accurately as possible. The learners were not always clear about their ideas and at times it was extremely difficult to note everything that was being transmitted. Nevertheless, I attempted to take down almost word-for-word that was tape-recorded. It was difficult to convey emphasis, gestures, and facial expression, which give additional meaning to the spoken word. It was important to note that:

*Given that a transcription cannot represent everything featured in the original spoken language, it follows that any transcription is an interpretation by the transcriber of what is being said (Powney & Watts, 1987: 153).*

It is best to represent the whole interview *verbatim* as far as possible, including hesitations, pauses, laughs, sighs and so on. The interviews were sequentially developed where I interviewed the learners at the beginning of the ABET teaching programme, during their stay at adult classes and after they completed their ABET literacy programme. The following sections explain the purpose and the focus of the interview.

### **Interview Schedule One**

In the first unstructured interview schedule, the learners were asked about their life history. The first interview schedule was broad to allow the learners to tell their story. It is the subsequent interviews that have more targeted information. The first interview schedule was completed in 1999.

The purpose of the life history interview was:

- To gather background information on each learner
- To link ABET with their life worlds
- To identify the many roles that the learners play

- To probe how they made sense of the English language at primary school.

### **Interview Schedule Two**

The second in-depth semi-structured interview was conducted after they completed their literacy programmes. All the learners had completed writing an Independent Examination Board examination.

The purpose of interview schedule two was to probe:

- What skills ABET had equipped adult learners for the adult world
- Whether ABET assisted in improving their English lessons
- Whether ABET assisted them as domestic workers
- Whether ABET improved their self-esteem
- Whether ABET 'empowered' learners as females in a gendered society
- Whether physical resources assisted in the teaching-learning situation and
- Whether examinations and portfolio assessments benefited the learners in any way

### **Interview Schedule Three**

This interview was conducted after learners had completed their literacy programmes so that one might establish the impact the English literacy curriculum had on them. The interviews were conducted in the years 2002 to 2003.

The purpose of the interview schedule three was:

- To trace the impact of the English literacy curriculum on four adult female learners (post-literacy)
- Probe whether English literacy empowered them in the community; family, employment and relationships
- Probe whether ABET fulfilled their desired needs
- Probe whether literacy skills helped them to change their vocation

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- Probe whether any literacy skills had developed

The interview may be used in conjunction with other methods in research. I have used the adult learners' autobiographies as a data source to triangulate information from the interviews.

#### 4.9 Autobiographies

I used the autobiographies as methodological instruments to gather rich data from the lived experiences of the adult learners through their own voices. Swindells (1989) aptly argues that autobiographical writing can tell us much about class, gender, race and reveal the silenced voices. On a methodological level, I probed how adult learners made sense of the English language from their own view. On a pedagogical level, I critique the autobiographical writing and the collage to evaluate whether learners were able to engage in critical literacy. Using the critical postmodern paradigm, I did not evaluate literacy through a narrow mechanical view as just acquiring reading and writing skills, but as development that goes beyond the technical sense. Did the domestic workers who are considered the most exploited in the South African context, acquire critical-consciousness so that they could become empowered to assert their authentic place in society? This question will be explored in the analysis of the data.

Autobiographies provide a rich data source for the discerning qualitative researcher. It reveals rich detail, written for the purpose of telling one's own story as he or she sees it. It can be an introduction to the world the researcher wants to study (Biklen, 1992). The autobiographies assisted in triangulating information from the interviews.

Adult learners were exposed for the first time in ABET to write a lengthy piece of writing. They were asked to write about the autobiographical experiences of their life, tracing their development from early childhood, preschool, primary school, life as a domestic worker, their goals in life and how they felt about ABET. This

was a daunting experience and something they felt was beyond their scope. I wrote my own autobiography as an example to assist in the writing process. When learners understood the process they were able to write about their life. They were able to express their feelings about how they were treated as domestic workers. The autobiographical writing according to Denzin & Lincoln (1998c: 187) gives voice to people long-denied a voice. For the reader, determining what is relevant becomes an exercise of critical judgment.

Professor Kendall assisted me in teaching this lesson. Professor Kendall, formerly from the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, had visited AABEC with Mpho Nthunya a domestic worker. With Kendall's assistance Nthunya, was able to write an autobiographical account of her life '*Singing Away The Hunger*' (Nthunya, 1996). Professor Kendall was able to demonstrate to the learners how to write an autobiography by illustrating through Nthunya's life. Nthunya (1996) explained how she was able to 'write' her autobiography with simple English. The illustration Nthunya used to describe how to recall events in her life was to open the pages of her album and write her stories. Nthunya read excerpts from her text and this encouraged learners to write. The learners benefited from the experiences shared by Nthunya.

#### **4.9.1 Collages**

The learners were required to bring magazines and cut out pictures to create a collage of their lives to add to their autobiographies. Learners spent some time identifying pictures that represented them and some wrote captions that went with the pictures. The pictures that learners identified were metaphors or symbols that represented their lives. The metaphors or pictures promoted open dialogue. It helps one to see what one does not often see, unlike logic, which helps one see more clearly that which one already sees. It is through these pictures or metaphors that we are able to get a clearer insight into the creative, imaginative world of the

adult learners. The pictures have been assembled with different textures, styles, writing and colours that reflect their individual thought and feelings.

#### 4.10 Classroom Observation

The purpose of the classroom observation as a data source was to:

- Verify and recognize the English communicative skills of the learners
- Analyze how they made sense of the English language in an ABET class
- Identify if the classroom teaching/learning produces an empowering environment for feminist critical consciousness

Direct observation provides an in-depth here and now experience. Lincoln & Guba (1995: 273) describe the methodological arguments for observation as follows:

*Observation ... maximizes the inquirer's ability to grasp motives, beliefs, concerns interests, unconscious behaviors, customs, and the like: observation... allows the inquirer to see the world as his subjects see it, to live in their time frames, to capture the phenomenon in and on its own terms, and to grasp the culture in its own natural, on-going environment; observation ... provides the inquirer with access to the emotional reactions of the group introspectively – that is, in a real sense it permits the observer to use himself as a data source ; and observation allows the observer to build on tacit knowledge, both his own and that of members of the group.*

My lessons were all done in a natural classroom setting. I taught the lessons, audio-taped them and then did a stimulus recall. As an insider researcher reflecting on my classroom teaching practice, I tape-recorded or videotaped lessons in order to provide the basis for extending or elaborating natural observation. This method offered greater understanding through slow motion and stop-frame. I observed and recorded six lessons but I analyzed only one lesson because it was not possible to complete a detailed analysis of all the lessons.

#### 4.11 Documents

Education policy documents provided a vital source of information of the evaluation of English literacy curriculum. Documents are a stable source of information that may accurately reflect a situation that occurred in the past, which can be analyzed and reanalyzed without undergoing any changes in the interim. They appear in the natural language they are contextually relevant and grounded in the contexts they represent. Documents and records are often used interchangeably. The term record is used to mean any record or statement prepared by an individual or organization, which attests to an event, for example a learner's grade file. While a document is used to denote any written material not specifically requested by the inquirer such as letters or tests these documents and records show proof that the event happened. The following documents are examined: learners' letters, policy documents

These were some of the policy documents that were consulted in this research:

- A National Adult Basic Education and Training Framework: Interim Guideline (1995).
- A National Multi-year implementation Plan (1997)
- A National Adult Basic Education & Training Framework (1997)
- Adult Basic Education and Training Act, 2000, Government Gazette, Pretoria, South Africa

From these policy documents the following framework for analysis of the English literacy curriculum was formulated (policy was interrogated in Chapter Three):

- Curriculum assumptions
- Policy intentions of redress, equity and human rights
- Impact of globalization
- Impact of ideology
- Power relations
- Outcomes based education and training (OBET) in the South African context



#### **4.12 Reflective Journal**

As an adult educator I had kept entries in a journal of my experiences at AABEC. Besides assisting me in being reflective in my practice, my reflective journal became a valuable source of data. In the next section I explain the methods I employed to analyze the data.

#### **4.13 Unbundling The Data**

During data analysis, the researcher like the adventurous traveller needs to take time out to rest and plan her next move. She has to be reflective and try to make sense of the 'chaotic data'. Data analysis is the process of systematically searching the interview transcripts and other materials that one accumulates to increase one's understanding of them and to be able to present what one has discovered in relation to others.

The steps involved in my data analysis process are as follows: preparing the raw data for analysis by reading and checking the data, organizing the data in order to make sense of the information by arranging it into a manageable form e.g. categorizing according to themes or patterns and re-presenting the data in narrative form to provide meaningful summaries of the large amount of data (Vithal & Jansen, 1997).

#### **4.14 Travelling Through a Maze**

My raw data was like a chaotic jungle of words. I had to travel through the maze by carefully clearing the chaos of words. The data had to be slowly unraveled as I went through each stage of new understanding. I tried to order the dense information from all my data sources by identifying common categories. Analysis involves working with data, organizing them into manageable units, synthesizing them, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned and deciding what you will tell others. Pattern analysis is often used to

make sense of what is discovered in the classroom. It is a technique of looking at what happens in classrooms. Pattern analysis is an open-ended technique, rather than a preconceived set of categories. Using pattern analysis I read through the transcripts of the interview schedules, autobiographies and classroom observations to identify themes. A system for coding and categorizing the data was developed. Through the use of highlighter pens, relevant passages, sentences, ideas and categories were marked. Categories and ideas were collated and codified according to colours. As the process continued, themes began to emerge. Coding and categorizing is intuitive and is also informed by the researcher's metatheories and explicit theoretical frameworks (LeCompte & Priessle, 1993). This method of analysis is an iterative process of reading, reflection and examination of each transcript. The iterative process was continued after each new transcript became available. There was a constant refining process, moving backwards and forwards between the raw evidence of the transcript and the developing analyses. There is a need to go over data carefully and to allow for contemplation of the data, because there are possibilities for uncovering rich meaning of the participant's lives through the data.

The contemplation period allowed for thinking and gauging nuances to achieve understanding. This resulted in a creative synthesis of the learner's story of her lived experience. This was similar to the constant comparative method put forward by Glaser & Strauss (cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 1998c). According to Denzin & Lincoln (1998c: 47) "There is no one best system for analysis". The categories that emerged from the data were: poverty, power relations, the hegemony of English and female oppression.

Using the metaphor of the traveller/ researcher, I needed to find the most effective mode of transport to engage in a journey with four female adult learners. The most powerful means of travel (the vehicle) was the life history method. In this method one remains close to the data. The theory that is developed from this research is grounded from the data that is systematically gathered and analyzed. No *a priori* theory could possibly encompass the multiple realities that are likely

to be encountered because seeing is believing and the naturalistic inquirer wishes to enter the transactions with respondents as neutrally as possible. The theory evolves during the actual research process and it does so through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection. In this methodology, theory may be:

*...generated initially from the data, or, if existing (grounded) theories seem appropriate to the area of investigation, then these may be elaborated and modified as incoming data are meticulously played against them (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998c).*

#### **4.15 Methodological Challenges**

Who said that research was neat, tidy and clinical? How is it possible to be neutral, detached and emotionless in a sea of poverty, pain and suffering? These were the challenges that I faced as a researcher. Researching in spaces that are in a constant state of flux is a methodological nightmare. Attendance at adult literacy classes is very erratic. Learners come and go as their life circumstances dictate. The unpredictability of employment is a major factor in determining the residence of the learners. Family commitments, ill health and the demands of employers are other contributing factors. Although I chose candidates who were fairly regular at school, who was to predict that Maria would have a baby and leave the province? Who was to predict that Cindy would be wrongfully arrested for the murder of her employer and that I would have to give her emotional support during the nine months of her imprisonment? Arranging interviews was a juggling act because of the circumstances of the learners. Eventually I had to go out and search for the learners at the informal settlements. Is it ethical to conduct interviews with a baby crying in the background? Interviews had to be stopped and restarted. Many of my interviews with Maria had to be conducted via letters. It was the postmodern feminist perspective that came to the rescue in understanding the unpredictability, messiness and non-linearity of life and research.

#### 4.16 Conclusion

In the first section, I explained how the qualitative, interpretative, naturalistic paradigm was used to explore my critical question. The qualitative method of research has many advantages and implications for this study. I illustrated how life history as a methodological tool richly captured the adult learners' lives. The telling of a story from a woman's perspective is further explored when I discussed the relevance of ensuring the characteristics of feminist research in feminist research methodology.

I explored how critical theory, critical postmodernism and the feminist stance were used to craft a methodological tool for my research. Using the critical theoretical frameworks, I explained the importance of the methodological implications of the invisible power relations constructed by culture, language, politics, ideological beliefs, religion and status. I gave a brief history of the organization to locate the site of my study. I explained the reasons for purposive sampling. The semi-structured interviews allowed me to gather in-depth information as well as tacit knowledge on the adult learners. The autobiographies and documents demonstrated how I could triangulate information with other data sources.

In the data analysis I described how large chunks of cluttered data are broken down using a systematic method of pattern analysis. My positioning on the issue of multiple realities was explained. As a qualitative researcher I explored how grounded theory had taken into account local conditions, local mutual shapings forces, and local values for possible transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985: 40).

In Chapters Six, Seven and Eight I will analyze the data sources mentioned in Chapter Four through the themes of poverty, power relations, female oppression and the hegemony of the English language. In Chapter Five I will present a graphic profile in table format of the learners, I then proceed to draw portraits and finally I present the autobiographies with their authentic voice.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### A JOURNEY INTO THE ADULT LEARNERS' LIFE WORLDS

#### 5.1 The Journey Continues

In this chapter I give an overview in tabulated form of the learner profiles. Thereafter a brief narrative summary of the learners' life history, with emphasis on how adult literacy in particular impacted on their life world and finally I present the learners' autobiographies through inter-text to reveal their own voice, uniqueness and identity that is often lost when reconstructing the stories. In Chapters Six, Seven, Eight and Nine the data are pulled apart and reconstructed into the themes that have emerged.

Before commencing with my data analysis I step aside momentarily from my journey into unravelling the data and reflect on how my theoretical and methodological frameworks shaped my analysis. I interpret the data through critical feminist postmodern lenses (see Chapter four). I am conscious of some of the criticisms that have been levelled against critical postmodernism. Darder (2003: 501) points out that the politics of identity, race, gender and culture are looked at in a sectarian, parochial manner rather than at the real enemy, which is the enemy against class struggle. I argue that life is not deterministic and cannot be looked at as binaries. Life is far more complex and should be viewed as open systems. Critical postmodernism is but one lens to interpret the multiple realities of the adult learner in the multicultural, multilingual context. A curriculum for the new millennium has been seen as conceptual revolution, given the latest fads and mind shifts that bring with it challenges to find new ways of thinking and doing things in the field of human endeavour. To investigate the impact of the adult literacy curriculum I base my analysis of the data on the following assumptions which emanated from the critical, postmodern and feminist perspectives: literacy is not just a process of learning to read and write but to make a full contribution to the liberation and authentic development of the individual. In literacy it is important that the learners become critically conscious of their society and make attempts to transform it. Curriculum is viewed as open, where students and teachers are in conversation and dialogue to create more complex orders and

structures from the subject matter. The teacher must use emancipatory and empowering teaching strategies to bring about transformative education. Learners' prior knowledge must be acknowledged in the teaching-learning situation. No one owns truth and everyone has the right to be understood. The curriculum of a postmodern *milieu* have broad frameworks but one that has no tops or bottoms. They are open systems, where the content is not given. In the open system disruptions, chaos and mistakes are not frowned upon but are viewed as challenges for transformation. In the closed system, setting goals, planning, implementation and evaluating results fit well. In the new system, goals do not need to be precise nor pre-set. They should be general, allowing for and encouraging creative, interactive transformation. In this system it does not mean anything goes. On the contrary, there are checks and balances. The system celebrates the contradictions and paradoxes of the complementary nature of human existence with the rational, technical scientific, perturbations and chaos which constantly challenges and provides for transformation.

Using the iterative process, information was analyzed and interpreted as soon as data was received. It was difficult to interpret the data in any linear fashion because of pragmatic reasons. Data from the various sources had been collected in a constant stream with no definite time schedule. The impact of the English literacy curriculum must be viewed holistically in an open system where learners interact within a dynamic, flexible, chaotic, messy environment and not one that is uniform, measured and determined. Thus data similarly is presented in a seemingly paradoxical, multi-streamed matrix.

## 5.2 Learner Profiles

The learner profiles were compiled from the following data sources: autobiographies/ collage, interviews, learner's letters, lesson observation and my reflective journal. The tabulated representation of the four respondents helped me as the researcher to have gained an understanding of the larger picture of the adult learners. Analyzing all the data sources produced the graphic representation of learner profiles. The profiles established the adult learners' involvement in adult literacy and their life world, which helps the

reader and researcher to have a greater understanding of the learners. I do not dwell extensively on the impact that literacy had on the learners at this stage because I provide detailed vignettes of learners own comments on the impact that literacy had on their lives in chapter nine. Table 5.1 sets out their pre-literacy and post-literacy activities.

**Table 5.1: Profile of Adult Learners**

NAME	MARIA	BONGIWE	CINDY	AGNES
Home Town & Residence during Literacy	Born in rural Phalarbowa – Moved to Durban, lived with employer	Born in rural Hammarsdale, moved to Durban lived in the informal settlement Mpolweni	Born in rural Transkei, moved to Durban lived with employers and Mpolweni	Born in rural Matatiele, moved to Durban, lived with employers
Date of birth	28/8/52	16/4/72	24/6/69	18/2/63
Age	51 yrs	31 yrs	34 yrs	40 yrs
No. Languages Spoken	Sesotho, Xhosa, IsiZulu, English, Venda	IsiZulu, English	Xhosa, isiZulu, English	Sesotho, Xhosa, IsiZulu, English
Highest Std.	6	6	5	5
Pre- ABET Occupation	Worked in motel as kitchen assistant, domestic worker, sales representative for perfumes	Domestic worker	Domestic worker	Domestic worker
Work experience – During & Post literacy	During-literacy: domestic worker Post-literacy: Took up small business enterprise sold chicken head and feet, sold sweets, cool drinks and chips at the stadium during weekends (2000-200.	During- literacy: 1995, Domestic worker; 1996: Sold curry powder; 1997: Worked for a security company; 1998: Bakery 1998 – 1999, laboratory assistant; Post-literacy: Worked in a restaurant- 2000-2003	During-literacy: domestic worker Post-literacy: Domestic worker	During literacy & Post literacy Domestic worker

<b>No. Yrs ABET</b>	1993-1999 (7yrs)	1995-2000 5 yrs	1996-2000 (4yrs)	1998-2000 (3 yrs)
<b>ABET Exams</b>	Level 2 & 3 Passed IEB exams with merit	Level 2 Passed IEB exams with merit	Level 3 Did not pass IEB exams	Level 1 Passed IEB exams with merit
<b>ABET Achievements</b>	Participated in debates, skits, sport, was class representative received numerous merit awards	Participated in, skits, song, class discussions, received awards in sport and certificates.	Participated in dance, discussions, sport and received certificates.	Participated in class discussion, sport and received awards.
<b>Community Involvement</b>	Ex member of Reservoir Hills African National Congress Women's League, Ex-president of the South African Domestic Worker's Union, Member of the Sacred Heart Church, member of the ANC	Member of the African National Congress, assisted in voter education, leader of Mpolweni settlement.	Member of the Zionist Christian Organization,	Member of the African National Congress, Member of the Anglican church
<b>Other Qualifications</b>	Certificate for home nursing	Certificate from Natal University, Test Stools	Apprentice Sangoma <sup>27</sup>	Sewing Diploma
<b>Children's Education</b>	Eldest son passed matric and is employed, daughter presently in Grade 11, children schooled at Phalarbowa.	Daughter Thabisle- grade 8 ex-house of delegate school, baby son, Thabiso 11 months	Little contact with children, son grade 5, daughter Grade 3	Alfred, grade 10, Patience, Grade 8 Litlotlo, Grade 2
<b>Domestic Work Experience</b>	A domestic worker for 11 yrs.	Domestic worker for 4 yrs years.	Domestic worker, 7 years.	Domestic worker, 7 yrs.

<sup>27</sup> Sangoma- Traditional healer.



<b>Interests</b>	Politics, involved in community upliftment projects, sewing, gardening, church work.	Community involvement at Mpolweni, athletics, jogging, karate.	Church work, no interest in politics.	Sewing and baking.
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### 5.3 Portrait of Learners

In the portraits of the learners I paint a summary of the learners' biographical details whilst in the learner profiles I presented a graphic illustration of learner details for a cursory summary. LeCompte & Priessle (1993) aptly explain how the summary helps the researcher to withdraw from the minute details of analysis and look at the larger picture. Another purpose of the summary is to inform the reader where the study was located and to reveal the co-construction of the multiple realities of each respondent in this research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998b). My analysis of each learner in the portrait focuses mainly on the central issue: the impact of the English literacy curriculum on adult learners. In the portraits I journey through their lives to understand how the factors might have shaped their understanding of adult literacy, it is the detours and the lost tracks that give greater meaning to life. It is the less traveled road that I attempt to embark on.

From my various data sources I draw portraits of each of the learners incorporating some of the following issues: early life, English literacy, early schooling, why learners joined adult basic education, the impact of ABET on their life worlds and finally an analysis and interpretation of their cover design. I present each portrait with the learner's cover design of how they interpreted themselves in the autobiographies. The first portrait I present is Maria. I begin each portrait by extracting from their own collage, images that they identified of themselves. The pictures are a symbolic representation of the learners' dreams and aspirations. The 'pictures paint a thousand words' and reveal great insights into how the learners perceived themselves.

## 5.4 Autobiographies

### 5.4.1 Introduction

The learners' autobiographies is the last data source I present as inter-text for each learner. From their narratives I was able to gather rich insights of each adult learner. The learners began adult literacy with rudimentary skills in English. The autobiographies were written after spending some time at acquiring English literacy. I have explained how the autobiographies were written in Chapter Three. I present their autobiographical writing without any alteration except for correct spelling of some words in brackets wherever it was essential for meaning. The autobiographical writings exposed the detailed tapestry of the learners' life that they weave so uniquely. The stories capture the critical moments of their journey from childhood to adulthood. The stories have been written under headings to assist in their writing. I had given the learners subheadings for the autobiographical writing in order to elicit data that I deemed relevant for this study. In this way the researcher's agenda could have interfered with the writings. Learners however, did not limit themselves to these headings but included critical incidents that made an impact on their lives. It could be said then, that the narratives were partly co-constructed. The following were some of the subheadings of the autobiographical writings:

- Early Childhood: My Home, my Family, my Community
- My School Days
- My Life as a Domestic worker
- Things I Like and Dislike
- My Dreams

The first learner's portrait and autobiography, I present is Maria.

5.5 Portrait: Maria

TITLE: MY LIFE  
ORGANISATION  
A&BEC



**"I want to become a business woman,"**

Maria was born in 1952 in a mountainous rural village called Phillipolis in the Free State. She attended a Roman Catholic school, MaMketsie Ntho Letwer, in Maseru, Lesotho. The schools she attended were all English medium schools. The English language was given a 'higher' status in school where learners were compelled to speak the language at all times. The school used tough measures to promote the use of English by requesting that it be spoken during breaks.

In Standard Two she made her journey from the Free State to Maseru to live with an uncle because he had no children. In 1970 she returned to Free State after the death of her uncle. Her parents spoke Northern Sesotho and Sepedi. When she moved schools she was rejected from Tweespruit because she could not speak Afrikaans. At the new school she

was forced to learn new languages that were not her home language. At home she spoke Northern Sesotho, but at school she had to learn Southern Sesotho.

Soon after she returned from the Free State she was forced to leave school because of financial difficulties. This was against her wishes because she desired to continue with her studies. The exposure to languages has given Maria the advantage of being multilingual. She is able to communicate in five languages: Venda, IsiZulu, Xhosa, Sesotho and English. She was literate in Sesotho and acquired basic literacy skills in English. Despite the diverse language skills that Maria acquired she felt the need to attend literacy classes to:

*...improve my English. I did not want my mind to get rusty. I didn't really hope to achieve much from adult literacy rather than English that was taught but I have learned so many skills like sewing and typing, which I did not expect from literacy. I also made good friends at AABEC we became like family.*

At nineteen she completed a home-care nursing certificate at the Good Samaritan College. In 1974 she worked at a motel near Hendrik Verwoerd Dam for one year, initially as washer then as a waitress. In 1975 she fell pregnant but was unable to marry because of the patriarchal influence of her father. Her father forbade her from marrying the man of her dreams because of African cultural reasons.

The rural area did not provide economic opportunities. The need to seek employment to provide for her family made her turn to the city, the land of *egoli* (golden opportunities). In 1976 she began her employment as a domestic worker.

In 1981 she joined the South African Domestic Workers Union (SADU). On the 29 of November 1986 Maria went for the launch of SADU to Cape Town as chairperson of the central Durban region. She held this portfolio for two years.

Maria is a devout Christian and belonged to the Sacred Heart of Jesus church. She was an executive Member of the Reservoir Hills African National Congress Women's League.

In 1993 she enjoyed being a sales representative for *Count Giovanni French Perfumes* while she was still employed as a domestic worker. Maria has three children, a son who

completed matriculation and is currently employed, a daughter in Grade 11 and a late arrival Rafik, who was born in 2000.

Maria attended the literacy programme since its inception and remained in it for seven years. She has been the class representative for many years. She has written the Level 2 and 3 Independent Board Examinations and passed with merit. She obtained excellent attendance and good progress awards. Maria participated in the pantomime 'Cinders' and the dance 'Asimbonanga'. Asimbonga is a song by Johnny Clegg, which describes the feelings of the Black oppressed people who were exiled and imprisoned and gained their freedom after democracy was given when Nelson Mandela was released. The learners did an Afro-fusion dance to the song. She was interviewed on television on how she felt about the Afro-fusion dance. Maria engaged in the sporting activities organized at AABEC and was involved in most class skits, discussion and plays.

In 1999, Maria fell pregnant but was at pains to inform me about her pregnancy. From her cultural perspective she felt that that by falling pregnant she was letting the teacher down. Therefore she did not inform me of her pregnancy until it became obvious that she was pregnant. It was during the class discussion that these cultural norms were made known to me. In December 1999 Maria quit adult literacy classes and returned to Phalarbowa. This was a difficult decision made after careful deliberation to begin a new life.

As an individual who always dreamed of setting up her own business she finally managed to engage in small business by selling clothes. When the sales dropped she used her entrepreneurial skills to venture into a new line by selling chicken heads and feet. Presently (2003), her chicken head and feet business is competing well in the market place because it is something that the community consumes frequently. With the help of her daughter she does sales of little goodies at the soccer stadium during matches.

Maria identifies her positive self-image with a well-dressed Black business executive for her cover in the autobiography. The caption below her picture read "I want to become a

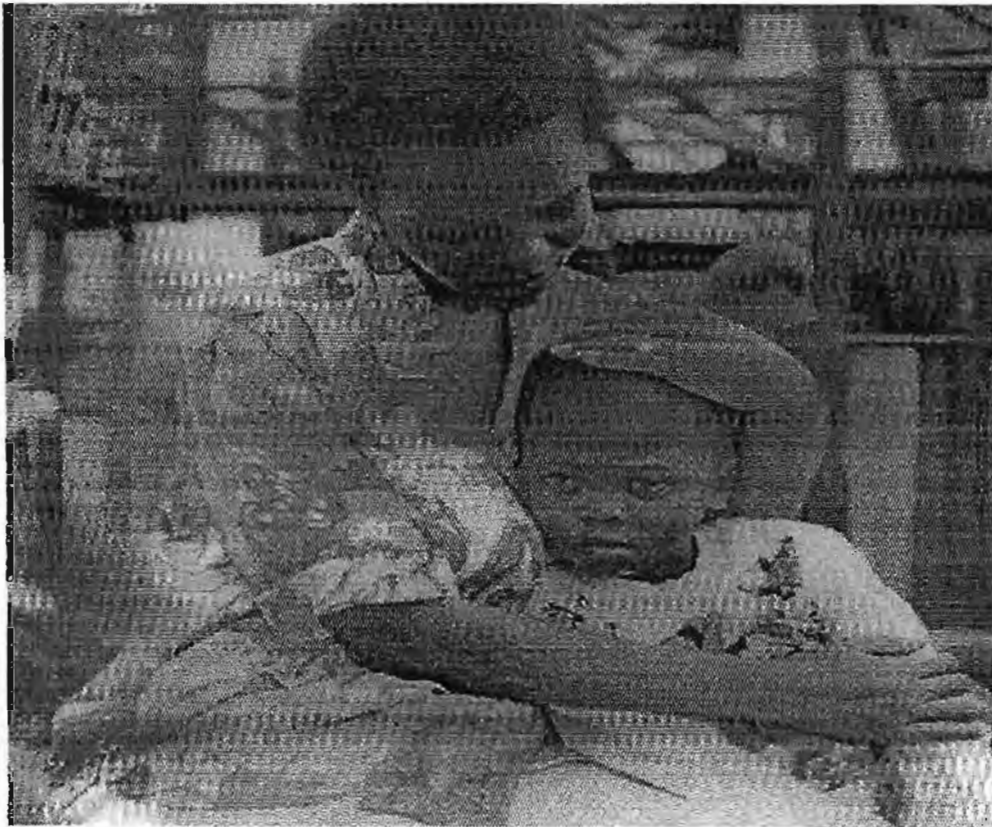
business woman,”. This reveals that she also identifies with the marginalized and believes that as a Black disadvantaged woman she would be able to fulfill her dreams.

Text One

Maria

WOMAN OF THE 90S

*Woman of the 90s*



CHILDHOOD

*My name is Mary. I come from the Free State a place called Phalarbowa.*

*It is a very small town with sloppy land and a lot of mountains. Phalarbowa is so cold in winter that I cannot go outside with out wearing a jersey or a blanket. When winter comes people feel really miserable.*

## MOTHER CITY PHILIPPOLIS



Although I  
and they do  
and when it  
they is sum  
love it to  
ally!



*There are ten in my family, five girls and five boys because my dad had two wives. I belong to the younger one and I am the youngest. You can imagine how spoilt I was. I used to get the best and my sister used to carry me on their backs. Oh ' it is was fun.*

*I used to have a friend called Tshidi with whom I played with. We used to play house games and with rag dolls. In our small houses we would take sand and mix with water and say that was porridge. We would also take sifted malt, put water and say that was beer. We would drink it and pretend we were drunk. When we were about seven to eight years old we then cooked real food.*

*One day we took tinned fish containers to cook our food. Being so small we did not know these tins were poisonous because they had sort of a yellowish layer. Guess what happened. The same night we ate that food both of us never slept. We vomited the whole night and our parents wondered what we had eaten. Only when we told them that we used those tinned fish containers they then realized the cause of the vomiting. From that day they gave us small saucepans to cook with.*

### **MY SCHOOL YEARS**

*I started schooling in 1960 in Henneman near whites. It was exciting to be at school for the first time because my mother bought me a new black tunic, a white shirt and black school shoes.*

*On the first day all dressed in black and white my mum took me for registration. It took us so long because there was so many of us. From eight o'clock to three o'clock in the afternoon. I attended school there until I moved to Lesotho in 1962.*

*In Lesotho schooling was also very nice but my problem was the way Sesotho language was written. I used to write Northern Sotho where as there they write Southern Sotho. So it was very difficult for me but then I got used to it.*

*I had to walk a long distance to go to school. The classes began at 8am and finished 3:00 in the afternoon. I had to leave home at 6:00 in the morning in order to get to school on time. One day I arrived late and Mr Modomo hit me so badly that I could not do anything because my hands were swollen. I was so angry because I walked so far and he didn't*



*have any feeling for me. My parents couldn't do anything because they felt that if they say something he may give me a hard time. Thank god I passed and went to another class.*

*It was in 1967 when I started a new class with sister Emmanuella. She was wonderful because she did not hit us like Mr Modumo. If we did something wrong she would only scold us.*

*I used to share my desk with two friends namely Anna - Marie and Marianna. I used to be called Maria in my school days. I changed it because my big brothers daughters name was also Maria. So both of us had similar names and surnames. That's why I changed it to Mary. Things were all right in sister Emmanuella's class but the worse thing is that I would do my own things and not pay attention to the teacher, as a result I failed that year. I was so disappointed because my two friends passed, but the following year I worked so hard that I succeeded and obtained a second-class pass. That was my final year at the secondary school (1969)*

### **THINGS I LIKE AND DISLIKE**

*The Lord has created all different kinds of people of people, black and white. Although we differ in colour but in the eyes of god we are all the same. God has given us the power, the strength and understanding so that we can see right and wrong. We also have different lives e.g. rich and poor. At the same time there are things that we like and dislike.*

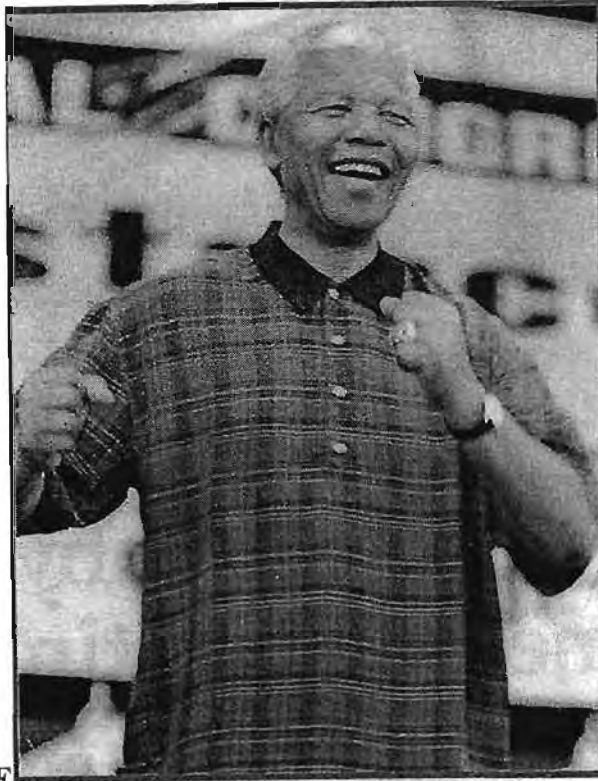
*I would like to talk about things I like and dislike. I like cooking and baking because with out food we will not survive. Healthy food build up the body. Once a week I do gardening. There I plant mealies, vegetables like tomatoes, onions, cabbage and flower which make my garden look beautiful.*

*The people in my neighbourhood always admire my garden. I was in fact rewarded for the peace garden of the year and I was so delighted. I like going to church every Sundays to worship the lord. I often meet with people because that's where we share our ideas and learn more about others.*

*What I dislike is alcoholism because it destroys many homes and families. Many people loose their jobs and end up in the street. There are so many people that are too pathetic, it makes want to cry when I think how they were at first and see the state they are in. Alcohol is really a bad thing. ;people should think twice before taking it. I also dislike violence because so many people loose their lives and their relatives through this monster called violence. Some have become orphans and without homes. I feel we should learn to love and forgive each other. If we really do so there won't be any fightings. Lets join hands and fight for peace.*

*The worst thing I dislike is the taking of drugs. It is so heartbreaking to see that our youth is involved in them. They leave school and go into the street so that they can smoke dagga, sniff glue and benzine and even take mandrax. The worst of all is these drugs are introduced to them by adults who know exactly the danger of drugs. They are killing our future generation. I hope our youth realise the harm the drug is causing to them and say NO to drugs.*

ELECTIONS, PROMISES, ASPIRATIONS AND DESIR



E

*After the Mr Mandela was released from prison in March 1990 the apartheid laws were also scrapped and the ANC was unbanned. People started afresh working for their party therefore the election process took place. On the 27-04 -1994, the first democratic election took place and ANC won with flying colours. On the 10-4-1994 was the inaocuration(inauguration) of the new president Mandela and his deputies Mr. Thabo Mbeki and Mr F. W. De Klerk. In its power the ANC promised the people that it will build houses for all and give electricity to all, free education for the 6 year olds, water and free medical treatment for pregnant and that was fulfilled. We are all very glad because those were our aspirations.*

*Now the government has come up with a new thing the KZT (AZT) to help the pregnant mothers from passing aids to their babies. This is a good challenge because we see how*

*people are dying of this monster (aids). I'm definitely sure that in future the people will again vote for the ANC government because they have achieved what we desired for.*

*I think the ANC government is the best compared to the White government.*

### **WHAT I WENT THROUGH IN MY JOB**

*I had a very bad time when my daughter was born in 1987, because my madam also had a small baby. In fact our children are six months difference. When I was three months pregnant, she wanted to know what I am going to do when the baby is born and I told her that I am going to bring someone from the farm to take care of her. When she heard me say that she told me she does not want two children in the premises. I have to find a place to stay. So I went to Claremont to look for but couldn't find it. I came back and told her and she said that I can stay but I must still look for it. That's how I stayed because she had to go work the next day, she had no choice in the matter.*

*When my daughter was nine months old her granny's grandmother passed away so I had to take her for the funeral, when the funeral was over something terrible happened because she didn't want to come back. Now I was puzzled as I couldn't bring my baby without anybody to look after her so what happened was I had to leave her behind. Oh! It was really heart sore I was still breastfeeding her. One day I went to a nearby informal settlement to look for somebody else to take care of her luckily I found a little girl who was prepared to stay with me. Her parents were very nice people as they were willing to help me. I came back and told the madam that now that I found someone to look after my baby I am going back to the farm to fetch her. I went and brought her and we all stayed nicely the three of us. In November which was two months since she was with me, she developed scabies and the madam asked me to send her home because she feared that it would spread onto the babies. Fortunately she was from Natal not like Free State where I had to pay lot of money to go. Eventually I ended up looking after two babies. Thanks to the Lord who gave me that strength to be able to look after the two of them. In December I went home for my holiday and coming back I brought somebody else to take care of my baby, actually this was the third person now. What could I do? I had no choice as I*

*couldn't stay without her, she also went through a bad time poor child. Although we stayed it was very tough I must say because we had no freedom everytime the baby makes a sound you would hear the madam saying sh –sh –sh I always wondered how could someone be so cruel towards an innocent soul. Maybe she was exercising her powers as an employer.*

### **MY LIFE AS A DOMESTIC WORKER**

*I am so neatly dressed in a three piece uniform but when the day goes I am all messed because of the job I do. I feel so gloomy at 500 when I get up to make the madams early morning coffee. I have to be up at that time because that's madams rule, otherwise I am fired. After getting the madam up with a hot cup of coffee, by 700 I have to make breakfast for everybody before they leave for work. Imagine how I feel when preparing these delicious food with an empty stomach. I shall be counting the hours for my breakfast which is at 900 am. After finishing all the household chores, I go to bed, which is 10 at night. In that tiny room of mine, all by myself I turn side to side unable to sleep thinking of my mum who is old and about my little girl. O! now comes month-end when everybody awaits there wages. For me it s different because I have to beg before I get it. When the madam gives instructions as what to do then its alright but when it comes to payment it the opposite. O! what a life to be a domestic worker*

### **A DOMESTIC WORKER**

*I the willing,*

*Let by the unknowing,*

*Am doing the impossible*

*For the ungrateful,*

*I have done so much,*

*For so long, for so little,*

*That I am qualified, to do anything,*

*With nothing.*

*People always say each dog has its day. I also believe strongly in that. What makes me say that is, the madam who treated me so badly now it was her turn to suffer when the boss divorced her 1990. She used to cry every day because she couldn't bear to live all by her self. She would come and complain by me every day forgetting that she did to me, but I said to myself I mustn't return bad by bad. I used to always comfort and encourage her by telling her that the boss will come back one day and he really did. In two years time he returned, that was in 1992.*

*At first the madam didn't want to accept him but eventually she did. I was also happy to see them together. Again.*

My madam



Just look how my madam is dressed for work. If it was <sup>not</sup> for me she would be so smart as she is.

*They lived very happily together as if nothing ever happened but things went back to square one on my side. She started to ill treat me like before. She would make funny comments to me that hurts my feelings, like one day she told me that I must give her all my details in case I killed somebody then she can conduct my family. When I asked her what she meant by saying that she said she was joking. I was really shocked to hear such a nasty statement and consider the fact that she knows every detail of mine even the telephone number too. I remember in 1994 when my dad passed away she made a call to me at the farm asking about the death because I was still on holiday at that time when my dad died. Now for her to make such a comment it was something.*

*That shows she didn't phone to sympathise with me but she was just checking weather I was telling the truth about my fathers death.*

*This is the thanks I get after eleven years of my life and I say that nobody will ever bear the pain I went through.*

### **THE HISTORY OF DOMESTIC WORKERS UNION**

*In the 70's DWEP was formed. This is Domestic Workers and Employers Project. This project was held in schools and churches, to teach the workers how to bake cook and sew. It carried on and on until the workers realised that they must form a body which will take up their grievances. Therefore they formed SADWA. – South African Domestic Workers Association in 1981. SADWA was only known in Natal and Transvaal, elsewhere domestic workers had different names. In P.E. workers formed Port Elizabeth Domestic Workers Union, in East London they formed East London domestic workers union and in Cape Town they formed National Domestic Workers Union.*

*In 1984 , the workers from all these regions held five unity meetings as how to form a union which will cover all workers nationally. Finally SADWU was formed this is South African Domestic Workers Union. It was launched in the Eastern Cape on the 29 November 1986. Workers from all over South Africa went to celebrate the power of their struggle. After SADWU was launched it then affiliated to COSATU.*

#### **Decisions were taken and officials were chosen.**

*President - Violet Mohlasedi.  
Vice-President - Eunice Mafenuka  
Secretary - Florie De-Villiers  
Vice Secretary - Elsie Komako  
National Treasurer - Martel Witbooi*

#### **Decisions were that :**

*Shall negotiate with employers on behalf of the workers.  
Shall secure the fair and reasonable conditions of employment.  
Shall protect workers against exploitation.  
Shall help workers solve their problem.*



:

*Demands were A living wage.*

*Pension fund*

*Maternity leave.*

*Sick leave.*

*UIF.*

*Workmen compensation.*

*And to covered by labour relation act.*

### **MY DREAMS**

*A.A.B.E.C started in 1991 with only four learners, to teach the under priviledged and people who didn't finish their schooling. My facilitator was Mrs R.Lahare at that time I was in the advanced class. Although the class started with few learners, at the present moment there is approximately thousand learners. I am so pleased to attend these classes because I have learned a lot even sewing too. Next year I am hoping to do typing.*

A B E C



ABOVE- ABEC learners whom at the beginning were only four, but now there are so many because of the benefit they get.  
There are also skills obtained like sewing and typing

Conclusion: This project has made me think of the past and made me put my memories together. It has also made me realise that I can be an author one day.

*At present I am a domestic worker. I do cleaning and taking care of the baby. I have been at this job for decade now and very happy. When I started working here in Natal I felt very hard because its very far and I can not go very often home. I only go in December or when there is an emergency. Having worked so long now I am deciding to go back home and start my own business.*

*I think business is in because after I left school in 1969, I used to bake koeksisters and ginger beer which I used sell and get money it was very exciting that it the ladies in the farm where I lived. I thought them how to make money- by organising concerts which we ran every month end. Then yearly shared the profit among ourselves.*

*I enjoy sales. In 1993 I became an agent for Count Giovanni French perfume company which was based in Gardener Street in Durban. When I started I was on 25% but within the year it went up to 50%. The manager was very pleased with me and couldn't believe that as a domestic worker I can have such good sales. Unfortunately in 1995 the company closed down.*

*Now in two years time, I would like to open a restaurant for myself and make a lot of money. Although my hometown is very small, the time I can make good sales is in month end, December and Easter holidays. I also decided to sell clothing when its quite during the year. Clothing I know is needed all the time.*

*I hope Almighty God spares me and makes my dreams come true, because he is the only one who over-rules everything.*

*Subjects: English, Sesotho, Mathematics, History, Geography.*

The second learner's portrait and autobiography, I present is Bongiwe.

5.6 Portrait: Bongwiwe

Organization: AABEC  
Title: My Life

My Life



My Dream To Become  
An Olympic Sprinter

By: Bongwiwe

Bongiwe was born in 1972 on a small farm in Hammarsdale, in KwaZulu-Natal. She enjoyed school and had an excellent rapport with her teachers. In primary school she progressed well but her performance deteriorated as she moved to the higher grades. The reason for her poor performance was her desire in the opposite sex, which led to promiscuity.

Bongiwe's home life was punctuated with much emotional and physical abuse from her father. She had to endure witnessing her mother being brutally beaten by her alcoholic father. Her father did not work but depended on his wife's earnings to support the family. He abused his wife physically and emotionally.

Bongiwe was forced to leave school in Grade eight because she fell pregnant. Her boyfriend was committed to marrying her but unfortunately he died tragically in an accident. She gave birth to a son whom she named "Tula Sis we" which means, "be quiet and see what I'm going to do for you my son".

Bongiwe had three children Tula, Thabilse and Thabiso who is a year old. Tula passed away because of diarrhea in 1995. This was a sad period for all at adult classes as Bongiwe found it difficult to come to terms with the death of her five year old son.

Bongiwe worked as a domestic worker but made numerous attempts to improve her career. In 1995 she assisted an Indian merchant to sell curry powder. This she did whilst she worked as a domestic worker. In 1996, she was employed at the Springbok Security Company, where she learnt the use of the firearm and assisted in some office duties.

Bongiwe attended literacy classes for five years (1995-2000). She wrote the Level Two Independent Board Examinations and passed with merit in 1996. She participated in the pantomime "Cinders". She also contributed actively to class plays, skits, discussions and dramatizations. Bongiwe's forte was her outstanding abilities in sport.

In 1997 Bongiwe worked at the Reservoir Hills Bakery. She worked for a very paltry salary and a job that demanded long hours. She had to begin work at 6:00 and her workday ended at 19:30. The physical strain of her work led her to protest to her employers. This resulted in a mere appeasement policy where she was promoted as supervisor of the team without any remuneration for the promotion. This was a smoke screen to stop her protests. The demands of her employment had in fact increased as she worked later hours as a supervisor. There was little or no time to spend with her family because she was forced to work all the days of the week. She was not given any time off on a Sunday to attend church services. The inhumane working conditions finally made her quit. In 1998, armed with her Level Two Independent Examinations Board certificate, Bongiwe was able to acquire a job as laboratory assistant at the University of Natal Diagnostic Parasite Control Unit. At the laboratory she was required to test the stools of children who hailed mainly from the informal settlements for hook worms. In 2000, Bongiwe was employed as a kitchen assistant at a restaurant. Currently (2003), she is working at the same restaurant.

Bongiwe is a leader of the residents at the Mpolweni Settlement in Reservoir Hills, a desire she yearned to fulfill. She assisted the people of Mpolweni to obtain water before the municipality provided free water. As an active member of the African National Congress, Bongiwe has assisted in voter education on Election Day (1998).

Bongiwe's main reasons for joining adult literacy was her need to improve her qualifications and obtain a better job, since most of her colleagues were in a better social position. She also felt that by attending a literacy programme her status in the community will be enhanced and this could help her achieve her status as community leader of the informal settlement.

Bongiwe's cover design is a reminder of the uniqueness of each individual and how one can be so diametrically opposed in personality and character traits, yet may complement one another in the way they feel about being silenced as Black domestic workers in a hegemonic society. Her cover exposes her desire to become an Olympic Sprinter or a

policewoman. As an individual Bongiwe dreams big and in doing so she was able to achieve greater success by having high aspirations. Her free, open spirit has turned her into a postmodernist risk taker who attempted to see the challenges, chaos and contradictions of life as a stepping-stone to transformation. She was the first adult learner to break out of the mould as domestic worker and become an entrepreneur. From a global perspective, the entrepreneurial activities might seem insignificant, but for the lives of ordinary Black disadvantaged women who hail mainly from the informal settlements, this is their dream. This is the second inter-text that I present.

Text Two

BONGIWE

MY DREAM OF BECOMING AN OLYMPIC SPRINTER

I just like to be a... singer



### EARLY CHILDHOOD

*My name is Sibongile. I was born at Mophela that's my rural area in Hammersdale. Now I want to tell you something about my early childhood. I was seven years that time I was very naughty. I remember the day my mum sent me to the shop to buy bread; it was cold that day I went to the shop it was far. Shop was opening at eight o'clock then I came before that time I had to wait. The baker had come late that day. I felt hungry that day I was rushing for school that day. Soon the baker came and the shopkeeper came to give me bread and I gave him the money for the bread. The bread it was very hot and smell very nice. My home was too far and I felt very hungry so what must I do now. I sat down on the grass I pull all the soft things inside the bread I left only the outside part. After that I ran back to my house. I left the bread on the table. My mum saw the bread inside she was so worried that she asked me. I told her that maybe the rat eat the bread like that mum. She said, "No, no, you eat the bread because I know you like hot bread." I was crying that time because she was scolding me then I told her that I am very sorry and I wont do that again I promise you. In my life it was the first time I waste food like that way. That's why my mum was very angry*

### MY SCHOOL LIFE

*I started schooling at an early age, I was only five years old by then, and I was already doing my sub-b. Though my school situated some 20 kilometers far away from our home I was always arriving on time.*

*Each morning by four o'clock early in the morning we were already up it was only my self and my brother Vusi who were attending that school. Darkness never stopped us from going to school. Mrs. Dladla my mathematics teacher used to be very fond of me because I was always wearing my school uniform and it was very neat. All my homework was always done in time and correctly When it came to sports and music nobody could make my match. My fellow colleague wanted me so much.*



*Thanks god because there was few those who were participating in sports with me as compared to the people loved and cheered me up. I cant remember taking position three when running. Is either I got position two or one that's all.*

*I also participated in the school choir which was rated number two in our circuit.*

Organization: AA BEC  
Title: EARLY Childhood



I WAS



Naughty

MY LIFE

*I am a human being, I've got so many things that I can do it. I just like to be a olympic sprinter, singer, police and social worker that was my aim.*

Name: Sibonsile

Organization: AABEC

Title: My Dream



*My life is very difficult to me because I don't know what to do now. I left school in standard seven I did not have enough money because my parents were not working. So still now I trying to become one of those things I writing in the first paragraph I wants to be a police and I know I can be, because god we can't fail me if I believe in his name we can't left me out. He answer our prayer quickly. So each and every time I keep on pray before I doing something for me soon I was small my parents was teach me to pray and I saw the different. I believe that god is my saviour.*

*In my life what things I want he gave me. I remember last of this week I went one of the police station to look the job, the station commander he wasn't ask me the matric certificate I was crying and praying then that guide was gave me the form to full up after that he told me must come end of this month I hope to here all that because I believe and I believe that god he would never and never fail. That why I said in my life I believe in the name of Jesus Christ.*

**WHAT IT FEELS TO BE A DOMESTIC**

*As how I feel to do that job, sometimes is very nice if you gone find a good people. Let me explain about good people. If you staying with them they treat you as their own child like if you got friend or boyfriend there don't mind if you bring them inside their yard, maybe if you got child sometimes they will tell you that bring a child to stay with you they would buy things for your child they would look after your baby as how they treat their own children as to live with that people is very nice.*

*To live with a bad people, they will treat you very bad, as if you doing job you must do it one way no lunch time, you mustn't use their toilet but you wash their shirt (shit), your plate must keep it separate, your clothes you must wash separate,. If you sich you must carry on do the job after they give you the tablets, and you don't have the rite to talk with your friends or boyfriends you mustn't bring anyone in their yard even your parents or your own child, only them there must bring the people for lunch or supper then you must wash all the dishes after they finish to eat no matter what time it is you must do it.*

*They would let you do the work as you don't have a blood like them if you start about 7 0'clock it will be 7 to 7 without rest.*

TITLE Things I Like & Dislike

I CAN FOUND



BE SIDE Degree

My Office.



**THINGS I LIKE AND I DISLIKE**

*I am a women but as a human being I have things which I like and something I dislike.*

*Firstly I can talk about things I dislike. I hate those people who abuse children. Now days some people are busy abusing children like doing sex with them. I believe that the children when grow up in a good manners, they can learn in a good way, because when somebody do this to the child she can absolutely confused. She cant consantratee at school. Secondly I am a female so I feel sorry if something came to my ears, like there is somebody who is busy rape the female. Some times those people who are busy doing that are suffering from some disease which are dangerous to us. That's why I like to become a police like that people are using black magic sangoma witch doctor I don't like them Thirdly I coming to what like now.*

*There are many things which I like so I can count all. I like to be a married women with a few family like one boy and two girls. I can give them better hood (neighbourhood), better education etc. And I think to buy a beautiful car for my son like Sierra Toyota that I thought always if his driving he would remember me*

### **MY DREAMS**

*I am a women of 24 years. I am old enough now, but, I don't think I can't fail to my dream. I could not finish the school I left it in standard six because of problems.*

*I wish to be a married women but not a house wife. I like to be a working women. If I get a man to marry me I will be happy if we have a true love. I don't like to marry a rich man because if you found somebody who is already wealthy, sometimes he don't care about you. After a few month we married we decide to divorce. So it easy if you found a poor man that to form a nice business. So if also we together its very hard to get divorce.*

*I prefer to marry a poor man then we start the business together, and have a big house for us and our children I will to have only two children one boy and one girl. I wish I can support them and teach them in a good way. Some of the weekend I would hope if I enjoy one of my weekend in Park or hotel. To show my children what is a love.*

*According to the work I hope to be a police women. Because I love a community. So now my aim to be a good person that means even a communicate they would talk be careful about me.*

### **CONCLUSION**

*I enjoy to do all my project because I learn so many things like to talk English well, and it gave me a good idea to do a lot of work. Soon I got my certificate I know I can found a good job like to be a police women, that my aim was there.*

*Yes I can be a police women. I enjoyed doing the project because it made me think very hard. If I did this project my opinion came happy and I think next time I will become a writer of newspaper or daily news*

Cindy is the third learner whose portrait and autobiography I present.

### 5.7 Portrait:Cindy



Cindy was born in 1969 in the rolling hills of the Transkei. She grew up on a farm that belonged to 'White Boer farmers'. A small garden patch was given to them to do their own gardening. Cindy describes the farm as a place where she had freedom to wander into the wide-open spaces of the forests of God's glory land. She was able freely to pick the eggs from the forests, catch mice and cook, shoot birds and enjoy a scrumptious meal.

She enjoyed schooling although her teachers enforced much corporal punishment. Cindy failed Standard Six three times and was forced to leave school. Cindy did not have many

opportunities to understand the facts about life. She grew up being ill-informed about female issues such as menstruation, conception, pregnancy and birth control.

Cindy shared a home, which was basically one room, with fifteen family members on the farm in Transkei. She experienced emotional abuse as she witnessed her father traumatize her mother and physically abuse her in his inebriated state. Her mother worked tirelessly to support and provide for the family.

She fell pregnant very early in life after sleeping with her first boyfriend. Cindy later settled into family life and had another daughter. Unfortunately, Cindy's husband was an alcoholic who mentally, emotionally and physically abused her. She was exasperated by the excruciating physical abuse from a husband who drank and demanded sexual favours at his whim and fancy. She was forced to abandon her children and run away in search of freedom. She worked as a domestic worker for Indian families at Reservoir Hills. She began working from 1993. Cindy's reasons for attending literacy was to:

*...learn hard words for English. I want to know how to read and write English. I want to improve my English. I want to get a certificate. I'm learning hard to get a certificate to get a nice job. Also when you come to literacy it's not like when you stay in the house and see the four walls, at least you meet friends.*

She joined Asoka Adult Basic Education Co-operative in 1996 and remained in the programme for four years. She wrote the Level 3 Independent Board Examinations and did not obtain a pass. She participated in the pantomime 'Cinders' and the Afro-fusion dance 'Asimbonanga'<sup>28</sup>. Cindy began classes as a shy conservative learner but eventually enjoyed participating in class plays, skits and discussions.

In 2002 she was framed for the murder of her employer, arrested and sent to prison. She remained in prison as an awaiting trial prisoner for nine months. The first telephone call that Cindy made from prison was to me, as she had no relatives in Durban. My visit to the prison with fellow learners uplifted her spirits. While in prison she participated in dance

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<sup>28</sup> Asimbonga- is a song by Johnny Clegg, which describes the feelings of the Black oppressed people who were exiled and imprisoned and gained their freedom after democracy was given when Nelson Mandela was released. The learners did an Afro-fusion dance to the song.

drama, which was part of the rehabilitation programme. In prison her belief in God made her strong and resolute about her innocence in a crime that she did not commit. During her trial she felt that she was capable of expressing her own story and refused legal representation. She was acquitted without any charges. She was released in March 2003.

All Cindy's possessions including her personal identity document were taken by her previous employer and not handed back to her. While she was in prison she had no change of clothes, towel, toiletries or money. When she returned from prison, her employers had moved house and took with them all her life's belongings. Cindy was devastated especially since she had no personal identity documents, clothes or money. However, in the greater scheme of her life, she was grateful to have her freedom. Bongwe assisted with accommodation and learners and friends from Mpolweni and Reservoir Hills helped Cindy with clothes and other essentials. Cindy joined the Siyakhana adult classes in March 2003. In July 2003 Cindy returned to Transkei with her boyfriend.

Cindy's strong inclination to be a Sangoma is demonstrated on her cover. As a child she experienced the trauma of witnessing her mother being brutally abused by her alcoholic father and as an adult she herself became the victim of severe physical, psychological and emotional oppression by her husband. Religion has always held a promise that she hung onto to give her hope for a better future. Even while she was imprisoned for a deed she did not commit, she was steadfast in her belief that the Lord would set her free. Throughout her stay in prison she held a very strong presence of mind, always making prayer her priority. Her greatest ambition was to become a sangoma and she was partially initiated into such a practice when she was rudely interrupted by her arrest and imprisonment.



Text Three

CINDY

**CINDY MY LIFE IS TO BE A SANGOMA**

ORGANISATION: AABEC

TITLE : My LIFE

F



MY LIFE WHILE I WAS 3 YEARS UNTIL 10 YEARS OLD

*I was born from Boer place on farm. I was born on 24 June 1969. Its nice to stay on farm, sometimes its not nice especial when you've got too much enemies. The place for the farm was very big enough to do everything the Boer want to do. There were three*

places that have forests. There's a big place for fields. From there my father plants mealies, rhubarb, cabbages, potatoes and spinach. There's two places for black people to stay. Other people stay on top place. Others stay down place. My family was stay at down place. There were too much people stay on top place. When we wanted to play we visited them from there. We like to play a ball. Our big sisters they teach us how to play. Sometime we play with toys. While I was young I didn't cook, I didn't do washing because I didn't know nothing. My sisters were cooking for us. They were doing washing for us. By the time I was young I like to ask everything I don't know. One day I was watching my mother doing washing. I was thinking that when you are doing washing you didn't rinse it. My mother teach me how to do washing. I learnt to much things especial to my big sisters. When I was four years old I learnt to fetch wood. My sisters teach me how to put wood on the rope. How to tight a rope.

My mother have got eight children. We are six girls and two brothers. All of us still alive. People from there were jealous for us. We all help my mother for hard job at home. I was feeling shy when I saw someone I don't know. One day I saw a man that put two horns on his head. I was crying and runaway while I saw him. On other day I saw the big sister for my mother. She visited mother. She didn't were nicely. She was wearing like a mad person. I was frighten for her. When she wanted to took me and kiss me I run away and cried. I was a big stupid by that time because there was no need to run away and cried when someone wants to do that. On another day I was walking lonely. The stupid thing I have done. I put my feet on broken bottles. Then I got hurt. . My feet was to much bleeding underneath. I saw a big scratch. I was crying and went home to show my mother. I talked lies to my mother. I said I didn't saw that bottles because I was rushing to come back. My mother took me to her boss. She gave her bandage and put some medicine under my feet.

On other day I was playing under the tree. The drunkard man chase me with a bicycle. Then I fell down. I was swinging from there. The man didn't care about me. He just chase me and run away. I was crying so much. After that I just play because swinging is to much nice. I remember one day the rain came. It was the time for us to went back home. I saw big worms under the ground on the way to went home. I was crying too much. I was

*frightened for those worms. My big sister put me on her back. I was thought that I saw small snakes. We likes to play ball. Our big sisters they show us how to play everything They were too much playings they teach us. I remember a nice play we have done with stones. We sing a song. We said that "isonke sam sebiwe dova- maire-mi sebiwe ngulomfozi dova- maire-mi so. So – dova – maire mi. Wasifoke phantsi konbhingo dova maire mi so dova maire mi." we gave other one to other one stone by stone. It was a nice game. We play nicely without quarrel. Some other day we do quarrel.*

### **THE MICE & THE EGGS THAT WE COOKED**

*While my sisters went to school they left me with my grandmother. I was playing together when I'm at home. Because my brothers cant play with me. He was too much younger than me. I make the room to play with all stones. Then I went from where they throw rubbish. I found too much toys and broken cups and saucers. Then I took all these things and went home to play. I took small clothes to make teddy bear for me. I said its my child. I put teddy bear on my back like a big mother. Sometimes I went to the forest to look for small birds and doves and some eggs for birds. Some other days I went to the fields where there is big grass and long. I took some big eggs for the grass. The eggs for the grass where big like the chicken. It was hard to break the eggs for the grass because it was hard and strong for the grass. The grass made the eggs on big or long grass. It was not easy to see these eggs. I took so much eggs because I was lucky to found any eggs. I went back home with so much eggs. We fried all eggs. Some times we fried some mice. The big brothers for us they come with so many mice. The big sisters for me they make fir outside to cook food. Then it was the time for us to fry our eggs and mice. My mother didn't want us to fry the mice inside the house. She told us that we must fry the mice outside. I was the fat girl and nice girl. I started school on 1974. My mother had the last born in that year. My father had been died in 1974. My mother was having all her babies at home. She never went to hospital. On that day it was raining. It was snowing. I heard the baby crying. I said, that "oh my mother got another baby". I was happy on that day. I was thought that the people brought the baby from an aeroplane ". They told us that. But on that day I seen that there have the baby on their own. My aunt took me to another*

house. She told me that I must sleep because it's too late. Then I sleep. On another day. I saw the baby. The baby was the girl. My father was a drunkard man. He likes to drink beer especially African beer. There were some people that hat my father. They put poison in African beer. They wanted my father to die. My mothers brother told my father that he mustn't went and drank beer to that house. My father asked him, "why you said like that". He said that. " these people put a poison in the African beer". My father told him that he is going to drank the beer. Then he drank the beer after that his stomach was too much paining. He was too much sick. He haven't got power to wake up. The people came to take him. They put him in the boss car. The boss took him in the Kokstad hospital. Then he died from there in 1974. It was the last day to saw him by the time he went. He left his last born girl. My mother was crying too much. By that time my mother was too much crying. I asked my mother why she is crying for. I thought that my mother was crying because my father was at hospital. He was too much sick. I saw my sisters come back to school early. They were all crying, then I started to crying. I have been seen that my father had past away. In the olden days they didn't bought expensive caskets they bought planks to put someone who bite a dust. Some people came to took all properties outside. They came to clean the house. They came to tell us that we mustn't cry because God has have been taken his person. He got his rest for the pains. They took him to the funeral. They put him in the hole. It was the last home for him. After that my mother. Wear the black clothes. She wear clothes the whole year. My mother was very thin because her heart was broken. Because my father have been left him.

### **MY SCHOOL DAYS**

I started to learn in 1974 in sub A. there were two teachers in that school. There name of that school was Oaklands. The name of that teacher was Mr Mtolo and Mrs Jatter. She like me very much. I was number 3 on December time. I pass sub A. I learn sub B in 1975. Mrs Jatter teach A and B. Mr Mtolo teach std 1 and 4. In 1976 I learn std 1. I was got a nice friend. Her name was Nongethani. She was always number one. The other boy his name was Sthongo. He came after Nongetheni. He always number 2.i come after them. Nongetheni was the best winner. She was always number one in running and other

girl called Thenjiwe. They were the runners for our school. They make us win from other school. They play net ball nicely. I was trying to play net ball. I left that school in 1977 in the middle of the year. Because we exchange places.

In 1977 I learn at Brooksnek school at Mount Ayliff district. I was eight years old I was in std 2. They took me at that school because I was having a report. I showed them my report. Then I learn my std 2 then nicely. The old children from there or old learners when they saw a new comer they said the new one is a tail. The first time I saw the people that I don't know I was feel shy. They come to me to asked my name. I didn't told my name. Instead of told them my name I just cried, because I was frightened for them. They laughed for me they said, "This new comer is crying for nothing because we just ask her name." After few days I was happy with other student then I told them my name. I made friend with them. In 1978 I was in std 3. I was too much clever I was ten years full. My teacher liked me very much. I remember on other day our teacher teach us with birds. There a bird that called a dove. She first told us with Xhosa. A dove is a (Inhobe in Xhosa). She ask all of us what is (Inhobe) with English. No one knows it was only me. I said it's a dove. My teacher hit all the children. She says that why all of you didn't know that thing I teach all of you yesterday. "There 's no one who knows it only one person who knows that." "It showed that all of you there's no one for me while I teach."

### **THE NICE VASGODAGAMA SONG**

Our teacher teach us history. I remember on other day she teach us a nice song for Vascodagama. She said that, "Who discovered the sea roots to India. Vascodagama " it was a nice song. We were happy with that song. I was in standard 4 in 1979. I didn't failed at school since I started in sub -A. all teacher liked me. I respect them. I have done excellent work for school. I was listening while they teach us. When I'm at home I keep on studying with my young sister that I came after her and we were clever.

At our school there were 10 teachers. In 1977 the principal was Mzemane, the vice principal was Mr Sokhenyile. 1. Mrs Mngokoyi, 2. Mrs Sikrweqe, 3. Mrs Blembula, 4.

*Mem. Mabhanya, 5. Mem Sigwili, 6. Mrs Banbala, 7. Mrs Zinqi, 8. Mrs Khetshiwe and Mem Quvana.*

*My teacher in standard 4 was Mrs Bonebela and Mrs Khetshiwe. At school we learn Xhosa, English, Afrikaans, Agricultural Science, General Science, Maths and Geography. We sing songs, sewing, playing ball, running and playing games. Mrs Khetshiwe and Mrs Mqokoyi were taught us so many nice songs. They came from Mount Frere. There were many sounds that they teach us. There were 9 long songs that we were singing when we are just standing not sitting. Our teachers made concert. We visited other schools. When we are going to other schools we were used our feet. We didn't travel by bus. We left a tour school later when we visited from other school. Our journey was long and we reached later to that school we visited. From there we met other students. Then we started to sing our songs group by group. Sometime from that place we came from or done our concert there came four group student schools. Before we sing there's someone who's gone wrote all schools that will come from there. The people came to listen and watch us when we are singing. They choose any nice songs for us to repeat it, they liked it. They put some money to ask any school. Before they get inside the hall they paid some money. We sing all our nice songs the whole night until the morning. Then we were finished, we went back to our homes. I took a part to be a singer because I liked to sing from school. Mrs Sikiweqe took a part for sewing. She teach us to sew. We used the sharp needle. We sew with our hands not with machine. I took another part for sewing but sometimes it was hard to sew by the first time. I didn't take part to play net ball. The principal teach the boys how to play soccer. We sing nice songs for our team. We went from other schools to play. We travelled by bus if we visited far place.*

*Mrs Mzamane didn't care about school. The school was not nice. The rooms for school was like the rooms from our home. There was no difference that was a school or home. He just rush school fund for nothing. The room was made of mud, roof was grass. Then Mr Sokhanyile took a part to be a principal. Mr Mzamane left to be a principal because he was very old. We made a big party for him. Mr Sokhanyile changed the school. He build the school from other place that have enough space to made nice rooms. The school*

*was end to standard 7. He made other rooms. He talked to the parents to pay some money for building other rooms. The parents respect him and they paid the money. Know the school have standard 10. He put the school at right place and enough space.*

*He put a fence to protect the rooms and school from cows, goat, horses, pigs and chickens because animals can makedirt anywhere. The other student took a part for running. It was hard for me to run. I didn't take a part to run. He changed the uniform. The uniform was black and white. Khaki shirts and black jersey, black shoes. Know Mr Sokhanyile told the parents that they must bought green and gold uniform. The boys must have grey pants and white shirts. I was got many friends in school. We play too many playings. We liked to play with a ball. We play a donkey with a ball. We have numbers when someone throw the ball she is gone call any number. if that number it's for you, you catch the ball. If you didn't catch the ball by the time it comes you take it from were it fell and hit anyone you see. By the time you waited to caught the ball we ran away. After you caught the ball you can say "stop". Then we stop. When you didn't hit anyone you can took one name or alphabet for donkey. If you hit someone she is going to take one alphabet for donkey until she have a full name donkey. Then we can said that you are a donkey, it's time to jump over your back.*

*Another game we made 4 surround. There were two people that choose a group that is going to play. There were two people standing in the middle of two surround up and down and they hit someone who get inside the surround. When the ball went away everybody counted until 24 was a game. If 5 people win, they were going to have 5 games. We always liked to play. Another play we made a surround with ourselves, then we sang nice songs. One who is inside the surround chooses her partner.*

*Before we get inside the class we first prey. Sub A up to std. 7 we made 9 lines. Any teacher opens the bible. We first sing a nice song for prayer. Then any teacher reads the bible and preach to us. We sang "our father who art in heaven". After we finish we sang the mutching song and we get into our classes. In 1980 I was in standard six. I have done standard six at Carl Malcomess high school. Carl Malcomess is at Bhongweni location at*

*Kokstad. It was a big house. There's a staff room, office room and six class rooms. The last class was standard 8. There's form 1a, form 1b, form 2a, form 2b, form 3a, form 3b.*

*I was doing form 1a the first time I learn. Our principal was Mr Malinge. He was a Zulu person. He came from Pietermaritzburg. The vice principal was Mr Diko, other teachers Mam Ndamase, Mam Mahlu, Ngolo, Mrs Sihlahla, Mr Ntusi and Mxhakaza. We had someone who was a clerk. We learn all subjects. General Science Mam Ndamase teach it. Mr Ntusi teach us Geography and Maths, Mr Mxhakaaze teach English, Mam Mahlunqulu teach us R .I and Xhosa. Mr Mxhakhaza teach us Agricultural Science. Mr Diko teach us Afrikaans. On spare time we have S.C.M that means Student Christian Movement. On that time we sang songs for church. Anyone or any student stood up and preached to us. We open with songs, we pray and then read the bible. Anyone who wanted to talk had time to talk.*

*Mr. Ntosi was a owner. When he found that we making too much noise in his period, he entered the class and said "I'm going to hit where god talled to hit until I finish were god told me to finish". He done like that. He hit two rows and he left two rows. I was lucky with my friend Nodumo. He didn't always hit us. He liked me and my friend. He always sent me anywhere. When he came before he teach us. He first told us that we must stand up. He said he prayed for us.*

*He drank African beer. He was an ugly man. The first time I saw him I was so frightened for him. Then he told me , "don't feel shy when you see me I don't eat people." He has a big stomach.*

*I was a friend that friend was a boy. His name was Paulus Gxoyiya. When he saw me he liked to play with me and I liked to play with him. He is a policeman now. He finished school. I didn't finish school because I failed standard 7 three years. Then I left school.*





### MY LIFE WHILE I WAS AT HOME

*My home is at Mount Ayliff district. Under Brooksnek school. There were big mountains and big stones on top of the mountains. There's too much mist. When there's mist on top of the mountains, there's too much cold in the village. When the mist come you cant see anything.*

*My home is far away to the bus stop. When I'm I went to town I climbed mountain, and I cross the river. The place from our village is no good. It is not looking nicely. There were valleys.*

*When I was at home I was always not feeling happy. I was always getting sick. My head, my stomach, bad pains all my body. I stay at home the two or one week I didn't went to school when I'm sick. I didn't stay long time at home. I just like to stay to my mothers sister. The big sister for my mother. I was stay at Kokstad at Bhongweni location. It was nice to stay there.*

*We stay in small one room and my family. We were 15 people stay together. Inside the room there was cupboard two beds and one wardrobe. There were five people that were worked. I called there my cousin. I remember one day I was watching some children playing in the ground. .T They were practicing to jump. Kholeke, Kholiswe and me we were watching those children. The other one didn't jump nicely. Then we all laugh for this girl. All these children they learn at primary school. I was at high school on that time. I was absent at school. These children said to me." Who's that, why are you laughing for this girl." "Where do you come from." "We are going to heat you because we don't know you." They said that, "we are going to call Pontso." "This girl is gone heat by Pontso." Then Ponso come to me to heat me. When I went to heat her they stand behind me. By that time my friend come back from school. She saw me and she call me. But know they didn't know that there's someone who knows me. Nodumo shout and call me. By the time I was going to Nodumo. These children took the stones to heat me . I took to much stones to heat them.*

*They run away and I heat one of them a big hurt in her leg. She fell down and there was to much blood bleeding. They said that "Okay we are going to her home and told them that you heat their child. After that we are going to come back to your home. I said "Okay I will see you all. I'm ready and I'm going to catch one by one of you.*

*They went to her home holding her. Her mother asked "What's wrong with you. They told her what's happened. Her mother said "She've got heated little. Because shelf to much job that she must be done. I told her to help me. I don't care about your hurt because you don't want to listen. They didn't come back. They respect me until now.*

### HOW I GOT MARRIED

*We stay in a room that is made by zink. In winter we were getting cold. My cousins were very strict they don't want us to fall in love with boys. One day I was fall in love with other boy. That boy was next door. I was love that boy to much. At home they heat us when we are doing wrong things.*

*One day this boy call me to visit him. I come to visit him. All my cousins were at home. It was the week end. One of them come in that room we were there. She come to ask the matches. Oh! She saw me and she went back to others. She told them. They come there to heat me. They said "I didn't respect them. I was very angry with that and my boyfriend to. I go outside crying. I didn't talk to anyone that day the whole day. I left that boy.*

*One day I was visited my friend from our farm Brooksnek next to my district. on another day there come a nice and clean boy. He proposed me. I told him that he must wait the whole week. I'm gone think more about him. After that I fell in love with him.*

*He took me to his home. I sleep for two days. Then he told me that he wants me to be his own wife. He was working from Jo'burg. At Sasolburg with his father. He told his parents that he wants me to be his own wife. His parents come to his room to see me. They talk to me and they ask some question. I answer them all they question. After that they bought some clothes for me to wear. They bought the scarf and doek for putting to my head.*

*I stay in the room for seven days. They went home to told them that they musn't think that I'm lost. They took me as a makoti for them.*

*After seven days they came many people inside that house to see me. There's other girl was falling in love with my boyfriend she come to see me. When she saw me she saw someone she knows. But at that house they took me they don't know me. They come with new clothes. The long dresses for makoti and the black doek.*

*I was always had a bad pains in my head because of this black dook. I come to the kitchen with long dresses or dorkey. I first greeting everybody in the kitchen. I saw so many people or their relatives. I ask a bucket. They gave me. I went to the river. My sister showed me the way for the river because I don't know the way. When I come back I put the water in the table. After that I ask mealies. They gave me to made a samp. I made a samp. I told them that I don't know how use the mealies. They teach me everything I don't know.*

*Before I made tea I first made a fire. It was hard to make a fire everyday. Because the wood were finished early. When I wanted to cooked food I went to the forest. It was not easy to fetch wood.. we steal the woods because the boere people didn't want us to fetch woods to their own place. It was a great day the first time I come to the kitchen.*

*They slaught the goat for me. They put the inyongo for the goat all my body. They said I must drink it. It was not to much nice. After that we eat meat other people were drinking juba. It was a nice day to respect the people from there. I said "mama and baba"*

*"mother and father." I respect everybody especially my husband. I didn't called him with his name. I called his name when we are lonely.*

*Father went back to his own work and my husband went with his father. They were worked on one place. After they were at their work. My husbands father found that my husband is not needed from his work. They send him back home. He was a drunken man. He liked to do fighting. He cut someone with a knife then they told him that he must get away.*

*He came back from his home, he didn't walk. There was a big quarrel between me and his mother. His mother have been changed. After his husband was gone. She always have a long face to me, everyday. They told me I must make emehewu everyday. We went to the field early in the morning to work hard from there. We have only emehewu in the bucket. We drink that emehewu everyday or the whole day. When we finish we went back home.*

*My mother control me for everything. She told me that I must collect woods after we finish that hard work. I was too much sick because of that hard work. My leg was too much paining. She didn't listen when I told her that. She said I'm lazy*

*When we came back I found that there's no water there's no food. I started to the river to fetch water. Quickly I make tea and cook food. There were five children. The big sister was worked to the boere place. I left with four children. They didn't do nothing. There were waiting for me to do all work everyday. I was slept with too much tired. I cooked while I'm sick...they don't care about me.*

*My husband didn't took care of me. He didn't bought new clothes for me even shoes and doek. I was wearing old clothes. I just put these old clothes in the line. I went back home. He went at my home to see me. Then he ask me to come back. I told him that "I can't went back to your home, because you haven't got tender care. I left him. They come to took they cow and goat for labola. My mother gave them.*

*He took another wife. She left him. He came back to me. Then I came back to him. Then I was loved him. I stay at his home. I was pregnant in 1989. I stay with my mother at town. Until I have the baby. I have the baby on the 15 July 1989. My baby was a girl. I went back with my baby to my husbands home. I stay nicely. But he was not working. I haven't got napkins to put to my baby. I was just used old clothes or old sheets. I went back home. He came to ask me to come back to him. I just went to Cotimuebe to work from there. I was working for the black person. She was my next door. She was my relative. I was glad to have a job but far place. But the work on farm is too much hard. I work from there. The husband for my sister was too much naughty. He wants to sleep with me while his wife was from where she is working.*

*She was worked at far place. She was working at casino. I told him that "your wife is my relative, I take her like my sister, why are u stubborn?" He hate me. Then I decided to left that job. I talk with other mother who was my next door. She ask me that, "Why are you working for that black people."*

*She told me that I must went to Jo-burg where her girl stay from there. She gave me an address. I didn't told anyone. I just left my child from there. I went to Jo-burg at Thembisa. That sister stay from Thembisa at Xubeni section. i stay nicely with her. The first time she saw me she didn't know me. Then I told her that I was working for her next door. She told me the whole story about that man how he treat the*



*I. love my children*

### **HOW WAS MY HUSBAND THE FIRST TIME**

*Many years ago I left my nice home or sweet home. My boyfriend brought me to his home. He left me with his mother and children for his mother. Her mother had 8 eight children. Three children have passed away. She had four boys and 4 girls.*

*That was the beginning of a very hard life for me. When I went to stay with my mother-in-law her husband bought new clothes for me. It was one (Sishweshwe) or (Pinito) one doek no shoes. I was used my shoes I came with them at home.*

*My mother bought only one (Pinto) for me. The cow eat that Pinto. I was got only these clothes that my father-in-law bought for me. They were lost clothes that I had. When they got worn out, my mother-in-law did not bought any new clothes for me. I was just their slave and got slave treatment.*

*I would wake up and have nothing to eat. I would just have to work, collecting wood at for place, washing many clothes, fetching water and hand grinding mealies in the machine my husband left job. He come and stay at home. He was cheeky he doesn't went to look a job. I told him that he must go to town and look for a job.*

*He was a drunkard man. He come back home at eleven o' clock or any times he wants. The first time he was nice and you can trust him. While I was at his home longtime then he begin to change and he started to drink. He would come home late at night and try to touch me.*

*When he come back home he talk all nonsense. He said I musn't asked him why he didn't want to look a job. Her mother was a talkative. I don't like everything she talk to me. It was the first time for me to hear a talkative lady. She was talk too much every bad things. I feel angry I didn't told them that I went back home. I just visit my grandmother. She was stay at boer place where young father was working.*

*Then when I came back I was sick and tired with my mother-in-law because she have a big mouth. I told my husband that I don't want him anymore I wants all my clothes I'm going back to my mothers house. He heat me very bad and cut me with the knife. He heat me with a sjambok. He heat me with his hands. There came too much blood. He went to kitchen to take some water for me to have bath. I bath all blood. Then he told me that I'm going to wear makoti clothes. Because by the time I was come back I was not wearing their clothes. I was wearing my own clothes not putting the doek on my head. i8 clothes. Because by the time I was come back I was not wearing their clothes. I was wearing my own clothes not putting the doek on my head. That's why he was too much angry.*

*Her mother was not at home that day. He was at our next door. There was someone who have been died there. The son for our next door.*

*Then hi son went to her and told her what I was done before he heat me. Her mother said that "This child is too much naughty I don't know what's wrong with her." If she don't want this home there are also other ones who wants this home.*

*He said he cant take me to the hospital. Then his cousin came to see me. He took me to the hospital. On that time I wasn't got clothes to change. I went to my other relative for me to ask something to wear. They gave me some nice clothes to wear. At hospital they saw me from where I've got hurted. My husband talk lies to the nurses when they asked him. He said I was heat by the other people. Later while I was went back to his home. I told the nurses the truth. When he come back the next day to take me. The nurses told him that he must I respect to heat me like that. He must just scold me. Because he have no right to heat me like that.*

*He asked me that "You told these people the truth.? I said "Yes I told them. He took me to his home. My eye was red inside because he poke me next to my eye with the knife. My mother heard that my husband heat me. She asked my young brother and my cousin to asked me to come back home. They took me home. My mother saw me that I've got a red eye.*

*She took me to the doctor to get a eye medicine. I used that medicine until my eye alright. My mother ask me what wrong I have done. I told her all story. She told me that I mustn't do wrong things I must go back to my husbands house. When I went to come back I must told them sorry.*

*I stay there long time. I asked my husband to go and look for job. He told me that I mustn't look for him. I must look for his parents. He said, he cant look for job. He is going to have a xhosa beer until he growing older. I told him that he must work because we are going to have our own house. He said he wants the people laugh for him until they come out the last teeth.*



*At the last moment he fell in love with another girl. He was like a mad person. He loves this girl very much. He took his radio and went from where the girl stay. When he came back in the morning he wants some water for bathing to me. I told him that he must go back to his new wife that is better than me. He talk every nonsense. He told every body that he don't wants me because I'm too much thin I poke him with my bones. He don't wants me anymore. But I stay at his home. He mother told me that I must stay.*

*I was feeling angry every day with that nonsense that he always do. After two weeks he changed . his aunt call him and talk to him that he mustn't do that wrong thing. Then he listen and stay with me. By that time he was working. He didn't gave me money. On other day that girlfriend for him came. She asked the young boy to go to my husbands home to call him.*

*I asked that boy who sent you to call my husband. He said sisi Nomusa sent me. Then I went there where she was. She saw me come. I asked her to come and see that someone that he wants. When she saw me she run away. She point my next door boy. She talk lies she say she came to him. She runaway then I went back to my husbands home. I told him that her girlfriend wants him. He asked me why you went there to my girlfriend what do you want to her. I told him that I was going to see her.*

*Then he went to that girlfriend again. He come back in the morning. After that he stay at home. The girl come again when she saw that he didn't come to her. Then he changed to her. He told her that my wife is with me I don't want you anymore. He always sent my relatives children. I told them that they mustn't call my husband they must call me.*

*On other day that girl come again. The girls from where I was working come to call me. They told me that girl come to call my husband. They gave me something to heat her. It was a sjambok. I heat her very badly. By the time I heat her two boys catch her. She took out her jersey, blouse and tops. I heat her too much. I was angry and talk and talk with her I said "what do you want to my husband." She just keep quite only running. Then I left her with her night dress and skirt. I took all these things she left until know.*

### WHY I LEFT MY HUSBAND

*I went back to his home. I found that they know all story because other girl for next door saw me by that time I was going to heat that girl. When my husband come back I told him that I heat your girlfriend. He was drunkard he waste all his money at sport. He have only sixty rands in his pocket. He said that he don'ts want me too and that girl.*

*Then later while he was fast asleep I took that remaining money to his pocket. I took all my clothes and run away. I come at Durban. I wake up at six o'clock and take a taxi to Bizana. From Bizana I took a bus it was only twenty rands. I was left with only twenty rands. My heart was too much broken when I left my children from there. I was sick and tired with that man. Because he have no manners. I didn't told anyone that I'm going to Durban. I left him for two years full.*

*In 1999 I was going for holidays. It was Easter holidays. My madam gave me too much clothes for my children. I went home. My mother was worried for me because long time I didn't see them on December holidays. She said, oh my heart was too much broken that we are going to have a starve and on the Easter holidays. She was glad to see me again. I come home later. I found that they were fast asleep.*

*I knock long time. Then the first born daughter for my sister opened for me. She was glad to see me. Every children was fast asleep. I took my son to come to me and sleep with me. He was fast asleep. For few minutes all children wakes up. The first born girl for my sister wakes them up. They were happy to see me. I show them their new clothes. I share these clothes to them.*

*My mother told me that my cousin have been died. She told me that he's gone be burried on Saturday. Then I went there I found that he was going to be burried on Sunday. She went to another funeral at our area. Then she said she cant go to the funeral of my cousin.*

*I reach there at eleven o'clock but I found that they put only the tent outside. Too many people come. When someone have been died the make a church for him and sing songs for church the whole night and preach talk with him.*

*The place where my cousin stay was my husbands place. My mother come to the funeral. My father-in-law and my mother-in-law come to the funeral. My mother-in-law don't know my mother. She asked to other relative for me. She told and show her. My mother said, " why you show her me because I don't want her to know me." Then my mother-in-law talk to my mother. She first greeting her and told her that she wants the children to visit them. My mother ask her that when she brought these children would she could bring them back to her. She said, " I can bring them back to you." She says that she must bring them they can give them amasi and mealies to eat.*

*My father-in-law was glad to see me and my mother-in-law. My mother-in-law asked me that I don't want them anymore. I didn't reply her. I just laugh. Then father-in-law asked me and talked to me that I must come and visit them. I said I he will come. I just visit them on Monday.*

*My sisters were glad to see me. They said I must come back even his brother. I told them that I'm going to forgive my husband and come back. I found that my husband is too much frightened to meet me. Then I went to sleep. There I sleep with him. I found that his room is too much dirty everything is not nice and his clothes is very dirty.*

*I wake up early in the morning to do the house work as from the beginning. I make tea for them. I first gave them water to have bath. I cook food for them. I clean all rooms for them nicely I asked my young sister to help me. After that we finished and went to the river to do washing. When I finished I have a bath I told them that I'm going home know to prepare to come back to my work. I told my husband that I'm going to see him from where he is working.*

*Then I asked mealies. My mother-in-law said, I must go and take it. I ask my young sister. I went to her sisters house.*

*I found that her sister was cooking the chicken. She gave me the intestines and inside meat for the chicken she fried all inside. She is a nice and clean lady. Even to her bad. She is cleaning nicely she very very clean than my mother-in-law. You cant think that its her sister. She is older than her. But you cant trust. My mother-in-law is not as clean person. She is too much lazy. She don't make up bed when she wakes up. She don't bath in the morning before she have tea.*

*I just going to forgive them. My mother told them that they must bring back that cow they pay for me and took it. They must bring back before they took me. While I was there they gave me three rooms for me and my husband. I'm going to exchange these rooms. I'm going to make American*

### **MY BOYFRIEND AT THE CITY**

*I've got a new boyfriend at Durban. That boy come from Harding. His name is Simphiwe Cele. I meet this boy at the bus. He gave me his phone to phone him and I gave him my number phone.*

*I love him very much and he loves me too much. In the middle of our love. He have been changed. On other day I told him that our next door is selling a wardrobe. I told him that it he will help me I can be glad. It was wardrobe and bed. He promise me that he is gone help me. But he didn't.*

*On other day he told me that we must look a room on flats. He told that flat is not costing too much money. Its only R600,00 a month. He promise me that we are going to stay at flats at town I said okay. But he haven't done that.*

*He promise me that he's gone take to salon to make my hair nicely. He promise me that he's gone do right things for me and buy some nice pants for me. He is still buy all and done everything for me and today. I still waiting for him to do all these things. He haven't done until know.*

Only thing he told me that I must look a room here and pay for it. He is too much naughty he used me for nothing he wants my money. I've been changing for him. I told him that I'm going back to my roots know. I'm going back to my husband. He make me fright he said I can go back from where I came from. I can go back to my husband. I told him that I can go back to my husband because you are same like him. There's no change. I've been saw that people are the same



These men are like my husbar and boyfriend, they are all the same. I've come to know that men are all the same you can't trust them.

### THE NAUGHTY BOYS

I'm working at Reservoir Hills from where there's too much naughty boys. I meet other boy. He prepose me. I told him and asked him. What are you going to do with me.

What are you going to please me with? I told him that he must live me alone. He heat behind the police station. The policeman saw him. They told him that he mustn't do that.

I took a stone to heat him. Luckily he just left me while the policeman saw him. I was going to heat him with a big stone.

*On other day I was come back to the clinic. I saw him again at the shop. He called me I told him that I don't want to talk with him anymore. He come to me and said he gone heat me. Lucky other friend for me call me. He just entered inside the shop. After that he come outside and went away.*

*I just look him without talking. I don't want him anymore because his too much naughty.*

### **HOW THEY TREAT ME BEING A DOMESTIC WORKER**



*My Mrs did not take care of me. They always wants my power. They don't want my friends to visit me. They don't want my boyfriend, like that I have no feelings They didn't check what is finish for cleaning their rooms. When I told them they have a big mouth. They didn't give me a sick live(leave). They didn't give me leave. They always wants me to be happy. Not feeling sick. If you are sick they give you Panado.*

*They don't want my family even my child especial when my child is sick( to visit me). They don't want me to wash the clothes for my children. The children have no respect for me they call me by name but in my culture our children respect us.*

*The way we respect their mother and father they do like that for us. They didn't give us nice food. They didn't give me some fruit. They gave me old food. The wages they give us is not enough for our problems. When they give us overtime they must surpose to pay us . I don't like to be a domestic worker.*

The final portrait and autobiography that I present is Agnes's.

### 5.8 Portrait: Agnes

ORGANIZATION: Time  
REBEL: My life (Time)



Agnes was born in 1963 in the rural town of Matatielo, Kokstad. Agnes attended Queensmercy Junior Secondary School (JSS) from Grade 1 to Grade seven. She has three children: two sons, one in Grade Ten and another in Grade one and a daughter in Grade Seven. The daughter attends a school in Reservoir Hills where Indian children are in the majority. She is making very good progress at school. Agnes's two boys attend the same school as she did, Queensmercy JSS. The same educators taught both mother and sons for some grades.



Agnes failed Standard Three and Standard Six. She attributes the reasons for the failure to the language barrier at school. English was used as medium of instruction after Grade Four. Agnes found it difficult to cope with English as a medium of instruction. She found the teacher's methodology lacked pupil participation and comprehensibility. This resulted in little learning taking place. In Standard Six, 49 out of 58 students failed and only nine students passed. Learners had to endure much physical punishment.

Agnes was forced to leave school because a gentleman, Joseph, found her suitable to be his bride. Joseph and his mother took Agnes to their home because he found her attractive and felt she would make a good partner. There were no negotiations with her parents or any consultation with Agnes about her feelings. She was taken from her home against her own wishes. She resented Joseph because she had no desire for him. She was forced to endure living with Joseph from age eighteen. Her parents did not show any disapproval at the manner in which she was taken from her home, as this was not uncommon in their custom. Three years later Agnes was married to Joseph.

In 1992, Agnes was forced to leave her children in the rural area and search for work in the urban area because of the poverty in Matatiele. There were no jobs and little money available to survive; she therefore had to turn to the big city. In Durban, Agnes worked as a domestic worker from 1992 to 2003. She has worked mainly for Indian families. She is a Roman Catholic who worships together with her employer at the Anglican Church at Westville, KwaZulu-Natal. Her underlying reasons for joining ABET as she says were:

*I want to know English. I want to know how to reply in English. I want to speak English and read and write. I think night school will help me to improve. I enjoy my friends at school. I made so many new friends. It will help me to help my child at school. Maybe I will get a better job. To be a domestic worker it is important to know English. The Madam and Baas speaks in English, they think you are high class if you speak good English. They pay you better. They want you to talk to their children in English.*

In 1998, Agnes joined Asoka Adult Basic Education Co-operative and has remained in the programme for three years. She has written the Level one Independent Board Examinations and passed with merit. Agnes presently (2003) attends the Siyakhana Adult

Literacy centre which I co-ordinate. Initially Agnes found adult classes difficult to adapt to because of her inability to communicate adequately with fellow classmates. Later she settled when she participated in class plays, skits and discussions.

Agnes's cover picture of Oprah Winfrey suggests her admiration and strong identity with Oprah. As a domestic worker who has been able to watch the *Oprah Winfrey Show* she has big dreams to become a successful businesswoman. Agnes's choice of Oprah Winfrey shows the influence of the mass media in a global village where someone can be influenced by a Black role model in another corner of the world. This once more reveals the inevitable impact of globalization on the lives of ordinary and not-so ordinary people in society.

Text Four

AGNES

MY LIFE IS WITH MY CHILDREN

ABEC  
My life  
Story —



MY EARLY CHILDHOOD

*I was born in Matitiela Town past Kokstad a farm area. It is a place where they plant. We had a farm but not for selling. We had water from the river. The river was far we carried water in the head. Matiel is a town. Father worked in Vryheid.*

*.He take long time to come home only when it is holiday. In a year we saw him one or two times. He worked in the Railway. He gave mother money enough mother did not work Stayed at home mother long time she sick I don't know what was her prolem my mother went to Vryheid. My grandmother took care of us. My sister was small and shell come and go and come. When we came from school we fetch water. I have five sisters and two brothers. There are seven in the family. I 'm the third born. Life was not bad in the farm . Only girls fetched water. The boys don't help in the house –boys no-cooking , no washing , they – time is not like this –now mens help –boys looked after the cattle .*

### **MY SCHOOL DAYS**

*Went to school 7 years or 8 years . Queensmercy School. It was a nice school. All African teachers. It was not a mission school – not a Christian school. Teachers not all the same some were good , some too much hitting. When I' m first year , Miss Mngunudu, cheeky one , he hit everyone with a stick it pained . He it whole class .I liked to go to school . I played basket ball run I enjoyed running I liked croched ,sewing and cooking. I did English , Sesotha, Maths , History, Geography, Science, Needlework. I enjoyed needlework the best. I failed standard 3 and standard 6. I had excellent attendance. School work was hard. Many children failed at school. In standard 6 out of 49 students only 9 students passed. I think I'm not clever. We don' t understand the teahers. I know my Catholicism I got a Rosary. I went to Sunday school. I'm want to be like Katazele she is so good in English. I tell my mother I want to speak English. That other work they did not speak English only Zulu. I left school because I got married Teacher Mhhafi he was very strict when he talk he talk like what he want. Like when he teach a poem he want you talk loud like you must say it nicely. Example when he was teaching us the poem 'Mokgutsitse` he want us to talk loud we must stand straight, we must act. If we don't do that then he hit us. Everyday when he comes to class when it was Sesotho we must say the poem. In the morning he teach us about the bible. He said when Jesus Christ was small he was lost his parents had to look*

*all over for him. He asked why they looking for him don't they know that he his in his father's house. He was in church. We have to say it like him aloud if we don't then he hit us. Everyday. It was hard. You are frightened to go to school because he hit us. But he was a nice teacher because everyone pass at the end of the year.*

*The boys are so cheeky they don't like when the teacher hit them. The boys say they don't want to be hit by a lady teacher. I remember one day I was in class one or two a boy was in standard 5. He wrote a letter to a girl friend. The principal hit the boy. He put the boy on the table in the assembly with all the children looking and he hit him. We was so frightened.*

*From class 1 to standard 2 the teachers they writ my name like Agnacia he correct my name. When I was in standard 5 I got lot problems I couldn't understand what they were teaching. They use only English. They say we are Junior now so we can start to speak English. I could not speak English. My problem is I did not understand English. They hit us but not bad.*

*We did sewing in school. We sew a child's dress. There we had a competition, our school came first. I like sewing. I remember when I was singining in the choir we make a practice it was so hot I fainted. We sang for the concert. In school I played netball. We have to go other schools to play. I was center*

### **ADULT LITERACY**

*I came to AABEC to know English. I want to know how to reply in English. I want to learn more about English –to be able to read and write –I like to speak English like be I will get a better job. Katazele. I want speak better English*

*I am a domestic worker, I go to church –Roman Catholic, and I go to sewing classes, -I send money to the farm every month.*



### HOW THEY FORCED ME TO GET MARRIED

*They took me by force. I did not want to go. That time was different – I did not like Joseph. I saw him there – he stay not far from where we live. They took me to his house. And told my parents that they want to marry me. I was in standard 6 at that time. It was a bad day – no wants to marry like that –after three years I had a wedding my parents did not say anything. After he slept with me my parents say I can't do nothing. I was 18 years old. He paid labola. It was difficult with the mother in law at home – she shout every time I did everything washing, cooking, it was hard. Alfred was born in 1982. It's hard ~ with baby .He worked he did not stay at home. He worked in Johannesburg.*

*In 1885 his work was finished –life was hard. –he can-me back home. –he work somewhere but little money. I did not work at all. 1992 came to Durban –Westville. North –I worked for a Muslim -. Alfred stays with his father – he is not intelligent.*

### **THINGS I LIKE AND DISLIKE**

*Church I feel when I went to church something worry me it went away. I like Church it help me with my problems. When I grow I think I don't go to shop to buy anything. I do myself. I want to sew. I enjoy sewing. like baking cakes, bread, biscuits and scones.*

*I like my brother, mother, father and sisters. When I'm not happy they write a letter they tell me not to worry about that. Then I feel my family is with me then I feel happy. My children I'm praying to be something. When they grow up they are not like me.*

*The farm means happiness to me. I see Litollo, my last born he ask me " Ma when I'm coming back" I say December. He ask me why I am not coming at the end of the month. I'm happy to see all my family at the farm in December.*

*I like to eat putu and mass and infeno. I like the Sotho dancing when they doing the feast. You enjoy when you looking at the dance. I do not like to be poor. Life is not good can't be happy without money, you are a noyhing. Your children are a nothing they don't like you, they angry for you, because you are not doing anything for them.*

*I don't like to be a maid. The work is you don't stay with your children. It is not good. To be a maid is when you are not educated. You can't do anything important. When you are a maid its like you are a children.*

BEING DOMESTIC WORKER



*Most of us are treated so badly to be a domestic worker is hard job for us. Our Madams they think you are African you are things hard like steel you are not tired not sick only they are feeling tired but not all of them like my madam.*

*They like their dogs ,pets better than you, they bought nice meat ,nice food for their dogs but they give a routen (rotten)food because you are poor you must eat*

*if you don't eat you are sleep with empty stomach they don't care about you. If you sick they give you panado after that they ask how you feeling after two or three days you haven't feel better they say you must go home because you are sick you don't do work nice or they say they are not have money to pay you the cut job.*



*For me I think to be a domestic worker we must be together to fight about our rights we must sign a contract to no(know)about my sick leave how many day you must take when you are sick and they must give us fresh food like theirs and they must know about overtime and lunch time to have a break is another thing help you to be strong they do not think it is important to have a break .To work on a Sunday is wrong we musn't work on Sunday every one must free that day.*

*You can't do anything yourself your family must help you with the money to take care of the children. I don't like madams like when I'm going to church and she say you must stay inside and don't go nowere.*

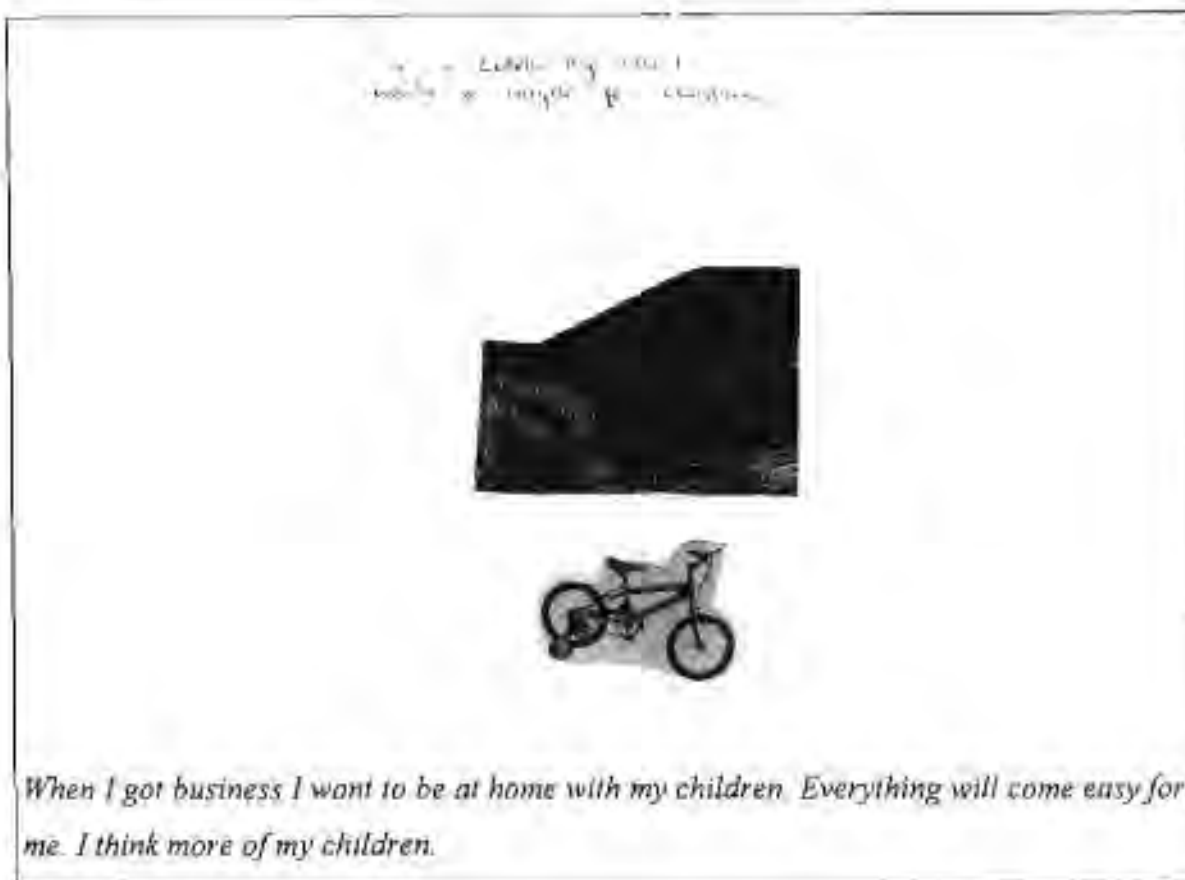
### **MY VIEWS ON THE NEWGOVERNMENT**

*We got a new government but they talk English. I don't understand. I don't know anything. For me everything is like before no change. I got nothing. No house, no good job, my children don't stay with me.*

*Before Mandela was released I did not know anything about the government. For me the Government do nothing some are happy because they got house water, lights but me I got nothing.*

### **MY DREAMS**

*I like to be in business and stay in my house. I want to sell something. I like to see my children finish there school and getting a nice job. I'm happy when Alfred finish matric and do something better. I'm happy to see Patience to be a doctor and a warm family. Litlotlo must go to varsity.*



### 5.9 Significance of Portraits and Profiles in Constructing Learner Identities

From the analysis of all the data sources, the portraits and profiles assist in constructing the identities of each learner. Maria's portrait reveals her strong sense of political roots and a need to be unconditionally loyal to a political party of her choice. Her deep involvement in community organizations such as the South African Democratic Domestic Workers Union has given a good sense of self-esteem. As a woman she asserts herself on female issues and understands her rights as a citizen and as a domestic worker in South Africa. Unfortunately, she is caught in a catch twenty-two situation where she is unable to assert her rights because of the repercussions.

Bongiwe's identity has been strongly shaped by her early childhood experiences. Despite her father's abuse, Bongiwe always maintained that her father was the head of household and needed to be counselled to overcome his problems. The abuse of her alcoholic

father's tirade had created a need for her to become a policewoman so that she could overcome female abuse. Her identity has been influenced by a need to reshape the world to change what her father had constructed in her early childhood. Therefore, much of her dreams appear idealistic. She has come from a world, filled with constant rejection, fear, violence, alcohol abuse, mother being constantly beaten and a teenage brother asked to leave the home for a minor offence. Bongiwe has taken comfort by holding on to big dreams because of her difficult life experiences. She has identified herself as an Olympic sprinter, social worker, policewoman and a singer. Her extroverted personality and zest for life is clearly seen in her choice and desire to be an Olympic sprinter and a singer whilst her need to transform society from beastly men like her father can be gauged by her choice to be policewoman and a social worker.

Cindy experienced very traumatic childhood experiences, with her father beating her mother. She lived in overcrowded conditions and tried to make the best of a bad situation. From early childhood Cindy seemed to suffer from a poor self-concept:

*While I was young I didn't cook, I didn't do washing because I didn't know nothing. I was feeling shy when I saw someone I don't know I was a big stupid by that time because there was no need to run away and cried when someone wants to do that. On another day I was walking lonely. The stupid thing I have done. I put my feet on broken bottles.*

There were many aspects of her life where her inability to make informed choices led to disastrous consequences and this led to her strong need to seek redemption from her Saviour:

*...on another day there come a nice and clean boy. He proposed me. I told him that he must wait the whole week. I'm gone think more about him. After that I fell in love with him. He took me to his home. I sleep for two days. Then he told me that he wants me to be his own wife*

Cindy's personality trait has been characterized by unfortunate circumstances especially grinding poverty that compelled her to live with a husband who physically, mentally and emotionally abused her. She felt the sword of Damocles hanging over her head for

abandoning her children to seek freedom. Despite her hardship, Cindy strove to seek an identity in society by engaging in the numerous activities that AABEC organized.

Although Agnes grew up without her father being present everyday at home, family bond was the central issue in her life. She grew up in a warm family background where family meant everything. Agnes's identity was shaped by the need to give her children, love, education and maternal support. Her dreams and desires are not about herself but about how she could assist her children to achieve their goals in life. Her ambition is to see her children, attend university, obtain good tertiary education and become successful. Her optimism stems from the high academic results that her children achieve. One of her reasons for attending adult literacy classes was to help her children with homework. Thus far she has been able to assist her daughter with mathematics and with English projects.

In the second section of chapter four, the 'The Journey Unfolding', I discussed how my data was analyzed in relation to the theoretical perspectives positioned in this study. I acknowledge the relevance of all prior learning and stated clearly that this thesis does not claim that literacy alone has made changes in the lives of learners. The position taken in this study is to acknowledge the learners' prior biographic experiences and during literacy classes.

I have used the various data sources to capture the profiles of learners so that a global overview is established. I presented a brief narrative summary of the learners' portraits so that the study establishes the context of the learners' biographical journey in relation to the impact that adult English literacy had on their lives.

### **5.10 Concluding Comments**

In this chapter I presented the four adult learners and briefly explored how the English literacy curriculum impacted on their lives. It was evident that the learners attended ABET because they needed to improve their English communicative skills. The profiles

revealed how learners had effected some transformation in their lives post literacy. In the next chapter I analyze the first theme from the data.

## CHAPTER SIX

# IF POVERTY MANACLES, CAN THE NARRATIVE UNFETTER?

### Data Analysis

#### 6.1 Introduction

In this Chapter I will present an analysis of the themes that emerged from all the data sources and explore their relationship to my critical question: What is the impact of adult English literacy curriculum on the lives of female domestic workers? In the next few chapters, I go into the heart of analysis, i.e., stripping, pulling apart, correlating, contrasting, comparing, interpreting, and evaluating the data to make sense of it.

Emerging themes from all the data sources were identified:

- The narrative as a voice in poverty
- The impact of pedagogy in power relations
- English as the language of access and domination
- Discursive influences in mediating the curriculum

As explained in Chapter Four, I used patterned analysis to analyze my data through which these themes emerged. I interpreted the data by presenting the various data sources simultaneously. Thus the autobiographies, letters, class efforts and comments, which may appear as organized chaos are in fact a multi-textured voice which provide greater understanding of the adult learners. In the main I analyze their autobiographical writing but this is not done in isolation: to do so would mean interpreting in a closed, linear mode. I present their writing not to be evaluated in the narrow technicist manner of outcomes but to be evaluated in the new critical paradigm: I thus go beyond merely reading and writing to entering into a framework of critical pedagogy (see Chapter Four). The main shift

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is towards a critical conscious, emancipatory, empowering and transformative educative process.

Poverty as a theme emerged in all the data sources for all the learners. Poverty defined the learner's lives from childhood to adulthood. I will demonstrate how adult literacy helped the adult learners to overcome their feelings of hopelessness, despair, and frustration that resulted from poverty. I present the data revealing how poverty has been experienced for each learner and how, through the medium of writing each achieved a level of consciousness. I will present data to explain whether literacy through the autobiographical writing has been a vehicle for conscientization, self-awareness, reflection, empowerment or some other change in their lives. As a researcher, I am conscious and cautious that the 'stories do not speak for themselves', that there is part researcher co-construction in the writing and interpretation of the narrative (The Personal Narratives Group, 1989). Maynes (in The Personal Narratives Group, 1989: 105) comments that in interpreting working class autobiographies one needs to recognize the social historical context in which they are written, because they 'capture the experiences of people struggling to stay afloat and beset by chronic insecurity, poverty illness, accidents and family tragedies so common to working class people'. In presenting the writing itself I am aware of the dilemma that lies in the power of words as (Hampsten, 1989: 130) describes:

*... we appropriate power of gods in words; can we help but cannibalize the lives of others? ...to the extent we dare to have anything serious to say. The mere desire to give form and therefore meaning to other's lives or their writing is, if you think too much about it, forbiddingly arrogant. We should be warned by the Pygmalion myth*

As researcher I interpret the data through an eclectic lens that allow me the latitude to use different frameworks. In this and subsequent chapters, I make extensive use of data from the autobiographical writings. I begin with a brief background on how the autobiographies were written. They were a series of lessons that I conducted. The whole notion of writing an autobiography seemed an impossible task to the learners. It was a daunting task to write a narrative in a

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language in which they were not totally proficient. The first lesson began with spider-grams where I introduced the main ideas. As an educator I found myself wanting in some of the competency skills required to teach the autobiography. Hence I engaged in a collaborative teaching strategy. After a broad framework was established, I invited Professor Kendall to discuss how an autobiography ought to be written. I learnt about Professor Kendall through her book *Basali* (1995) where she describes the lives and experiences of African women in Lesotho. One of the women that she had written about was Mpho Nthunya a semi-literate domestic worker, who had become a writer. Professor Kendall assisted me in teaching the learners how to write their autobiographies. She brought in Mpho Nthunya, who told her story in *Singing Away The Hunger* (Nthunya, 1996). The learners' were able to identify with Mpho's situation and believe in themselves. They realized that they too, could become writers if only they gave themselves a chance to write their stories. Professor Kendall and Mpho motivated the learners and this helped the learners to gain confidence.

### 6.2 Orientation to the Analytical Process

The data analysis of each learner will be divided into two sections, in order to show the impact of the English literacy curriculum on their lives. The first section of the analysis will present the learners' experiences with poverty and the second will explore the role of adult literacy in their lives. It should be noted that learners were semi-literate when they joined the adult literacy classes. The data will be interwoven as a matrix of information from all the data sources. This open system will be constantly receiving information, which appears to be chaotic. I begin the data analysis on poverty with an apt quote from Dora Tamara cited by Budlender (2001: 330):

*You who have no food, speak  
You who have no homes, speak  
You who have no jobs, speak  
You who have to run like chickens from the vulture, speak*



### 6.2.1 Definition of Poverty

An understanding of the concept of poverty has long been the subject of debate; it could mean different things to different people. According to May (2000: 5) “*The perceptions of the poor themselves are a good source from which an appropriate conceptualization of poverty can be derived*” Poverty is multifaceted, as the learners’ experiences show. May (2000) writes that the emerging consensus on the definition to poverty is generally, the inability to command sufficient resources to satisfy a socially acceptable minimum standard of living. Within this definition of poverty provided by (May, 2000) the following are included: alienation from community, food insecurity, crowded homes, use of basic forms of energy, lack of adequately paid secure jobs, and fragmentation of the family. Agnes’s voice from her autobiographical writings concurs with some of the characteristics of poverty that May (2000) speaks about:

*I do not like to be poor. Life is not good I can't be happy without money, you are a nothing. Your children are a nothing they don't like you, they are angry for you, because you are not doing anything for them. I don't like to be a maid. The work is you don't stay with your children....*

The anguish, the fragmentation of the family, the alienation from mainstream society and lack of an adequately paid job are reflected in Agnes’s lament about being poor: *life is not good, can't be happy, they (children) don't like you, you are a nothing.*

My understanding of poverty was made more real to me by my *in loco* visits to the informal settlements. At the Mpolweni Settlement, I observed some of the everyday issues of poverty. During my initial visits during 1998, water was not available to the people of Mpolweni. The learners experienced much difficulty in obtaining the basic resources that every community ought to have. Water was a major problem and the people had to obtain water by taking the essential life-giving water from those who had water. Bongwiwe had made numerous requests in her capacity as leader of the informal settlement and after much effort water was delivered during certain periods. The people at Mpolweni were able to collect

their water but had to wait until the next delivery. From 2000 a tap was installed in a central area and the people were able to fetch water at their leisure.

The community lacked proper sanitation but never complained about such issues. Living cheek by jowl had some advantages where many people enjoyed *ubuntu* or the close co-operation, where people share their love with their fellow sisters and brothers. At other times the over-crowding created socio-economic evils such as crime and a lack of privacy. The community also had the social evil of snobbery where the 'haves' and 'have nots' competed. A different kind of xenophobia prevailed as the people who did not speak the native language, IsiZulu of KwaZulu-Natal, were ostracized. People who hailed from other rural towns from KwaZulu-Natal and who spoke other African languages and not IsiZulu were seen as outcasts. They were not readily welcome to the community of Mpolweni.

Poverty defined this community and its people. It was like the skin worn on their body. There were few little material comforts afforded to them from childhood to adulthood. Their autobiographical writings reveal that poverty was not a deterrent but motivated them to rise like the Phoenix from the ashes and transcend their obstacles by having big dreams. Their dreams and aspirations gave them hope to change and transform, to gain a better life. Through their autobiographical writing skills, the learners were able to embrace poverty and become critically conscious. Using a critical feminist postmodern perspective in this research, I have demonstrated that educational research is non-linear but a complex activity because there is no tangible reality out there. The methodological insights cited provide a more adaptable way of dealing with multiple realities because the methods expose more directly with the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the researched. My task as life history researcher was to engage in their storytelling so that the *truth* emerged. But truth is an elusive concept and difficult to attain because each individual constructs reality from one's own perspective and that will depend on where the reality is being constructed. Therefore in constructing women's life stories it becomes imperative to make use of methodological tools that will reflect and reveal a woman's life story in a

multiplicity of ways. From this chapter the findings demonstrate that the Black female adult learners were exposed to poverty from early childhood to adulthood. The learners hailed either from rural areas in their early childhood or from the informal settlements as adults. In researching women who experience poverty throughout their lives, the life history as a methodological tool provided an excellent lens to achieve a greater understanding of the impact of literacy on their lives.

### **6.3 Bongiwe's Tale of the Rat**

*"Give us this day our daily bread ...for thine is the Kingdom the power and the glory. Amen"*

The excerpt below exploring poverty is from Bongiwe's autobiographical writing where she describes her hunger as seven-year-old infant:

*I was seven years that time I was very naughty. I remember the day my mum sent me to the shop to buy bread; it was cold that day I went to the shop it was far. Shop was opening at eight o'clock then I came before that time I had to wait. The baker had come late that day. I felt hungry that day I was rushing for school that day. Soon the baker came and the shopkeeper came to give me bread and I gave him the money for the bread. The bread it was very hot and smell very nice. My home was too far and I felt very hungry so what must I do now. I sat down on the grass I pull all the soft things inside the bread I left only the outside part. After that I ran back to my house. I left the bread on the table. My mum saw the bread inside she was so worried that she asked me. I told her that maybe the rat eat the bread like that mum. She said, "No, no, you eat the bread because I know you like hot bread."*

The perhaps humorous yarn that Bongiwe spins about the rat eating the bread belie the hunger pangs that gnaws in the stomach of a seven year old. The critical point of her writing through an adult lens is that she has not become bitter over her experiences of having insufficient food as an infant; instead, she chastises herself for her ill-disciplined behaviour and not being considerate of the family needs. From the extract one also notes that facilities for the poor are not near at hand, for example, the store, the school are far away from home and children have to walk long distances.

According to the Redistribution and Development Policy (RDP) of 1994, the new ANC government promised to improve the lot of the poor. This has not materialized, instead the state has adopted a new macro-economic policy that is in line with the neo-liberal policy of the north and toes the line of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund<sup>29</sup>. The neo-liberal policy shows the widening of the gap between the rich and the poor, the loss of jobs and a growth in the number of poor people. The South African neo-liberal policies and shift towards global market economies tend to tolerate poverty and severe inequalities (Good, 2001: 47).

### 6.4 Reclaiming one's Identity

In the excerpt below I illustrate how alienated some members can feel within a community because they are poor. Bongiwe expresses how the dominant classes have tried to maintain their privileged status by exploiting disadvantaged groups. Bongiwe grew up in the rural village of Hammarsdale, KwaZulu-Natal. Presently (2003) she resides in the Mpolweni Settlement that is adjacent to the mainly Indian middle class residents of Reservoir Hills. Many people refer to the informal settlements as the 'Jondols'<sup>30</sup> or squatter settlement'. Squatting is unauthorized occupation of land. Many poor people who have no houses build their homes with scrap material on vacant land. Adult learners themselves often refer to their place as the 'Jondols'. However, during the interview it was made very clear that the derogatory reference undermines their dignity:

*Bongiwe: Jondols is not a good name. The people they don't like when you say you live in the Jondols it is like you live in the bush. We got a name for our Jondols, Mpolweni. We like the people to call it by that name.*

*I: How do the people from Reservoir Hills treat you?*

*B: Some of the people they treat us so nice they treat us well. But some of them they don't greet us, they don't give us a lift they think we are like dirt. They don't give us fresh food. They don't respect us.*

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<sup>29</sup> (see Motala & Pampallis, 2001)

<sup>30</sup> The word *Jondols* is an IsiZulu slang for squatter settlement

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Bongiwe and those that live in the informal settlement detest the label of 'Jondols' and the perception that they are 'like dirt'. She seems to be yearning for a positive identity when she says that, *we got a name for our Jondols Mpolweni*.

From childhood to adulthood, Bongiwe has grown up in social settings where she has been part of a group that was marginalized. Cloke and Little (1997) explain how in rural society many social groupings are constructed as 'other' to the mainstream ideas of who belongs to the countryside. The economic, political, ideological context of society in which Bongiwe lives creates the divide of *them* and *us*. Her notion of the people in Reservoir Hills as *them* seems to show that she has accepted the hegemonic divide between the people of the mainly Indian residence of Reservoir Hills as *them* and the people of Mpolweni as *us*. Because of the economic positioning between the poor Mpolweni residents and the middle class residents of Reservoir Hills the adult learners identify with the *other*. Cloke and Little (1997) describe how the positioning of people can result in complex hegemony of domination because of material and cultural acceptance as belonging whilst *others* are marginalized and excluded for various reasons such as race, gender, age, economic position and alternatives:

*Currently, the urban poor live in a diverse range of buildings, including hostels, backyard shacks, garages, outbuildings and informal settlements constructed from scrap. Most of the informal settlements do not have sanitation, water and electricity. Approximately 80% of the poor in the urban areas of South Africa's economic heartland, Gauteng, is made up of newly built unplanned informal settlements, which are regarded as illegal and characterized by overcrowding Williamson (in, Wilson, Kanji, & Braathen, 2001: 348).*

The learners have experienced the 'otherness' as they lived in rural countryside's and in later life, some lived in marginalized informal settlements. Bongiwe's comments epitomizes how as the poor, she felt a sense of degradation at the way people from Reservoir Hills referred to their homes as *Jondols*. Because of where she was located she felt that some people did not accord her respect, dignity and humanity. The narratives allowed Bongiwe and the other learners to reflect on their lives, and through reflection to become critically conscious. In reflecting on her life Bongiwe also seems to exert her identity of wanting her abode to be called

by its proper name. Bongiwe is also conscious of being marginalized by the dominant class in her neighbourhood:

*But some of them they don't greet us, they don't give us a lift they think we are like dirt. They don't give us fresh food. They don't respect us.*

McLaren (2003a: 178-179) emphasizes the importance of providing students with a language of criticism and a language of hope. He argues that the new generation of learners must be capable of analyzing the social and material conditions in which their dreams are given birth, realized, diminished or destroyed. Education needs to foster dreaming, a dreaming that speaks to the creation of social justice. This dreaming, this striving for human dignity, this language of hope, is encapsulated in Bongiwe's writing:

*My name is Sibongile. I was born at Mophela that's my rural area in Hammersdale...I am a human being; I've got so many things that I can do it... I just like to be an olympic sprinter, singer, police and social worker that were my aim... I am a women but as a human being I have things which I like and something I dislike.*

Bongiwe's writing reveals her level of consciousness as a human being in society *I am a human being; I've got so many things that I can do it. I just like to be an Olympic sprinter.* She shows a critical understanding of the dehumanization process of her past (apartheid) and her present situation of poverty has contrived to strip her of her humanity. She has identified with the 'other' and has not allowed the 'thems' to dehumanize her. She triumphs over her situation by her assertive power in claiming her dignity and humanity. Writing has given her the discursive critical space to proclaim her identity and to be proud of who she is. It is within this context that she constantly refers to her humanity as the power, which can liberate her. She explains that to make one's dreams a reality is possible through the individual's determination and sacrifice. The strong use of the verb 'can' shows her intention to transform. Her use of the first person 'I' and 'my rural area Hammersdale' show that Bongiwe does not accept the *status quo* but challenges the economic and political contexts from where she hails. She is conscious of the economic, political ideological context of society in which she

lives. From a Freirean perspective (1998a), Bongiwe has achieved critical consciousness and human liberation. This is evident in her dreams, her strong sense of identity, her sense of empowerment, the progress in her career and economic conditions (see Profile, Chapter Five).

Bongiwe's writing is also indicative of the different English competency skills she has acquired. Her introduction to this 'story' reveals her linguistic competency skills and her ability to provide a vivid description. Her affinity to the farm is suggested by her clever use of the possessive case 'My rural area in Hammersdale'. The story of the "Hot Bread" supposedly eaten by the rat was developed with suspense, a variety of voices and good paragraph construction.

### **6.5 Maria: A Slave's Dream'**

*After finishing all the household chores, I go to bed, which is 10 at night. In that tiny room of mine, all by myself I turn side to side unable to sleep thinking of my mum who is old and about my little girl. O! now comes month-end when everybody awaits there wages. For me it s different because I have to beg before I get it. When the madam gives instructions as what to do then its alright but when it comes to payment it the opposite. O! what a life to be a domestic worker*

This excerpt demonstrates how poverty has placed Maria in a position of powerlessness. She recounts her anguish at bedtime, the agonizing wait for her pay and the dehumanizing effect this has on her.

Maria's letters have been an alternate data source in this research. The letters helped me discover the complex and sad realities of her life world. In one of her letters written in 2000 when she returned to her hometown, she explains:

*I moved without any furniture except my clothing and a mattress. I could not even know how to set up house, it took me days because of no furniture. My son and I took turns to use the mattress when he is away in JHB where he works I use the mattress but when he is down he uses it. He used to write or phone before coming home so that I must get his bedding ready. Sleeping on the floor killed me because when I get up in the morning its like I slept on the stones. What a life but what can I do I just*

*have to live with it because I am not working anymore to buy what I want. Fortunately my mother helped a lot with her pension money to buy food and pay for electricity.*

Of the households receiving pension in South Africa 89% are African and two thirds of the pension go to rural areas (Budlender, 2001: 127). When Maria initially moved to Phalarbowa the old age pension that her mother collected was the only regular source of income for Maria and her family.

### **6.5.1 Maria the Budding Poet**

Maria cites a poem in her autobiography that shows her critical level of understanding of the plight of the domestic worker.

EXCERPT ONE: cited from Maria's autobiography

#### *A DOMESTIC WORKER*

*I the willing,  
Led by the unknowing,  
Am doing the impossible  
For the ungreatful,  
Have done so much  
For so long, for so little  
That I am qualified,  
To do anything,  
With nothing. (Poet unknown)*

Maria might be in an economically powerless situation because of poverty as a domestic worker, but through her writing she has clearly demonstrated that she has the knowledge, skills and empowerment to accomplish her dreams. The stumbling block to the realization of her goals in life has been the sociopolitical situation in which she was trapped. Lines 1-5 from the poem aptly sum her feelings through reflexive thinking where it describes how the domestic worker



has worked efficiently and loyally to a very unappreciative employer. The poem concludes on a very optimistic and triumphant note. Maria identifies herself as an individual who is 'qualified, to do anything, with nothing'. This concluding line of this short poem elevates the status of the domestic worker to someone who has the ability and who is in fact qualified to do things despite having 'nothing'. Maria's ability to handle language creatively is displayed when she cites a poem that conveys succinctly her message in a powerful manner. The poem encapsulates the suffering, exploitation, manipulation and oppression of the domestic worker and ends triumphantly, with optimism and hope.

As ex-chairperson of the South African Domestic Workers Union, Maria through her writing demonstrates further her knowledge and understanding of the ideological underpinnings of society. Thus her writings campaigned for the rights of domestic workers when there was little change in the status of domestic workers. However, in 2003, legislation was passed where every domestic worker who works for 24 hours or more per week has to be legally registered with the Department of Labour. Although legislation was passed I am sceptical about its implementation.

Excerpt Two From Maria's Writing

*These were the decisions taken at the launch of South African Domestic Workers Union*

Decisions were:

*Shall negotiate with employers on behalf of the workers,*

*Shall secure the fair and reasonable conditions of employment.*

*Shall protect workers against exploitation.*

*Shall help workers solve their problem.*

Demands were: *A living wage, pension fund, maternity leave, sick leave, UIF. Workmen's compensation and to be covered by the Labour Relations Act.*

Maria's inclusion of the excerpt of decisions and demands made at the launch of the South African Domestic Worker's Union shows her level of critical consciousness of the world in which she lives. She shows a profound understanding on the rights of the domestic workers through her autobiographical writing. These excerpts show how writing is a powerful tool that emancipated the

adult learners and assisted in empowering them (see Gough, 2001). The writing has made them reflective and critical of their roles as domestic workers.

Maria's critically conscious writing is what Freire (1998c: X) invites adult learners to do. Adult learners ought to look at themselves as persons living and producing in society. Learners must come out of the apathy of conforming to society. Freire (1998c) challenges them to understand that they are themselves the makers of culture. He makes it clear that the lower status is not the result of divine determination or fate but rather of the economic, political and ideological context of society in which they live. Thus literacy is not just about reading, writing and arithmetic but as Freire (1998c) asserts, when men and women realize that they themselves are makers of their culture, then they have accomplished or nearly accomplished the first step towards the importance and the possibility of owning reading and writing. It is then a person becomes literate, "politically speaking" (Freire, 1998c: X1). This position argues that adult learners who are able to re-read reality may engage in political practices, which aims at social transformation.

In the third excerpt below, Maria demonstrates in her autobiographical writing how she was able to liberate her mind through reflexivity. She concludes that she wants to transform perceptions of her life from that of powerless, poor, domestic worker into someone who wishes to become a businesswoman. She displays some of her entrepreneurial skills and business acumen by citing some of her experiences:

*...Having worked so long now I am deciding to go back home and start my own business...I used to bake koeksisters and ginger beer which I used sell and get money it was very exciting ... I thought them how to make money-by organising concerts which we ran every month end. Then yearly shared the profit among ourselves...I enjoy sales. In 1993 I became an agent for Count Giovanni French Perfume Company, which was based in Gardener Street in Durban. When I started I was on 25% but within the year it went up to 50%. The manager was very pleased with me and couldn't believe that as a domestic worker I can have such good sales. Unfortunately in 1995 the company closed down...Now in two years time, I would like to open a restaurant for myself and make a lot of money. Although my hometown is very small, the time I can make good sales is in month end,*

*December and Easter holidays. I also decided to sell clothing when its quite during the year...Clothing I know is needed all the time.*

It is Maria's optimistic spirit that has resulted in making part of her dreams become reality. From one the letters she sent to me in 2000, I cite an excerpt where she explains that ... *in two years time I will open a restaurant.* Her persuasive language and convincing tone show her determination to succeed. A few years later Maria did accomplish something incredible: she returned to the location and set up her own successful business. In 2001 she wrote in a letter to me about her need to engage in business:

*...as business is concerned I have started in small way selling chips in the stadium every Sundays ... I'm still trying very hard to sell this and that. I started selling clothing ....the sales were good at first but stopped ...but now I started a new thing, selling chicken head and feet (runways) and see what is going to happen because this is everydays food...*

In 2003 she still continues with her thriving chicken head and feet business. Maria has transformed herself from a powerless domestic servant to a self-employed entrepreneur. There is no doubt that Maria's biographical experiences and determination have contributed to her successes in her life. To claim that adult education has contributed to all her success is to subvert the truth. What can be claimed is that by becoming proficient in the reading, writing and communication skills Maria became more confident. The narrative allowed her the space to reflect and be more acutely conscious of her lived experiences.

### **6.6 Agnes's Spreads her Wings to Protect her Brood**

Agnes's writing reveals that the main source of concern as a result of poverty is the fragmentation of her family. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, love / security is the most important need for any individual, especially children. Agnes with her strong maternal bonds identifies with this need and understands the pain and suffering of being forced to leave her children on the farm and work in the urban area.

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Agnes's poverty forced her to leave her children on the farm and find work as a domestic worker in an urban area. She felt great pain when she recalled her last-born's words:

*I see Litlotlo, my last-born he ask me, when I'm coming home? He asks me why I'm not coming at the end of the month.*

Because of the pain of separation from her children Agnes's dream in life is: *to be in business and stay in my house*. She desires to have her family intact. In the context of her feelings, the words: *the farm means happiness* reveal a mother's unconditional love and need to be physically close to her children.

Poverty is like a plague that manifests itself in many facets of people's lives. Poverty has made Agnes feel dehumanized leading to anger and frustration in her life (in Sesotho *ho kwato hape olonya*). Her words clearly demonstrate how poverty marginalizes people and makes them feel non-entities in society:

*I do not like to be 'ho hlopheha (poor), life is not good I can't be 'ho thaba (happy) without money, you are a nothing. Your children are a nothing they don't like you they are angry for you because you are not doing anything, anything for them.*

Through her writing Agnes displays reflexivity and consciousness to transform her life. She shows strong intention to want to engage in some form of entrepreneurial skills in her hometown so that she could be with her children. Agnes has demonstrated her anger and frustration at being poor. This poverty deprived her children of one of the fundamental human rights of being cared for by their biological mother. It was not of choice that she left her rural land but poverty and the economic circumstances forced her to find work in the urban areas, which means that she was only able to see her children once a year. As a marginalized Black domestic worker she feels a sense of 'nothingness' without money and her children. She writes:

*... I do not like to be poor. Life is not good I can't be happy without money, you are a nothing. Your children are a nothing they don't like you,*

*they are angry for you, because you are not doing anything for them. I don't like to be a maid. The work is you don't stay with your children.*

May (2001: 305) reveals that in South Africa there have been trends of very high-income inequality, unemployment and levels of poverty in the 1990s. She asserts that half of South Africa's population can be categorized as poor. The poverty rate in the rural areas is about 71% compared with 29% in urban areas. About 61% of the African population is poor. In contrast to a mere 1% of the White population being poor in South Africa, 80% of the poor rural areas have households with no piped water or sanitation. Basic services in the rural areas for the adult learners indicated that the most basic services such as safe water, electricity and sanitation are still lacking. To escape poverty, unemployment and to provide the basic needs for their families, all the adult learners had to leave their hometowns and turn to urban areas as their promised land to achieve their hopes and dreams.

### **6.7 Agnes Writing of Hope**

But as her writing continues, Agnes becomes more reflexive. Through her writing she displays her level of consciousness to transform her life by trying to engage in some form of entrepreneurial skills in the rural area so that she could be with her children. Her consciousness of her poverty as a domestic worker is depicted in the line, *I don't like to be poor*. Her frustration and anger at being poor gives her the determination to break from the manacles of being a maid, *I don't like to be maid*. Her writing glorifies her rural home in Matatiele, where she hopes to rise from the ashes of being poor to engage in business and to be with her children. Although Agnes has not attained this dream, her writings show hope, desire and a need to transform and not to remain as a maid for the rest of her life:

*I like to be in business and to stay in my house. I want to sell something. I like to see my children finish there school and getting a nice job. I'm happy when Alfred finish matric and do something better. I'm happy to see Patience to be a doctor and a warm family. Litlotlo must go to varsity. When I got business I want to be at home with my children. Everything will come easy for me.*

### 6.8 Cindy's Experiences of Poverty

The poverty exhibited from all the writing of the learners revealed much social destitution amid South Africa's land of plenty. Cindy poignantly conveys her squalor and the crowded conditions in which she lived through her simple and effective style of writing. She is able to convey her deep emotions of pain and anguish through her autobiographical writing. Pregs Govender (in Wilson, Kanji & Braathen, 2001) a former member of parliament, in South Africa, states that women make up the majority of the homeless, landless, the unemployed and the violated.

Cindy uses the medium of writing as a vehicle to vent her feeling; it was in a sense cathartic. As a writer she journeyed from one level of consciousness to another. I will explore this consciousness in her writing in the discussion that follows:

*When I was at home I was always not feeling happy. I was always getting sick. My head, my stomach, bad pains all my body. I stay at home the two or one week I didn't went to school when I'm sick. I didn't stay long time at home. I just like to stay to my mother's sister. The big sister for my mother. I was stay at Kokstad at Bhongweni location. It was nice to stay there. We stay small one room and my family. We were 15 people stay together. Inside the room there was cupboard two beds and one wardrobe. There were five people that were worked. I called them my cousin.*

Cindy's writing reveals the unbearable living conditions that she was forced to endure on the farm. Her home was one room that had to be shared with fifteen family members. The room was furnished with bare essentials such as a cupboard, two beds and one wardrobe, for the whole family. Being in such a claustrophobic condition it was no small wonder that she disliked being at home. Her home environment was not conducive to children growing up and this created feelings of gloom, despair and loneliness, often resulting in her becoming ill and not attending school. To escape these poor living conditions, Cindy preferred to live with her aunt in the location in Kokstad, Bhongweni. In this context the word *farm* did not mean owning the land. They were like *squatters* on the land. As farm labourers they were allowed to live on the land without being given much

privilege. The term *location* shows that people lived in slightly better economic conditions. In South Africa, the average floor area per person for Whites is about 33 square metres, whilst for Africans it is 9 square metres in the formal housing, and a mere 4-5 square metres in informal housing (Budlender a, 2001: 348). Cindy's living conditions have certainly been worse than the average size. The figures quoted show the stark contrast between the elite White class and the poor Africans in South Africa. Budlender (2001b) adds that overcrowding and inadequate or deteriorating physical conditions contribute to dysfunctional behaviour, dissatisfaction, criminality and violence. Although Cindy was trapped physically by insufferable living conditions she used her writing skills to creatively draw on canvass the rich beauty of her land, which she found was a form of escapism.

### **6.8.1 Writing that Goes Beyond the Crowded Room**

Cindy uses her writing skill to look beyond the boundaries of poverty and writes about the splendour of the land:

*I was born from Boer place on farm. I was born on 24 June 1969. Its nice to stay on farm, sometimes its not nice especial when you've got too much enemies. The place for the farm was very big enough to do everything the Boer want to do. There were three places that have forests. There's a big place for fields. From there my father plants mealies, rubarb, cabbages, potatos and spinah.*

Cindy's descriptive opening paragraph reveals her union with nature. From her simple language she was able to depict the huge open fields, the green forests and the visual imagery of her father's well-cultivated garden patch of mealies, rhubarbs, cabbages, potatoes and spinach. She makes a clear distinction between the vastnesses of land available to the Afrikaner (Boer) in contrast to the well-cultivated patch that belonged to her father. Despite the physical poverty she experienced, Cindy was able to locate three forests in nature's grandeur where she had the freedom to wander into:

*... the forest to look for small birds and doves and some eggs for birds. Some other days I went to the fields where there is big grass and long. I took some big eggs for the grass. The eggs for the grass where big like the chicken*

Her rapture with nature gives her the ability to paint in detail the richness of nature's magnificence. She was able to capture the enigmatic beauty that is experienced mainly by those who live in such an environment. The forests with its abundance of wild life provided plenty of delicacies. Through her penmanship she was able to expose the beauty of God's glory by focusing on the rich experiences she had with the doves, birds, eggs and the grass that she enjoyed in the rural countryside. Through her descriptive writing one is able to visualize the birds in flight and her hunt for eggs amongst the tall blades of the grass.

She was able to elevate her feelings and understanding of nature through the writing process. The juxtaposition of the contrasts of two parts of her world lays claim to her ability to rise above her unendurable living conditions.

## **6.9 Concluding Comments**

In my analysis I have presented data to show how autobiographical writing provided the learners with discursive space to critically reflect on their marginalization, the oppressive conditions they lived under and their lived experiences. There was evidence of critical consciousness in all the writings as well as dreams to liberate themselves from the bondage of their poverty. Their writings also showed the triumph of the human spirit to rise above poverty. I also showed how learners gained confidence and motivation to write by wanting to emulate Mpho Nthunya, a domestic worker who turned writer. Like Mpho, they viewed the autobiographical writing as something that could be emancipatory. Although the autobiographies did not achieve such a high measure of success as Mpho, the learners felt a sense of achievement, which boosted their self-confidence as disadvantaged domestic workers. Poverty and power relations thus emerged as the major themes.



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McLaren (2003b: 178-179) emphasizes the importance of providing students with a language of criticism and a language of hope. He argues that the new generation of learners must be capable of analyzing the social and material conditions in which their dreams are given birth, realized, diminished or destroyed. Education needs to foster dreaming, a dreaming that speaks to creation of social justice. The 'language of criticism', a yearning for 'social justice', the ability to 'hope' and 'dreams' were clearly evident in all the writings. This was demonstrated in Marias's small-business enterprise, Bongiwe's dream to be an Olympic sprinter, policewoman, social worker and singer, Cindy's desire to become a Sangoma and Agnes's dream to become a businesswoman.

Poverty defined the learners' lives from childhood to adulthood. They were able to transcend their poverty even if for the moment, by becoming critically conscious of their world. The autobiographical writing allowed the learners to journey from one level of consciousness to another. The writing was a powerful tool that emancipated and assisted in empowering them (see Gough, 2001a). The writing has made them reflective and critical of their roles as domestic workers. This critical conscious writing is what Freire (1998c: X) invited adult learners to do: They looked at themselves as persons living and producing in society; did not conform to the socio-political, ideological, contexts in which they found themselves, but challenged the *status quo* through their writing. According to Freire (1998a), when learners reached such a level they are conscientized. Through their autobiographical writing, the learners demonstrated how they were able to liberate their minds through reflexivity. They were able to transform their life from being a viewed as economically poor and powerless to asserting their power through writing.

In the next chapter I interrogate the power relations in society and the impact it has on the lives of the learners. I also explore whether adult literacy played a role in negotiating these relations.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### POWER SUBJUGATES!! CAN LITERACY LIBERATE?

#### DATA ANALYSIS

##### 7.1 Introduction

In this chapter I explore the theme of power relations and its role in the lived experiences of the lives of adult learners, as well as the role of pedagogy in making sense of their experiences. In all the data sources oppressive power relations reared its ugly head in the learners' lives. There were nuances in their experiences of power but power did shape their lives. I will present data to show how the marginalized female learners in South African society felt oppressed by those who had hegemonic power, namely their employers, fathers, husbands and some of their educators. Some of these power relations will be explored in the following discussion. I will demonstrate how their writing skills displayed the complex thinking skills that Freire (2003) talked about and how the classroom provided a critical pedagogical environment that allowed for critical consciousness or counter hegemonic discourses. For each of the learners I would explore how writing as a medium of expression was emancipatory and just not a mere mechanical act of reading and writing. Autobiographical writing is reflective and learners may be able to become reflexive through it (Gough, 2001a).

In this chapter I will analyze one lesson to establish whether learners have acquired English communicative skills. In Chapter Six I mentioned how I used co-operative or collaborative teaching in assisting the learners on how to write autobiographies. In this Chapter I examine one of my lessons. The reason for one lesson analysis is that in a study of this nature it is not possible to analyze all the lessons I observed. This would result in data overload, which can go into volumes. However, for the purposes of this study, I have selected the oral discussion lesson because the written and reading components have been

given focus. The written aspect has been analyzed through the autobiographies, and reading will be discussed in chapter nine.

The reason for the analysis of my classroom lesson is that there has been strong evidence (Bhola, 1994 & Freire 1998a) from my literature review to support the claim that the adult educator plays a significant role in adult education. The classroom lesson observation is crucial in understanding the impact that the English literacy curriculum had on adult learners. Therefore I focus attention on how the adult educator interacted in the classroom. In this Chapter I reveal insights by presenting an excerpt from an English oral lesson and I also use evidence from the autobiographical writings and the interviews to interrogate the central themes.

## **7.2 Power Relations**

The data captured in the first section for each learner illustrates how each experienced the power relations. In the second section I will examine whether the pedagogy assisted the learner to deal with oppressive power. From the data analyzed it was evident that learners experienced oppression on many levels of their lives. This will be discussed below:

### **7.2.1 Bongiwe: Patriarchal Power, Abuse and Cultural Norms**

Bongiwe grew up in a patriarchal family where her father dominated, abused and oppressed them. Because of religious and cultural factors, such oppression was tolerated in the hope that one day their father would change for the better. Bongiwe's mother instilled values in her children to accept:

*'Now we are Christians we can't do that [hit their father] I will pray God will help me'.... My father he was drinking too much, he was giving my mother too much hiding. He was supposed to support my mother but he was not working. My mother she was working she was a domestic... My mother she's very quite. My father he's fight. My father will kick the pot, he will throw the T.V. My father broke all the things. We will fright and just run. My big sister says that we should*

*hit my father. But my mother she says "Now we are Christians we can't do that. I will pray God will help me".*

The learners have shown that there was a strong patriarchal dominance especially in Black families. Egbo (2000) has argued that in Africa there has been an irrational desire by men to control women. The Black women from the rural areas in this study (from the early 1960s to 1990s) were forced to accept the violence perpetrated on them by their spouses because of the cultural norm espoused at that time. It was their deep sense of spirituality and belief in God that gave them hope for a change in their lives. Bongiwe's trauma through the cruel hands of her father's oppressive and abusive behaviour made her conclude: *when I saw my father like that I told myself I won't get married...* It seems that this male oppression affected her psyche as she transferred this dislike to all men. In the interview Bongiwe demonstrated how afraid she was of her father's oppressive abuse. However, she accepted the abuse as part of her religious and 'cultural' upbringing in a patriarchal home.

### **7.2.2 Bongiwe's Transformation**

In her autobiographical writing Bongiwe shows enlightenment and female consciousness. It demonstrates her critical consciousness of female oppression and reveals her desire to transform society by hoping to ameliorate the suffering of females at the cruel hands of men. The deliberate use of the verb *can* emphasizes this point; *I don't think I can fail to my dream*. Bongiwe's empowerment is displayed when she writes that she does not wish to be an appendage to her husband: *I wish to be married but not a housewife, I like to be a working women*. Through the autobiographical writing Bongiwe demonstrates her consciousness of men who abuse women in society. She shows her contempt of such men and expresses a determination to transform society by desiring to become a policewoman to deal with men who abuse/oppress females:

*I hate those men who abuse children. Now days some men are busy abusing children like doing sex with them. I believe that children when they grow up in good manners, they can learn in a good way, because when somebody does this to the child she can be absolutely confused. Secondly I am a female so I feel sorry if something came to*

*my ears, like there is somebody who is busy rape the female ...That's why I want to become a police. Like that people are using black magic sangoma witch doctor I don't like them.*

As a Black African female she does not hold the same view as Cindy who is an apprentice Sangoma. Bongiwe rejects the use of Black magic, Sangomas, and witchdoctors; instead she believes she could help female oppression by becoming a policewoman.

Bongiwe's analysis of handling female oppression reveals the strength of an empowered woman when she talks about becoming a policewoman. This in contrast to her earlier comments:

*My father will kick the pot, he will throw the T.V. My father broke all the things. We will fright and just run .....when I saw my father like that I told myself I won't get married.*

But having big dreams assisted Bongiwe to strive to reach higher levels in society. She attained the role as community leader at the informal settlement where she lives, obtained a job at the University of Natal and assisted in campaigning during elections as a committed member of the African National Congress. Bongiwe's positive spirit is a strong feature throughout her writing.

### **7.2.3 Cindy's Horror with Brutal Female Abuse**

No pedagogy, which is liberating, can remain distant from the oppressed. Therefore it becomes vital to include the silent voices from those who live the experiences as a starting point for critical action for the women in Sub-Saharan Africa (Egbo, 2000:12). I recognize that missing from many research-based inquiries are the views of women themselves; these lived experiences add to the much needed area of research:

*I told my husband that I don't want him anymore I wants all my clothes I'm going back to my mothers house. He heat me very bad and cut me with the knife. He heat me with a sjambok. He heat me with his hands. There came too much blood. He went to kitchen to take some water for me to have bath. I bath all blood. Then he told me that I'm going to wear makoti clothes. Because by the time I was come back I was not wearing their clothes. I was wearing my own clothes not putting the doek on my head, his clothes. Because by the time I was come back I was not wearing their clothes. I was wearing my own clothes not putting the doek on my head. That's why he was too much angry....At hospital they saw me from where I've got hurted. My husband talk lies to the nurses when they asked him. He said I was heat by the other people. Later while I was went back to his home. I told the nurses the truth. When he come back the next day to take me. The nurses told him that he must I respect not to heat me like that. He must just scold me. Because he have no right to heat me like that. I stay there long time. I asked my husband to go and look for job.*

Cindy experienced severe physical beatings and emotional abuse from her alcoholic husband for many years. In a later relationship Cindy shows empowerment and discernment of how some men can manipulate and exploit women for their selfish pleasures.

#### **7.2.4 Cindy's Reflexivity: Creates A New Understanding of Men**

Cindy's level of enlightenment and female consciousness is shown when she writes that her boyfriend whom she initially trusted and *loved*, did not keep any of his promises. Instead she had to make changes to suit his needs. She also had to provide financial support for him. Through reflection and later reflexivity in her own autobiographical writing Cindy, shows her critical understanding of being oppressed by her husband and boyfriend. What Cindy was able to learn from her oppression was not to be naïve and trusting in any relationship. This made her become wise and conclude that men were all the same: *There's no change. I've been saw that people (men) are the same.* From this analysis the data disclosed how women who were once manipulated and subjugated were able to fight and challenge their exploitation (Harding, 1987):

*I love him very much and he loves me too much. In the middle of our love he have been changed. On other day I told him that our next door is selling a wardrobe. I told him that if he will help me I can be glad. It was*

*wardrobe and bed. He promise me that he is gone help me. But he didn't. Only thing he told me that I must look a room here and pay for it. He is too much naughty he used me for nothing he wants my money. I've been changing for him. I told him that I'm going back to my roots know. I'm going back to my husband. He make me fright he said I can go back from where I came from. I can go back to my husband. I told him that I can go back to my husband because you are same like him. There's no change. I've been saw that people are the same.*

### 7.2.5 Agnes's Abduction

Agnes was taken against her wishes from her home to live as a partner to a man she had never met before: *they took me by force. Joseph took me by force. I did not want to go. That time was different. I did not like Joseph...* This is a sad tale of human rights abuse and female oppression perpetrated with the acceptance of the Agnes's parents. It exposes how Agnes was dehumanized as a female through the domination of men and other cultural factors. She was forced into a relationship to which she had not consented. Her parents accepted the situation because during the 1970s, African customary marriages were accepted. For Agnes this must have been confounding because at eighteen she was still a minor and respected the decisions made by her parents. Her basic human rights to freedom of choice were violated but she did not have an understanding of her rights, nor the economic power to exercise them even if she had such knowledge. Henn (1988) points out that women in most cultural contexts are an oppressed group when compared to men as a group. The degree of gender related oppression might vary, but what links women is their subordinate gender position even though their degree of oppression might vary. Oshwada (1997) adds further, that in the case of the African context the women in Sub-Saharan African societies were subjugated in both the public and private spheres and women as a group were distinctly considered inferior in society:

*Agnes: They took me by force. Joseph took me by force. I did not want to go. That time was different. I did not like Joseph. I know him I saw him there. The place they stay is not far. They took me to his house and told my parents they want to marry me. It was a bad day. No one wants to marry like that. After three years I had a wedding. My parents did not say anything when he took me...After he slept with you –you can't go back. He pay labola.*

In Chapter Two I explained that Black female experiences of ‘patriarchy’ are different from Whites. In the presentation of female oppression I showed how the Black female experiences are different in this study. They experienced oppression because of their gender but also had to endure far more complex social historical processes that account for the subordination as Blacks. The data presented above and in Chapter Six revealed how learners were discriminated, physically abused, emotionally abused, marginalized and oppressed because they were Black females. From the data yielded, the learners revealed that there was an acceptance of female oppression during their early biographical experiences because of a lack of female consciousness, cultural factors, hegemonic power relations, race, colour, patriarchy and language.

### **7.2.6 Agnes’s Change in Consciousness**

During her early biographical experiences Agnes was more accepting of ‘cultural’ norm that violated her own feelings. There was a shift in consciousness from her earlier way of viewing reality:

*Agnes: Mam that was how it was a long time not now. Now is modern the African they don't want like that... they don't want a man to have many women. No, no, no, we don't have money to have like the King. (Excerpt Classroom Lesson)*

As an empowered individual, she values her customs and traditions that are meaningful to her but rejected those that were abominable:

*I am proud of my culture, I like to be a African but I don't like somethings the African's do... Mam we don't cut the face or cut the finger, or do initiation. Not all the African do like that...*

The excerpt indicates that she is able to challenge the *status quo* and believe in her own views and that the classroom allowed for a feminist, critical pedagogical discourse.



### **7.2.7 Maria's Experiences of Cultural, Norms and Values**

Cultural values and norms are deeply rooted in one's life; they are not static but dynamic as they are exposed to forces of change in a constantly changing society. Maria's acceptance of a polygamous marriage is shown when she wrote of her father having two wives:

*...dad had two wives. I belong to the younger one and I am the youngest. You can imagine how spoilt I was. I used to get the best and my sister used to carry me on their backs. Oh ' it is was fun ...*

In the above context Maria is referring to the early 1960s when her father, like some African men, engaged in polygamous relationships. The migratory labour practice in South Africa forced Black men during the apartheid era to work in urban areas and leave their wives in the rural areas. They visited their wives only once or twice a year. This led to a break down of the normal family unit and encouraged extramarital affairs. The women were forced to accept this practice. Also, polygamous marriages were acceptable in the earlier cultural norms of their society.

### **7.2.8 Maria's Consciousness Raising**

Maria's critical understanding of what makes for an authentic relationship between a man and a woman has changed from the way she understood her parent's relationship. The excerpts (see pages 216 & 219) taken from a classroom lesson will support my claim.

### **7.3 A Pedagogy for Critical Consciousness**

Weiner (1994: 127) argues that that there is a need for feminist researchers to consciously reflect on practice in particular, on the way it relates to inequalities in power relations and encourages critical consciousness amongst learners. As a feminist researcher and educator, I have tried to create a consciousness-raising environment, which could lead to emancipation and transformation.

All the women in this study had lived in rural villages before moving into the urban centres. The data presented has demonstrated patriarchal relations especially in the Black family. Cloke and Little (1997: 125) suggest that the stereotype of a rural woman is that of a family woman, traditional and conservative, absorbed in the care of the home. This construction of a gendered female identity must be seen as historically specific and embedded in particular spatial times. Therefore gender identities and ideas of gender differences are not fixed but rather are constantly changed and reworked. Thus the idea 'domestic woman' is not universal, and certainly not the 'natural' identity of women (the word 'natural' means decreed by nature).

The data I present reveals that femininity is not an inherent quality that is linked to biological sex but identities that are continually being constituted, reproduced and contested at particular times in particular places. It is shaped by numerous factors such as class, age, race and culture that inform gendered identities (Cloke & Little, 1997: 126).

In this section I demonstrate how adult education in the literacy class provided the space for learners to reflect, question, help shape and re-work, the identity of the woman.

#### THE LESSON PLAN

Learning area: Language Literacy and Communication

Levels: 1-3

Lesson: Mary's Birthday

Specific Outcomes: To initiate and maintain conversation (Level 1-3)

Assessment Criteria (Levels 1-3)

- Greetings and introductions are appropriately used, neutral
- Unmarked register is used
- Topic of conversation is followed
- Turns in conversations are taken and yielded
- Obvious cross-cultural differences in body language are identified
- Express and respond to opinions and feelings

Assessment Criteria (Level 1)

- Own opinions and feelings are linked to the topic of discussion

- Responses acknowledge the points of view of the other speakers
- Agreement and disagreement are clearly yet politely expressed
- Simple problems are discussed and immediate issues are negotiated

Assessment Criteria (Levels 2,3)

- Opinions and feelings: uses supporting evidence to justify response
- Views are clarified according to listener response, responses: acknowledge the points of view of other speakers'
- Agree/disagree /question the position given, problems discussed and immediate conflicts of interests are negotiated

Assessment Criteria (Level 3)

- More and other problems are discussed and conflicts of interests are negotiated e.g. proposing options, compromising
- Own and other's positions are clarified to facilitate further discussion
- Listen and respond critically to oral text (Levels ,2-3)

Assessment Criteria:

- The main message is identified
- Values and views of the world and stereotypes are identified
- Own experience and knowledge is drawn on to respond to an oral text
- Facts and opinions are identified and distinguished
- The likely purpose is identified reasonably accurately
- Effects of tone, volume, body language, appearance's, discrepancy between angry tone and polite words on the message are noted

Learning assumptions:

- *Outcomes 1* and the assessment criteria assume that learners are learning a language not their own. Mother tongue speakers could be given recognition of prior learning for these outcomes.
- *Outcome 4* may apply to both first and second language. Learners may have no ability to speak in a second language.

Purpose: Learners are able to interact orally with others in various contexts and situations for a variety of purposes:

- Learners will be able to know the conventions of holding a birthday party
- Learners will understand the various role functions at a birthday
- Learners will be given a chance to affirm each other
- Learners will be given a chance to communicate freely after the party

Critical Outcomes

- Use speaking and listening to display problem solving and critical thinking
- Use speaking and listening to communicate in order to work effectively as a team
- Use speaking and listening to communicate effectively

Pre-planning: in the previous week learners had brainstormed ideas on the organization of the party. Learners divided their tasks. Each one decided on what they would bring to the party. Various roles were given to each member of the class:

- Master of ceremonies
- Toast master
- Speakers
- Entertainment
- Table setting

Learners were required to prepare for the various roles.

### 7.3.1 An Analysis of an English Literacy Lesson

The first part of the lesson was the actual birthday party. I will not attempt to analyse the first part as it was formal and followed a more technical format of a conventional birthday party. The discussion that followed the birthday party, although not anticipated in the planning of this lesson, will be discussed in detail. Planning of lessons is of utmost importance but the intuitive teacher seizes opportunities that arise during lessons to provide the space to raise critical consciousness.

Note: Krishnee is the voice of the facilitator /researcher

The following excerpts are extracted from a discussion on love and male female relationships.

***“Yes I love him but I won’t marry him. but I’ll die for him”***

*Krishnee: Mary do you have a boy friend? Let’s listen to our ‘sisie’ now.*

*Maria: Yes, I got one.*

*Elisha: Krishnee, will you like to have some one?*

*Krishnee: Yes, I have Juggie whom I am happily married to.*

*Maria: I have got one.*

*Katazele: Yes, I'm listening, she's got one.*

*Maria: But you know, how men are. He's got somebody else also.*

*Katazele: So, you must use a condom.*

*Krishnee: How do you feel about your relationship?*

*Maria: Before he was fine, but now he is not good.*

*Katazele: How shame?*

*Maria: You see once when you love somebody, and he goes to somebody else, it breaks your heart, and it makes you not to trust that person, although he'll come and tell you I love you, "I love you." ...*

*Krishnee: Did this man offer you any money or buy you things?*

*Maria: Yes, he gives me money, buys me things, even now when I went for this trip he gave me money to buy the ticket.*

*Krishnee: Well, that's good at least.*

*Maria: I don't feel very good.*

*Moses: Do you love this man, Maria?*

*Maria: Yes I love him but I won't marry him. But I'll die for him Moses. I feel I'm not used to that. It's like he is having me for a short while to show off.*

*Cindy: I know a man he say good things he buy this and that but he wants your money he don't love you.*

*Moses: Don't worry go and kiss him don't worry about the people.*

*Maria: When you see an elderly couple they are walking together people must not see that only now they are in love*

*Bongiwe: No, I will not share my man. These modern times he can't have another woman. If he likes another woman then he must go to that woman. ....*

(Below is a continuation of the discussion, this is not a full excerpt. I hope to include as many voices as possible)

Agnes: ....Mam that was how it was a long time not now. Now is modern the African they don't want like that... they don't want a man to have many women. No, no, no, we don't have money to have like the King.

In critical emancipatory education, the educator must attempt to reconcile and transcend the opposition between technical and practical knowledge. Emancipatory knowledge helps one to understand how social relationships are distorted and manipulated by power and privilege. The education must aim at creating conditions under which domination and oppression can be overcome and transformed through action. It must create the foundation for social justice, equality and empowerment (McLaren, 2003a: 73). Emancipatory education is particularly relevant to this study because all the respondents came from marginalized backgrounds, were the poor and had been politically and socially oppressed.

The excerpts quoted clearly illustrate how each learner has acquired the outcomes necessary in a competency-based mode.<sup>31</sup>

During the adult literacy class discussion, Maria was prepared to assert her female voice and reject the cultural practice of Black men having other relationships. I use the word *cultural* because in South Africa the Zulu monarch is allowed to choose a new bride at the annual reed dance. This royal tradition is often accepted by some Black men who also feel it is a *cultural tradition* to have many partners. This *cultural* practice prevails for the Zulu monarch and to some extent to his subjects. The female learners in this study rejected the view that Black men could engage in polygamous relationships<sup>32</sup>. They claim that such practices prevailed in early years but they now live in modern times and find it totally unacceptable. Bongiwe makes a strong pronouncement that she

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<sup>31</sup> Specific outcomes: 1. Initiate and maintain conversation. 2. Ask for and give simple explanations. 3. Make and respond to offers and requests. 4. Express and respond to opinion and feelings. 5. Listen and respond critically to text. Maria was able to acquire all the above outcomes through her ability to maintain, respond, give critical opinion; Bongiwe, Agnes and Cindy were able to initiate conversation, listen and respond critically to an oral text.

<sup>32</sup> Polygamous marriages: In African tradition in South Africa it is not uncommon for African men to have more than one partner because of the Zulu Royal tradition where the King is allowed to choose a new bride annually.

*...will not share my man. These modern times he can't have another woman. If he likes another woman then he must go to that woman.*

The adult literacy classroom provided a feminist pedagogical environment where learners were able to articulate their female voice and become critically conscious of the power relations that oppressed them. The hegemony of certain cultural practices that was detrimental to the plight of African woman has been strongly rejected. This rejection shows evidence of the counter hegemonic force that women can wield. Maria does not accept the cultural practices but reworks and reshapes her gendered identity in the complex historical and social landscape of South Africa. There has been a transformation of her acceptance of the polygamous marriage of her father to a rejection of such norms for herself in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. She shows her enlightenment of female consciousness when she raises the issue of how some men lack integrity, become unfaithful and expect females to accept such relationships. In her understanding of love she does not accept a man to commit himself to two women. She believes in intrinsic, monogamous love and therefore does not accept her deceitful lover's overtures of *love* and material comforts. Because of her values and her love, she is prepared to die for her lover but would not marry him since he is unfaithful to her. Unlike Katazele she is not prepared to accept mere material comforts and physical displays of a man's love. What Maria is able to ask for in a relationship runs deeper? It is an intrinsic, eternal love, which she describes as:

*When you see an elderly couple they are walking together people must not see that only now they are in love.*

Maria's diction in the above lines expresses her perception that love should not be evaluated on a superficial level but with far greater depth. For her, love must not only stand the test of time in the physical sense but also in the spiritual sense. Two individuals need to be bonded together spiritually. Maria's discussion shows enlightenment and consciousness of what females need in an authentic relationship.

Agnes's quiet acceptance of Joseph forcibly removing her from her home against her will shows transformation as she expresses:

*Agnes: Mam that was how it was a long time not now. Now is modern the African they don't want like that... they don't want a man to have many women. No, no, you must money to be like the King*

I explore different excerpts from the same lesson to reveal how learners are caught in a bind between their own culture and that of the dominant culture. In this part of the lesson, the learners are discussing whether Black women should kiss in public. I unpack the following excerpts and show how the dominant culture has a hegemonic power in shaping some of the adult learners' identities and consciousness.

**“Black woman should kiss in public”**

*Katazele: I hold his hair. I play with him. I give him one kiss.*

*Cindy: Ag, no, not for me.*

*Moses: No. What Kissing? We show respect we don't do like that? We respect the big people. You must do it like that, Cindy. Don't be shy about your boyfriend.*

*Cindy: Ag*

*Katazele: Me, when he is driving I play, play.*

*Moses: Yes, Yes. That's good.*

*Katazele: That time he drinks beer. I rub it on his hands. When he is driving I play with his hair .*

*Moses: I'm going to tell my girlfriend to change to tell her to do like you Katazele. I like you. Ya, it's very good.*

*Agnes: To stand with a boy is not good. When we growing up our parents told us that we must not do that, it's like we not respecting the adults. For me I can't do that it's not right.*

*Krishnee: Maria what have you got to say to that?*

*Maria: I agree but it's like she's showing off, we Africans we feel shy to hold the man and kiss him in the street.*

*Moses: Excuse, why African women must feel shy?*

*Katazele: Me I do whatever I like I don't worry.*

*Bongiwe: In our African culture we show respect and don't do those things in public.*



*Maria: Whenever you see an elderly person they are walking together people must not see that only now they are in love.*

*Moses: What's wrong in kissing in public? What is wrong with kissing?*

*Cindy: No you can't do like that Moses, what is wrong with you?*

*Krishnee: Bongiwe, what if you were married, can you kiss in public?*

*Bongiwe: In our African culture we show respect and don't do those things in public.*

*Katazele: All I can say is that they don't know nothing.*

*Maria: You got no respect if you do like that.*

This excerpt reveals the invisible socio-cultural norms and values that create the identity of learners (Hinkel, 2001). Most of the learners seemed to have identified and accepted African cultural norms. From the arguments they presented the majority concluded that it was disrespectful for an African to kiss in public.

#### ***White People's Love is Very Tight***

In the third segment I present another excerpt of the same class lesson. I will demonstrate how learners who have developed critical consciousness are sometimes bastardized by the power of the dominant culture's norms and values (Freire, 2003).

***Moses: You see the White people their love is very tight.***

*They used to it from young. The African feel shy, they don't feel shy of their love*

*Maria: Ja, you see with growing children we don't do it like that.*

*Krishnee: But, he says the Whites got tighter love?*

*Maria: The Whites got more love for each other. Ya, I think so. Ya, you see the old lady and the old man they will hold each other's hand and I will think to myself and say White people they got love for each other they really love each other. They are old they will be walking together.*

*Cindy: Ya, that's true.*

*Bongiwe: Ag, that's not true White people don't love better. They show more love in public because they are free.*

*Moses: If I could change my body to a White people.*

*Maria: Don't do like a Michael Jackson...*

*Moses: It's a very good life.*

*Krishnee: Do you think you like to be White?*

*Moses: No, I just want to be who I am. I am proud to be Black.*

*Cindy I like to be Black.*

*Moses: I like to be a White. You can be very, very I don't know what I can say, when you are in the street you can kiss. You can wear T- shirt over pants, but if you an African you have to be careful.*

*Katazele: If you dress like that you go to jail*

Although the majority of the learners rejected, African's kissing in the earlier discussion, the majority thereafter agreed that Whites have a stronger love for each other because of the way they demonstrated their physical love in public. Bongiwe was the only one who rejected the notion that Whites had tighter stronger love by pronouncing:

*...that's not true white people don't love better. They show more love in public because they are free.*

The learners praise for the public display of love by White people and interpretation of such love as intrinsic illustrates the extent to which White dominant cultural values have gained greater cultural capital than the values of the less dominant cultures. The discussion by learners demonstrated that in a multicultural country such as South Africa there would always be differences in the way people perceive cultural identities. From these excerpts it is clear that the majority of the learners valued the dominant class culture because of its cultural capital. They did not realize that they rejected their cultural values in preference to the dominant culture. This led Moses and Katazele to want to change their Black identities to White if it were possible. Although learners showed that they were rooted in and proud of their Black identity, there were times when they longed to belong to the dominant cultural norms and values because it gave them a feeling of status, power access to economic freedom and 'real freedom' in the new South Africa. These

points are made clear when Moses and Katazele make the following responses. He states that that he is proud to be a Black:

*No, I just want to be who I am. I am proud to be Black.*

Moses seems to be caught in an identity confusion when he expresses a yearning to be White because as a:

*White you can be very, very I don't know what I can say when you are in the street you can kiss. You can wear T-shirt over pants, but if you an African you have to be careful.*

In the South African context, Moses expresses his deep inner emotions as a Black South African who has to dress acceptably in order to gain recognition from society, unlike Whites who do not have to dress well. The learners felt that the dominant Whites class was privileged to dress and act as they pleased while an African needs to be careful. This point is summed up succinctly when Katazele explains if Africans dress and behave in a manner such as the Whites, the Black people will be liable to *go to jail*.

The learner's emerging identity in the dominant culture is without doubt an important factor in the way the learner relates to her/himself within the classroom and society at large. Savignon (2001: 26) cites the experience of; an American raised in a Korean family, from the novel, *Native Speaker* by Chang Lee. The novel traces the struggle and frustration of knowing two cultures and at the same time not belonging to either one. I use this example as a poignant reminder of the challenges faced by some South Africans of the need to belong to the dominant cultural values and at the same time to be part of their own culture. Freire (2003: 59) explains that the above power domination has resulted not because the oppressed are 'marginals' living on the 'outside'. In fact they have always been 'inside' the structures, which made them 'beings for others'. Thus it is not for the 'oppressed' to integrate, into the dominant culture's style of dress, language, behaviour, speech or other aspects of life, but for the oppressed to transform the structures so that they can create their 'own identity.'

The data analyzed illustrates how learners achieved many communicative competency skills. Through the analysis of this lesson it is evident that as an adult educator I did not

demonstrate to learners how the dominant class culture had been hegemonic which resulted in them not validating their own cultural norms. Through their autobiographical writing and the critical feminist pedagogy practiced in the classroom, the learners demonstrated the ability to be critically aware of how men can oppress women. Feminist theory argues for a transformative feminist pedagogy, which enables female's greater understanding of the inequalities in power relations (Weiner, 1994).

### 7.4 Concluding Comments

In this research the autobiographies emerged as a powerful pedagogical tool to liberate learners by making them critically conscious, and to overcome some aspects of female oppression in society. The learners revealed that there was an acceptance of female oppression during their early biographical experiences because of a lack of female consciousness. From their early biographical experiences, the Black females in this study were exposed to abuse because of socio-economic factors, cultural factors, patriarchy and attitudes to gender stereotyping. The findings showed that learners' were discriminated against, physically abused, emotionally abused, marginalized and oppressed as Black females in a South African society. The hegemonic power relations that prevailed in society oppressed them. The first power relation that oppressed the learners was the employers who manipulated and exploited the Black female domestic workers (see Chapter Six). From the discussion it was evident that women have been controlled. They subconsciously endorsed the hegemony in a Gramscian sense but by rejecting the *status quo*, the women put up a Foucaultian counter hegemonic struggle in order to replace the unwanted structures. This research has revealed that adult literacy education has helped shape and re-work, the identity of the women. The gendered female identity was shown to be dynamic, continually shaped and re-worked through time and space.

The adult literacy classroom provided a critical feminist pedagogical environment where learners were able to articulate their female voice and become critically conscious of the power relations that oppressed them. There was evidence of female consciousness-raising in the adult literacy classroom, which allowed the Black female learners to critically

dialogue issues that were relevant to their lives. Through the autobiographical writing, learners demonstrated their consciousness of individuals who abuse women in society. They showed their contempt for such individuals and expressed a determination to transform society by trying to transform themselves, to deal with oppressive power relations. Through reflection and later reflexivity of their own autobiographical writing learners show their critical understanding of being oppressed. The data disclosed how the women who were once manipulated and subjugated were able to fight and challenge their exploitation.

The power of the English language as enabling<sup>33</sup> and disabling learners in a world filled with contradiction is presented in the next chapter.

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<sup>33</sup> Enabling -I use the word enabling to connote the positive impact that English had on learners such as improving their self-esteem, empowering and conscientizing. The word disabling is used to connote the 'negative' impact such as creating stereotypes, creating feelings of inadequacy, negatively affecting the identity of the individual.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### ANALYZING THE POWER OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

#### 8.1 Introduction

I examined the power of the English language in Chapter Two and used the language of the different population groups to describe the English as a hot chillie. I used this metaphor to illustrate the controversial and contentious nature of the English languages in the multilingual and multicultural South Africa. In critical, feminist pedagogy, it is imperative that the marginalized, silent voices of the learners be heard in their quest to acquire the language of power. Medgyes (in Celce-Mucia, 2001: 429) writes that in our age of globalization, "*It is commonplace to state today that English is the unrivaled lingua franca of the world and that it is rolling ahead like a juggernaut*".

#### 8.2 English for the Market Place

My literature review showed that forces of globalization, neo-liberalism and market-led forces have made the English language the most powerful in the world, both economically and politically. In the South African context I revealed how globalization and market-led forces have competed in determining the status of English. The literature review showed the contradictions faced by a society caught up with political correctness, equity, justice and the need for transformation from the old apartheid education to a new multilingual multicultural education system. This is reflected in an impressive compendium of new education policies. Some analysts argue that the education policies since 1994 are political symbolism (see Jansen, 2001) while others have argued that countervailing forces such as fiscal austerity because of the neo-liberal macro-economic policy and globalization, have stymied policy intentions (see Motala & Pampallis, 2001). It is within this context that a very politically correct, most democratic and liberated language in education policy is made. The problem lies in that there are very few fundamental changes in the South African education

system that goes hand in glove to support such a system. With no changes being made to the medium of instruction at tertiary institutions, Grade 12 examinations written in English, examinations in all learning areas in adult literacy written in English, textbooks written in English and the demand from the global village and local economic front, it is no surprise that English becomes a commodity that is sought after by the adult learners: '*Sithanda uku funda isingisi*' 'we are happy to learn English' (adult learner).

It is within these global and contextual factors that many adult learners in the adult literacy classes desire to become literate in English. Some of the learners are multilingual and speak two or more of the indigenous languages but they are not necessarily multi-literate. They are caught in a *double bind* because they are forced to acquire English as well as one or more African languages to cope with their situational contexts. I will advance evidence from the data to support this finding.

In Scribner and Cole's (1981) ethnographic studies into literacy, various findings were demonstrated. Literacy means not just simply knowing how to read and write a particular script but to apply this knowledge for specific purposes in specific contexts of use. The Vai people had access to three scripts: an indigenous Vai script, the Quranic script and an English script. Many were multi-literate but literacy rarely led to the acquisition of new bodies of knowledge. Scribner and Cole's (1981) research suggests that literacy is culturally organized systems of skills and values learned in specific settings. The Quranic literacy was mainly to recite from the Quran. The Vai script literacy was pragmatic, mainly for personal letters and keeping sales records. English literacy was studied for intellectual factors as well as 'cultural capital'. Each language was taught in different context, for a different purpose and this affected the levels to which literacy skills were acquired. It was important for literacy to be a purposeful activity in social interactions.

The main reason the learners attended ABET was to become literate in English.

*Maria: I joined literacy to improve my English. I did not want my mind to get rusty. I didn't really hope to achieve much from adult literacy rather than English that was taught but I have learned so many skills like sewing and typing, which I did not expect from literacy. I also made good friends at AABEC we became like family.*

Maria joined adult literacy mainly to gain confidence with the English language. She stated explicitly that literacy held no further dreams or hopes for her. In essence Maria wanted to maintain her English communicative skills. She was content with her educational goals and did not intend to pursue further education. All she required was to merely maintain or improve her English communicative skills. She remained at literacy classes for seven years but did not engage in other educational activities because there was no scope for further education such as the SETA learnership programmes that were offered to domestic workers since 2003.

*Bongiwe: Also all my friends are educated. I feel so bad I want to be educated. I think maybe if I go to night school I will get my matric and I could manage to get a better job. I like to help the community in the Jondol (informal settlement). They take me as the leader of the Jondols.*

From comments of the learners there were some common reasons for joining a literacy programme, for instance, to obtain a better job. But the deeper, underlying reasons for each learner were different. Bongiwe felt that she might obtain her matriculation certificate and being at literacy classes would help her to get more recognition in her community as she aspired to be a community leader. She felt she would gain credibility with her community by being able to communicate in English. Bongiwe was highly motivated and driven to improve her status. Her attendance at ABET classes was announced to all and sundry and she ensured that she achieved the maximum from obtaining a literacy certificate. Her perseverance in trying to acquire the English language and her ability to take risks had seen her enter new frontiers such as becoming a laboratory assistant at Natal University, and embarking on new jobs.

Cindy's purpose in attending adult literacy classes was clearly her desire improve English communicative and written skills. She was overjoyed at her ability to write and speak the English language. She felt a great sense of accomplishment at



receiving AABEC's certificate. Her working conditions were such that she spent much of her time in a home where her dignity was violated (see Cindy's comment's in her autobiography). As a domestic worker she felt isolated because she did not have much occasion to socialize or communicate with others. The violation of her rights to human dignity and feelings of worthlessness were part of the reasons that she attended English literacy classes. She also attended literacy classes to overcome the boredom of merely watching the 'four walls' daily. Cindy also explained that the employer's considered domestic workers who have acquired the English language in a better light:

*Cindy': I came to AABEC I wanted to learn hard words for English. I want to know how to read and write English. I want to improve my English. I want to get a certificate I'm learning hard to get a certificate to get a nice job. Also when you come to literacy its not like when you stay in the house and see the four walls at least you meet friends. I want to speak English to my Madam and baas. My madam wants me to speak in English for her children.*

The desire to communicate in English with their employers is evident in Cindy's and Agnes's utterances. The ability to speak in the 'dominant' language gives learners the feeling of being superior. The acquisition of the English language gives them a bargaining power to obtain better-paid jobs as domestic workers. English is also sought after so that they could be perceived as 'high class'. The acquisition of the language is thus perceived as improving identity and status. Agnes also felt that if she were literate in English she would be better equipped to help her children at school. Some of her children attended rural schools while others attended urban schools, but the medium of instruction at both is English:

*Agnes: I want to know English. I want to know how to reply in English. I want to speak English and read and write. I think night school will help me to improve. I enjoy my friends at school I made so many new fiends. It will help me to help my child at school. Maybe I will get a better job. To be a domestic worker it is important to know English. The Madam and Baas speaks in English, they think you are high class if you speak good English. They pay you better, they want you to talk to their children in English.*

Neville Alexander (1996: 28) while accepting the need to maintain mother tongue language in South Africa accepts the hegemony and usefulness of English as an international language. In the absence of the grand policy implementation, he argues for the access of English to be facilitated for all learners in the country. He stresses that we must facilitate access to all, working class included. Because of the hegemony of English in society Agnes requires English in many facets of her life: shops, taxis, clinics, banks, post office, doctor, church, bible, to purchase uniform, schools. The data also revealed that adult education classes were viewed as a social institution where they could meet others and increase their social network of friends. The classes were used as an emotional release from oppressive working conditions.

The discussion explored the adult learners' need to acquire English literacy. In the following discussion I indicate the consequences of a lack of English literacy skills in the South African context. Agnes's interview reveals her predicament when she did not have good communicative skills in the English:

*Agnes: I did not know how to fill a form. I was feeling shy. I should ask the security guard only because he speaks my language. But now I can speak English. I fill the form in the post office.*

*Agnes: The one thing that we need is English, everywhere mam.*

From this response the English language is depicted as the language that gives access to ordinary individuals in the South African context. In order to function in all walks of life, Agnes needs to read, write and speak in English. Thus the status of English is elevated, since it is the language that allows access to so-called better life opportunities. Agnes makes a point of mentioning that her children go to an 'English school' because the English language competence is seen as the passport to economic liberation.

The excerpts below demonstrate how the learners are caught in a *double bind* because of the hegemony of the English language. By *double bind* I mean that South African Black learners in this study require both English and an African language to function optimally in society. There is a strong pull to their own

mother tongue but at the same time economic and contextual forces draw them to the dominant language:

*Bongiwe: I don't think I can open my own restaurant if I don't know how to read and speak English and write. There is only one language that we have to use in South Africa, English. If maybe the people can do to read it is so nice to improve yourself.*

*Bongiwe: You need to speak English everywhere. If I go to the bank I have found an African that will help me. First I was so scared. Even in the shops too I make sure I find an African who can help me.*

*Cindy: Madams look for maids who speak good English because they want good English for there children. They also want us to do good work in the house like ironing and washing all is in English.*

Bongiwe aptly sums up the hegemonic influence of English when she describes it as the *only language that* gives access to opportunities in South Africa. This statement clearly reflects the manner in which African languages have become 'marginalized' and English elevated because it is seen as the passport to a better future. This study has revealed that in commerce, industry and government, the English language is necessary. On the other side of the coin, the African languages are being used daily in their homes with families and colleagues. The power and the impact of dominant English language for the adult learners were defined spatially, socially and culturally. The English language is embedded in the situational context of their lives. Learners showed how their lack of competency in English literacy skills in different situations in society created a poor self-concept.

Agnes and Bongiwe's comments on how they felt at being incompetent in functional English literacy skills such as form filling, demonstrate their need to seek assistance from their own linguistic group. The hegemonic influence of the language made learners feel inadequate and afraid because of the power of the English language. The learners needed to acquire English literacy skills to be able to function as ordinary citizens in the South African context. The learners' comments have shown the hegemony and need for the English language.

All the learners claimed that English literacy skills were essential in their everyday tasks as domestic workers. From the learners' comments it emerged that employers seek to employ domestic workers who are literate in English for the following reasons:

- They required domestic workers to communicate in English to their children.
- Domestic workers would be able to follow basic instructions written on labels for washing clothes, ironing, reading recipes and to be able to use household appliances, which have instructions in English.

From the anthropological/ socio-linguistic and critical theoretical perspectives it becomes clear that the dominant language, English in KwaZulu-Natal has gained cultural capital (see Chapter Two). The hegemony of the dominant language has been naturalized as common sense reality even as part of nature itself, whilst learners' own languages have not been given such a high status. It subordinates and accepts their own language as inferior (McLaren, 2003a). Bongiwe's strong assertion that

*...there is only one language that we have to use in South Africa, English. If maybe the people can do to read it is so nice to improve yourself. You need to speak English everywhere.*

This expresses the way the adult learners have internalized the power of English language as the dominant language. Critical theory demonstrates how language, like other social practices, serves particular interest groups.

### 8.3 The Paradox of Language

The data from their interviews were used to evaluate whether the learners acquired English literacy skills and to assess the impact it had on their lives:

*Maria: It gave me confidence. I would like to teach people in the farm. My meeting with Mpho, it was fantastic it made me feel it was unbelievable. I always thought you have to be highly educated to write a book. But when I*

*saw Mpho I learnt something else. I felt, look at her; she had written a book, she is quite confident.*

*The Professor Kendall she was wonderful. She made us feel worthwhile that we must not think we are just domestic workers. She made us feel like we are a 'some body' – she said if we want to do something we can achieve it. They treated us with love yet they were highly educated. Dr Rajab and Suria also made us feel very good. They showed friendship. I would like to meet more people like that kind it gives us more experience*

Maria explained how she was able to develop greater confidence through her acquisition of English literacy skills. Through her participation in class discussions, drama and meeting with people she improved her self-concept. The individuals who had met the adult learners such as Professor Kendall<sup>34</sup>, Professor Suria Govender<sup>35</sup> and Dr Devi Rajab<sup>36</sup> had shown their humility and accorded dignity to the adult learners as domestic workers. The true spirit of *ubuntu* between the adult learner and the guests made them feel worthwhile as human beings. It renewed their faith in humanity and made them believe that they could achieve their dreams with hard work and perseverance. Their meeting with Mpho Nthunya<sup>37</sup>, a Black domestic worker turned writer, gave them further inspiration to believe in themselves, improve their self-esteem and confidence:

*Bongiwe: Each little bit I was free to speak slowly, slowly I improved myself.... In school we learn English but we did not know how to speak English. At night classes we talk a lot, act and practice our English. This helped me to talk English.... First when I was working in the restaurant in town with the whites I was so shy. I couldn't even speak English there. Why I did not try in the restaurant because there was a African if I want something from my boss I will say my boss something to my nation who know English to go to my boss...even if I knew what my boss is saying I will be so scared to speak in English to tell him what I want. Even in domestic I was alone there was no one understanding me well. But now I can go anywhere because I can speak English. At work the whole day I speak English most of my customers are Indians but the African I speak Zulu.*

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<sup>34</sup> Professor Kendall: she was guest of honour at the 1999 Awards day.

<sup>35</sup> Professor Suria Govender of the University of Durban-Westville: She choreographed an African fusion dance with the learners, which was screened on SABC.

<sup>36</sup> Dr Devi Rajab from the University of Natal: was one of the guests at the 1999 Awards day.

<sup>37</sup> Mpho Nthunya was a domestic worker who turned writer whom the learners had met through Professor Kendall.

Bongiwe states that adult literacy did not effect radical changes in her but after AABEC she was able to communicate in English. She no longer required a crutch to support her in her communication in English; she was able to speak confidently. Bongiwe as well as Maria identify lessons in which they participated actively, such as drama, discussion and skits. These have made an impact on their acquisition of English communicative skills. Using the postmodernist critique, I reveal the complementary and contradictory aspects of the impact of English literacy. The power of the English language certainly opened doors while simultaneously creating feelings of inadequacy.

*Bongiwe: ....when I was working in the restaurant in town with the whites I was so shy ...I couldn't even speak English there... even if I knew what my boss is saying I will be so scared to speak in English to tell him what I want...*

It is clear from Bongiwe's response above that the hegemony of the English language created feelings of inadequacy. Hence, learners were afraid to communicate freely, especially to English first language speakers. The dominance and the influence that the English language has on their identity and psyche can be gleaned from Bongiwe's inability to speak to her White and Indian employers because of the symbolic violence of the language.

For Bongiwe and the other learners the lack of English language skills was a barrier to becoming effective at the workplace. What is clear from Bongiwe's comments is that the dominant class of any society talks about their tastes, styles of living and language as concrete expressions of nationality. Thus the subordinated groups, who have their own culture, language, and styles of living, cannot talk about their own as national expressions. Freire (2003: 358) explains how the dominant class has the power to define and describe the world, begins to pronounce that speech habits of the subordinate groups are a corruption or bastardization of the dominant discourse. This gives rise to many people being silenced because their discourses are suffocated by the dominant discourse. The world, however, is not made up of certainties, instead it is made up of tensions

between the certain and uncertain. It is within this contradiction that I perceive the learners as being caught up in the complex realities of their socio-cultural context.

*Agnes: I did not know how to fill a form. I was feeling shy; I should ask the security guard only because he speaks my language. But now I can speak English. I fill the form in the post office.*

*Agnes: I think for me it was not my language and all Cindy, Bongwiwe, Maria, Sylvia, Katazele... They are all high-class mam and now me it's like I'm dom (stupid) because I can't speak English. Like now when I'm talking I'm not talking clear but a Zulu hear they laugh and say something mam –you will understand it is not your language but the Zulu my own people will laugh at me. Like Cindy she should laugh at me in class I should fright to talk ...like now when they come (for the interview) I can't say anything .I just keep quiet. They are high class. ...Even in Zulu mam they do the same thing they call us isilwane's i.e. we are like animals, me ,Cindy and Maria we are all Swanes because we don't speak the proper Zulu like those that speak in Kwa Zulu Natal. When we speak they know mam that it is not the same. Think mam how you will feel when some one call you a animal.....*

The level of English communicative competency skills amongst the adult learners created class stratification. Adult learners accorded status to fellow learners who had better English communicative skills. They were labelled as 'high class'. The status of 'high class' was based mainly on the learner's oral communicative ability (speech) and not the English literacy competency skills, such as reading and writing. The learners who were able to communicate effectively in English were not necessarily most competent in English literacy. One is reminded of George Bernard Shaw's Eliza Dolittle (Pygmalion), who is transformed into a princess from a flower girl just by learning to speak the English language properly.

The learners based their social identities in relation to how well they spoke in English. Agnes claims that, Bongwiwe, Maria, Cindy and Katazele were 'high class' in contrast to her low status because she was unable to communicate effectively in English. Agnes gives herself the label 'dom' meaning stupid, for not being able to communicate in the hegemonic language. She has been taunted by her own peers for not being able to speak the dominant language and this reinforces the idea in her psyche that she is not good enough, hence, 'dom'. The

class stratification is so overwhelming that in the presence of her competent English speaking colleagues, Agnes feels ‘oppressed and intimidated’ to speak. This data reveals that Agnes has not reached a level of consciousness where she feels empowered enough to overcome the colonization of the mind by the English language. She needs to recognize the value her multilingual abilities in her own indigenous languages as opposed to not being totally proficient in the dominant language. However, value is mainly gained through one’s significant others.

The different indigenous languages of South Africa brought about class stratification within their own communities. It is in this context that Agnes and the other learners suffer a triple bind because they are forced to acquire other additional African languages when they move from one area to another. Learners, like Bongiwe, Cindy, Agnes and Maria have all come from different parts of the country where they speak different African languages. Only Bongiwe was able to be accepted into the mainstream cultural language of IsiZulu because her home language was IsiZulu. The others were found wanting because their IsiZulu was not ‘pure’ and they suffered from the label of being called *Isilwanes*, i.e., they are animals because they cannot communicate effectively. This labelling results in learners developing a poor self-image.

### 8.3.1 Language that Created *Isilwanes*<sup>38</sup> and Eliza Dolittles

*Agnes: We are all Isilwanes because we don't speak the proper Zulu...  
Think mam how you will feel when some one call you a animal...*

Despite this oppression, Agnes explains how English literacy has made some positive impact on her life world. The purpose of literacy for most of the learners in this study has been situational. Agnes and Cindy demonstrate how their abilities as domestic workers have improved. They are able to read recipes, labels,

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<sup>38</sup> *Isilwanes* is an IsiZulu word that means someone is an animal and cannot communicate. *Eliza Dolittle* is a character in George Bernard Shaw’s play, *Pygmalion*. Eliza is transformed from a flower girl to a duchess by learning to speak the English of the upper class.



take telephone messages and follow instructions of household appliances. Agnes explains how:

*...a long time ago I did no know how to read a recipe but now its easy for me to read my Madam's recipe book.... To speak was very hard for me. When I first came I can't speak English but now I can speak English. I know I'm better. I think for me it was difficult because it was not my language. Before this I worked elsewhere I was not so good. But now I know English better I work better before I know only Sotho.*

Prinsloo (2000: 119) talks about situated literacies where language and literacy are acquired through 'situated learning'. Situated literacies means learning is situated in certain forms of co-participation where meaning, understanding and learning are all defined relative to action contexts (Lave and Wegner in Prinsloo, 2000: 121). For the adult literacy curriculum to be relevant it is necessary to identify social engagements so as to provide the proper context for learning to take place. Prinsloo (2000) cites Hull's studies to illustrate that learning is necessarily structured and defined by actual social relations and social practices on shop floors and training sites. I argue that it is important to understand the social context of adult literacy because it gives rise to particular literacy practices and purpose.

In this section I examined reasons why learners attended adult English literacy classes, the purpose for which English was to be used and how English literacy impacted on their every day lives. A brief overview of the language policy was discussed. The analysis revealed that language in South African educational institutions is a very contentious issue. The language in education policy (A Qualification System and Placement Procedure,1999) and the ABET policy document (A National Adult Basic Education & Training Framework,1997) spelled out clearly that all official languages in South Africa are to be given equal status. However, in reality the implementation of the policy on the ground is a far cry from its theoretical position. In KwaZulu Natal, ABET examinations and text books in most learning areas are written in English. This is in direct contradiction to the ABET policy document (A National Adult Basic Education & Training Framework, 1997) that allows learners to write in their preferred medium of

language. In most tertiary institutions in South Africa, mainly English is the medium of instruction. The matriculation examination is written either in English or Afrikaans and this is a passport to a future in tertiary education, vocation, commerce and industry. The anomalies have entrenched English as the language of dominance and have marginalized the African languages.

In this study evidence indicated that learners attended literacy classes for the following reasons:

- To improve English literacy skills
- To gain recognition from friends, family and community
- To socialize, meet friends and escape from the hum-drum as domestic workers
- To obtain a better job
- To help their children with homework
- To read school notices, fill forms and communicate to employers
- To be more efficient in their jobs as domestic workers by speaking well to their employers' children, and to follow instructions as domestic workers

The data revealed that the adult learners acquired English literacy skills, which gave them confidence and improved their self-concept. After joining adult literacy classes, learners were able to work more effectively in their situational context as domestic workers. The adult learners who were Black domestic workers and who hailed from marginalized informal settlements have shown that they required English literary skills that were closely embedded to their social practice. After gaining English literacy skills they were able to read labels, take down telephone messages, follow instructions from recipes and follow instructions in household appliances. The acquisition of the English language also brought about class stratification such as high or low class speakers. Learners suffered oppression and were ostracized by their own community for not speaking the local language in the local dialect. The learners faced further labelling such as 'Isilwanes', meaning 'we are like animals that cannot talk'.

#### 8.4 Discursive Practices and Spaces in the English literacy Classroom

In the next section I examine how the English language curriculum was mediated in the classroom in relation to the teacher learner relationship, the relevance of the curriculum, learner responses and their perceptions of the impact of the curriculum. I begin with an analysis of my own reflective journal, followed by an analysis of the interviews and autobiographical writings of the learner's views on adult educators at ABET, their views of English teaching at primary school and I draw finally from all their data sources to draw vignettes of their evaluations on the English teaching at AABEC.

#### 8.5 Personal Reflections: Reflective Journal

Bailey, (2001: 490) observes that now there is a much more inclusive view of teachers as partners in the research enterprise, working in collaboration with researchers. It is not uncommon to find teachers as producers, instead of consumers of classroom research. Reflective teachers are capable of learning from and further developing, their personal understandings and explanations of life within language classrooms. I take a peep into my own reflective journal to make sense of my own struggles in mediating the curriculum.

##### ***REFLECTIONS OF MY MIND***

*I began my first literacy lesson with much enthusiasm and some trepidation. The introduction went without glitches where learners introduced themselves and spoke about their families and things that interested them. However the presence of the co-ordinator (who was White) and an AIDS research worker ruffled my collar since this was a new situation and I needed to be relaxed.*

*I did much planning but it was a disaster. I thought that taking a lesson from a so called reputable book 'Write Well' (Cretchley & Stacey, 1986) would help but it was not so. I had taken my first lesson from that text. The lesson was based on: "How to write sentences?" I believed that adults had made great sacrifices to attend adult classes and as their educator I must engage in 'good comprehensive English teaching'. (That was of course naïve of me to attempt before reading any of the ABET research literature). I handed out three worksheets and discussion continued with much strain. My lesson had become disastrous. All my high school*

*experience as English educator did not adequately prepare me for adult education. This is indeed very different; it requires a different teaching approach, attitude and sensitivity. I perhaps have to check with other who have more experience and perhaps consult more reference.*

*Perhaps I have to get to know the learners and choose lessons within their own frame of reference.*

### **8.5.1 Myths, Realities, and Truths about Adult Teaching**

My romantic notions of teaching in an adult class were shattered when I discovered how inappropriate my initial lessons were. I soon realized the level at which the content was based was also not suitable. The English language register that I used during my lesson was not appropriate for learners whose home language was not English. I needed to work from their frame of reference and choose lessons that were appropriate for adults. I questioned my teaching and asked whether I was the sole source of power and control. I questioned my methodology and content, as I realized that I was not achieving my objectives set for the lesson. I lacked training in adult basic education. High school teaching did not necessarily qualify one as an adult educator. Iwataki (1981) cautions that those who teach adult education to English second language learners should be made of sturdy stock because they need special qualities of understanding cultural sensitivity, adaptability, stamina and resourcefulness to be able to cope with the realities of English second language education.

My own middle class South African Indian identity and stereotypes were becoming a barrier to my teaching. In most traditional classrooms, one's particular social and cultural identities as teachers usually remain in the background (Bell, Washington, Weinstein & Love, 2003: 465). Bell *et al.* (2003) argue that teachers should talk about their identities and positions in society and allow students to engage in such discussions. Teachers need to discover and confront their own prejudices of being labelled, racist, sexist or classist. From my Indian cultural background, I did not understand the nature of their questions. So many years of apartheid had separated the Indians and Africans from mixing in a

social context that this became a new learning curve for me. I needed to understand the learners' needs in preparing my lessons.

I began formal teaching too soon without knowing much about the learners. According to Wedepohl & Kupper (1988: vii) the educator must get to know the learners so that learners have a good rapport with the educator as 'equals'. The educator must develop content that is useful to them and help them to deal with life's problems. The objectives of the lesson are best achieved when the content of learning material relates to the adult learner's life. The learning material must be built on what learners already know. The crucial point in adult learning is the learner's life experiences and their problems should be the starting point of the lesson. Therefore the educator needs to learn about the learners lives before starting to 'teach' (Wedepohl & Kupper, 1988).

For the adult educator to engage in a 'true dialogue' with the adult learner, the educator must nurture a responsive and creative attitude where dialogue must exist with a profound love for the world and for human beings (Freire in Clarke 2000: 61). Dialogue must have humility, faith in people, faith in their power and in their vocation to be fully human. If participants expect nothing to come of their efforts, their encounter will be empty, sterile, bureaucratic, and tedious. True dialogue cannot exist unless the participants engage in critical thinking. The important thing is the continuing transformation of reality on behalf of the continuing humanization of people. Celce-Mucia (2001) has shown that affective factors are more important in adult second language than in any other type of learning. Warmth, compassion, empathy and kindness, along with a keen ability to observe and respond seem to be necessary personal qualities in good English second language teachers.

This explanation outlines the tremendous role that the adult educator plays in order to help learners to become independent, self-reliant, confident individuals where they can use what they learn to transform problem situations in real life. What can be identified from my first literacy lesson is that the adult educator

plays a pivotal role in adult literacy especially when teaching English as an additional language (second language). For the teaching process to be meaningful teachers should create a democratic space where everyone has a say. There should be active participation because adult learners learn by talking, doing and experiencing for themselves (Wedepohl & Kupper, 1988).

In the next section I present data on the adult learners' perceptions about their adult educators from Asoka Adult Basic Education Co-operative.

### 8.6 Learners' Perceptions of their Facilitators

Bongiwe articulates how some adult educators wielded power over the learners because they belonged to the dominant culture. She expresses a feeling of being discriminated against because they were from a different race (Black); the sting of racial discrimination seems to still exist although the laws have changed:

*Bongiwe: Learners at AABEC were so scared they will not correct the teachers. If you say do this they will just do. They think if we are Black we don't know anything.*

Bongiwe reveals an acute consciousness of her colour and although she understands her rights she was afraid to challenge the attitude of the teacher:

*But as a student you got a right to tell a teacher you are wrong but teacher some of them so bad they could not tell them...Learners were not small kids ... They were supposed to be equal – but we don't know, we go there to learn something we must work together. I am not a small child. I must also speak it is a two way process.*

Clearly Bongiwe's understanding of the relationship between adult learner and educator is the same as the principles outlined by Wedepohl & Kupper, (1988) and Freire in Clark (2000). However, Bongiwe relates that not all facilitators were like the one's above. They did enjoy a caring and compassionate relationship with others:

*Not all the teachers are like that, some of them are so kind we can talk to them like our friends they teach us so nicely. That's why we go to AABEC because we like our teacher.*

Bongiwe explains how the dominant power relations of some of the educators who were mainly from the Indian middle class backgrounds had created inequalities in the relationship between the adult educators and adult learners. These comments indicate that not all adult educators taught according to the principles of adult education. The dignity of the adult learners was not always upheld. Many of the educators were from the mainstream educational system, which could have influenced the way they taught adults.

Maria also presents a caring and empathetic picture of some of the facilitators who accorded them dignity: *'caring' like a 'mother, friend, everything'*. On the other hand there were some educators who were:

*...not happy when they were criticised they only want to be praised. That's why the learners speak in Zulu because they are afraid. In Zulu they speak their feelings.*

I provide a brief background to what Maria is saying before commenting. In pursuance of the principles of democracy, the AABEC constitution allowed for the voices of the learners to be heard. Learners had a meeting once a month to discuss their concerns and the learner representatives would present these concerns to the AABEC meeting where all facilitators and all learners were present. It is at these meetings that criticisms were levelled against the facilitators. Herein lies a contradiction, democratic space is offered to the learners but when learners exercise their right to be critical, the dominant forces show disquiet, which serves to silence the learners. So democracy is only on paper. For meaningful education to take place, it is critical that adult educators do not assert their authority and power over the learners but allow for equality and a meaningful critical discourse.

Draper & Stein (1989) explain that the educator who wishes to be sensitive to the cultural diversity of the learner must not only be aware of his or her own culture but also have understanding of the similarities and differences of others. It is important for adult educators to be aware that culture does have an impact on one's identity, behaviour and learning. At AABEC all the facilitators, except two, were Indians. Two Black, IsiZulu speaking educators taught IsiZulu literacy.

There were times in my first year of literacy teaching when I was insensitive to some practices of the learners. Bhola (1994) and Freire (1998a) explain that the literacy teacher is the most important factor mediating the curriculum. The teacher needs to be sensitive to the cultural background of the learners. Prinsloo (2000) concurs with such a statement when she argues that literacy is a skill not easily transmitted.

### **8.7 Learners' Perceptions of English Teaching in the Primary School**

I include the learners' perceptions of their primary school experiences in the learning of the English language because many learners came to adult literacy having only rudimentary skills in English or as semi-literate in English. I wanted to know how the English language was mediated in primary school and the impact this had on their early biographical experiences. This would help to establish their level of literacy skills from primary school and to evaluate whether they had acquired any literacy skills from AABEC:

*Agnes: I did not enjoy English. The teacher read the story we don't understand. Teacher explained in English. She spoke alone we did not speak. The composition was hard I hated it. I did not know how to write. I mixed up the tense. The whole class feel like that. The teacher read the comprehension because we did not know how to read.*

*Cindy: I like school but English was hard for me. I don't understand the teacher*

*Bongiwe: In school we learnt English but we did not know how to speak English.*

From their personal interviews, what can be gleaned is that learners did not achieve the intended English literacy outcomes in their primary schooling. They did not understand what the English teacher taught, mainly because the English



language was a barrier to understanding. Lessons were not made comprehensible to the learners and this resulted in learners not acquiring the basic skills of communicating and understanding the English language. For learners acquiring an additional language, it is imperative that educators use different teaching methodologies and techniques to make the language accessible. From the data yielded learners were not exposed to different methodologies and techniques to assist in acquiring an additional language. I am not suggesting that the teacher be a technician in looking for the right strategy. In teaching there is no 'one size fits all' approach. Teachers need to have a repertoire of strategies. It seems that for many of the learners, words were taught in a mechanical manner without much meaning attached to them: *teacher read the story. She spoke alone. She read the comprehension.* Many learners could read sentences but were unable to explain its meaning. For the learners who were at primary school, knowing English words meant merely knowing the phonic aspect or the pronunciation without much understanding to the words.

Chick (2001: 227) states that there is widespread agreement amongst observers about the essential characteristics of interactions in schools for Black people in South Africa under the former apartheid system. It was highly centralized, with teachers adopting authoritarian roles and doing most of the talking, with few pupil teacher interactions and most of the pupil response in the form of group choringing.

The classroom ethos was one where the teacher dominated the lessons; learners had little knowledge of what prevailed in the lesson because they did not understand the English language. Learners were afraid to communicate their feelings because of fear of corporal punishment. Cindy complains that *English was hard for me because I don't understand the teacher.* This situation demonstrates how the learners were unable to acquire the necessary competency skills because of the manner in which the English language was taught.

Agnes's description of the teacher was someone who:

*...did all the talking because we don't know how to answer, if he question we just sat and listened today, tomorrow the whole year.*

This succinctly describes how learners sat passively listening to the teacher because of their lack of understanding. Her words sum up why effective classroom discussions did not take place. The lessons were teacher centred and did not allow for learner participation. Agnes had failed in Grade five and Grade seven, Cindy had failed Grade seven three times, Maria had failed Grade eight and Bongiwe failed Grade eight.

From their explanation it would appear that much of their early English language development was understood through the grammar translation method. This method focuses on direct one-to-one translation of words from one language to the next, often resulting in misconceptions and confusion for the learner. Celce-Mucia (2001) argues that the grammar translation method also leads to serious difficulties in the education process. In this method it is not always possible to attain exact equivalence when translating from one language (e.g., English) into the (home language, IsiZulu). One should not wholly abandon the learner's own language in the additional language classroom instead a more effective use of the additional language should be made initially. When learners in the classroom are handling two languages simultaneously, there should be a focus on ideas from one language to another and not on a direct grammar translation word-by-word. The focus on ideas will develop the fluency in the additional language rather than strictly finding accuracy of meaning from one language to another.

From the learners' primary school experiences in English, it would appear that the English reading lessons were based mainly on the 'bottom-up-approach'. In this approach it is necessary to understand all the linguistic data generated by the text. In developing reading skills teachers are often more concerned with developing the reader's skills in being able to translate the written symbol to a phonological sound. This skill merely results in recoding from one code (written symbol) to another (the phonological sound). In such a situation the learners do not develop

the skill of comprehending the texts. In the bottom-up approach the learners are involved in decoding the words by breaking them up into sounds. It is necessary to have an integrated top-down and bottom-up approach to reading (Rumelhart, 1980). The top-down approach is a more concept driven mode where the teacher usually uses a picture, a word, or an object to elicit meaning. In the top-down approach the emphasis is on comprehension. For the learners in the primary school, English was taught using more of a bottom-up approach and very little of the top-down approach. Learners were thus unable to acquire English language competency skills.

In the next section I will analyze learner's perceptions of English literacy teaching. The responses are taken from their in-depth interviews and post-literacy interviews.

### **8.8 Learners' Perceptions of English Literacy at AABEC**

In order to give an account of how adult English literacy was taught at AABEC, I will present four vignettes of how the learners perceived the adult English literacy teaching. Some of their responses have already been quoted in previous themes but I repeat their comments because they give a holistic picture of the learners' perceptions and feelings. The learners' perceptions of English literacy at AABEC provide data to establish the level to which learners have acquired English literacy skills and to evaluate the impact of English literacy. Their writings also provide evidence of their competency in the language. I have maintained much of their own voice and merely added names or places to give clarity to the discussion.

VIGNETTE 1

MARIA

*When I wrote my autobiography it made me feel I learnt a lot about my self that I did not know. I learnt how to act where to go from here to there. At the beginning I thought it was impossible, four pages, we ended up writing more. But in the end we did and I enjoyed and learnt about each other too. The pictures says more about ourself.*

*My meeting with Mpho and Professor Kendall it gave me confidence It was fantastic it made me feel it was unbelievable. I always thought you have to be highly educated to write a book. But when I saw Mpho I learnt something else. I felt look at her, she had written a book she is quite confident. The Professor Kendall she was wonderful. She made us feel worthwhile that we must not think we are just domestic workers. She made us feel like we are a 'some body' – she said if we want to something we can achieve it. They treated us with love yet they were highly educated. Dr Rajab was our guest of honour at the awards day and Suria Govender she taught us the dance 'Asimbonanga', they also made us feel very good. They showed friendship. I would like to meet more people like that kind it gives us more experience.*

*I acted in a play called 'Cinders' during the play I got so excited and forgot what to say. Acting in a play at AABEC taught me how to express myself as an actor. It was my first acting experience. I was very scared, I lost my lines. I learnt that it was not so easy when you are on stage and have people look at you. It took away my shyness. As the play went on I felt good and everything was fine. It gave me confidence. It was a good experience, I can laugh when I think of how I forgot to close the curtains*

*I would like to teach people in the farm.*

**Maria**

From each vignette I will use the data to illustrate how the English literacy curriculum at AABEC contributed to transforming their lives in a positive way. Maria demonstrates how the writing of the autobiography offered her reflexivity and she was able to understand herself better. The craft of storytelling and writing is well depicted in her words *I learnt how to act where to go from here to there*. Maria's use of pictures revealed some aspects of personality that might not have been discerned. Her meeting with special guests such as Mpho, Professor Kendall, Dr Devi Rajab and Professor Suria Govender had taken pride of place. She mentioned each of them and mentioned their contribution to growth in her self esteem and making her feel like a 'somebody'. Her experiences of acting in major productions such as 'Cinders' and 'Asimbonanga' had certainly enhanced her confidence and ability to speak English.

**VIGNETTE 2**

**BONGIWE**

*At night classes we talk a lot, act and practice our English this helped me to talk English. Before if I go to the bank I have to found an African that will help me. I was so scared, even in shop too.*

*But now that I can speak English I can go anywhere because ...at work the whole day I speak English because most of my customers are Indians but the African I speak Zulu. English is my job.*

*That time I was at home I was looking for a job. There was lady from the University of Natal. She was looking for a matric but I told I don't have a matric but I have my level 2 I.E.B..certificate. She said ""You could try"". She took me with that certificate just to try. She found me job. There I was so good. My*

*Professor was a White man he told me I was with the people with the matric but I passed very well. I did not think that I could pass with all the people who finished matric. He said Bongiwe, you did better than those people with matric...*

*There was two lessons I liked you know that one where you asked us to write a letter to a friend or someone we know on the farm .We posted the letter. I also learnt a lot from the one where we had to write about how we were when we were small right up till today. So we did a lot of things that made me think about my life and to write about my life. I felt so good that I could write a little story about my own.*

*I read the Zulu newspaper as well as the weekend Sunday Times.*

*I understand the English but when Thabisle brings letters sometimes I can't understand the forms I go to the school and I ask the teacher if I got the time if not I ask my friend.*

*Every week you gave us books to read it helped us. It was easy for us because the books we were reading from my culture –it was not written in Zulu but there is a name for Katazele and Sifiso like that. So I will think and remember the story better. I know the people it is so easy for me to understand. It is like I know the story before. It is like the. Books we read in class we all read the books because it was about our sistas (sisters) and brothers...the story of the 'The Suit', 'The Lovers' like that...*

### **Bongiwe**

Bongiwe, was unable to communicate well in English prior to her adult literacy classes. Her comments clearly demonstrate how the English literacy curriculum helped improve her English communicative skills:

*At night classes we talk a lot, act and practice our English this helped me to talk English. Before if I go to the bank I have to found an African that will help me. I was so scared, even in shop too. But now that I can speak English I can go anywhere*

The writing of the Independent Board Examinations had helped Bongiwe obtain a job as laboratory assistant at the University of Natal where she tested stools for

hookworms. Bongiwe's identity is clearly revealed when she comments on her need to engage in literacy because all:

*...my friends are educated I feel so bad I want to be educated.*

As an individual without a matriculation certificate, Bongiwe reveals the poor self-concept she had when compared to those who had a matric certificate. Ironically, it was Bongiwe who was able to prove to the Professor that she had, higher order thinking skills and was able to obtain a job without a matriculation certificate at the University of Natal. The passing of examinations has given some learners one small step to a better future. It must be stressed that the passing of examinations, Level one, two and three, had on the whole brought few material changes to their lives. The English literacy curriculum provided for an authentic writing medium as Bongiwe aptly explains that she found the writing experiences useful to her everyday life. The reading component in English literacy revealed an improvement in their reading skills. The significant point that Bongiwe makes is that the choice of readers used in class, the easy readers, allowed adult learners to read for leisure and improve their reading skills. Despite all the strides made in English literacy, Bongiwe has difficulty reading her daughter's school notices, which places her in an invidious position. There is a need for her to continue with adult literacy but the English medium schools ought to write letters that are comprehensible to the second language parents.

### VIGNETTE 3

#### CINDY

*After going AABEC I used to write phone message for my Madam she say I was good in writing.*

*I think it is okay to take part because you talk something and it helped me in English. It helped me to take away my shy, after that I talk once and then I talk.*

*I felt alright to act. Acting is teaching us how to stay with our bosses and Madams. I learnt what our rights are. I was shy for acting but now I like acting it*

*teach me to talk English and learn about domestic worker. I also like when we dancing – Asimbonanga. It was so nice the teacher she teach us the Indian dances and the African. The whole school was dancing it was so nice even the T. V. came to make us be on television.*

*I also like when I write the story. I think my story can become Mpho's story.*

*I learnt so much. I can't understand [reading] at the beginning it was difficult but when you carry on and on then I understand.*

### Cindy

Cindy was able to demonstrate concretely how the English curriculum influenced her life. She learned to take down her employer's telephone messages in English. She was able to improve her English communicative skills by participating in class plays as the following excerpt explains:

*...felt alright to act. Acting is teaching us how to stay with our bosses and Madams. I learnt what our rights are. I think it is okay to take part because you talk something and it helped me in English. It helped me to take away my shy, after that I talk once and then I talk.*

The English curriculum allowed her to overcome her shyness and gain confidence through the various activities that were structured for ABET:

*...It helped me to take away my shy, after that I talk once and then I talk.*

The writing of the autobiography boosted her self-concept and made her feel that she was capable of turning into a writer like Mpho:

*I think my story can become Mpho's story.*

Cindy reveals that she struggles with her understanding of English, especially establishing the meaning of a story at the beginning. However, she also makes the claims that as the lesson progresses, she is able to understand and follow the lesson.



VIGNETTE 4

AGNES

*Before going AABEC I did no know how to read a recipe but now it's easy for me to read my Madam's recipe book.*

*Everything in the house, like when you do washing mam, you have to read the labels first see whether you must put it in the washing machine or not or put only white, vacuum cleaner, when you put the bag is full you must read how to put the bag inside.*

*I did not know how to fill the form. I was feeling shy. I should ask the security guard only because he speak my language. But now I can speak English. I fill the form in the post office.*

*The debates on madams and maids. I learn about madams when they talk. Now I understand about some madams (why) they are not happy when we don't it right. Now we heard all that we need to learn about how the madam must treat us. We know what was right and wrong. I also know that the madam must not do a lie. Talking is thinking.*

*I felt happy taking part in debates and acting in class, I think it is okay to take part because it helped me in English. It helped me to take away my shy after that I talk once and then I talk.*

*Now I read the newspaper before I only looked at the picture. I also read my daughter's schoolbooks. She tells me, "Ma you must read this story."*

*The school notices they use difficult words sometime mam, I know some of the words but sometimes I don't know what is in the letter. Not always I know what is in the letter I understand but not all. When I don't know I ask my madam to help me.*

*In the class when you talking about Indian and other cultures sometimes we don't know. It's okay when you talk about Zulu culture.*

*I liked Mpho's Story mam it was just like my story with Joseph. The book was little bit hard I read it two times.*

*It was difficult but if we used to read and speak it won't be difficult ...but when you carry on and on then I understand... it was not too difficult.*

### Agnes

Agnes attended adult literacy classes with the express purpose of improving her communicative English skills. One of her goals was to be able to help her children with their homework. Her comments indicate that she was able to improve both her written and communicative English skills:

*Before going AABEC I did no know how to read a recipe but now it's easy for me to read my Madam's recipe book.... I should ask the security guard only because he speak my language. But now I can speak English. I fill the form in the post office.*

The English literacy curriculum equipped her with critical skills about her rights as a domestic worker. The diverse activities in the English literacy classroom provided Agnes with the space to open up from a shy English speaker to an individual who enjoyed engaging in English debates, drama and skits. The English reading programme might have been difficult. Agnes states that she sometimes had to read the text twice but the strides that she made in English are evident when she talks about reading the paper as compared to glossing over pictures as she did in the past. Like Bongwiwe she also found school notices written in English sometimes difficult to interpret and required the assistance of her employer.

#### 8.8.1 Issues that Emerged from the Vignettes

From the vignettes, the following issues emerged about English literacy at Asoka Adult Basic Education Co-operative. Learners showed that they were able to acquire English competency skills because of the methodology and techniques that were used in teaching English additional (second) language. From the data, the following teaching methods, techniques and curriculum design emerged as having an impact on the acquisition of English literacy skills.

The first issue I discuss is the curriculum design:

### 8.8.2 English Curriculum

Nunan (2001: 55) concedes that curriculum is a large messy concept, which can be looked at, in a number of ways. However, a “broad definition includes all of the planned learning experiences in an educational system” (Nunan, 2001: 55). From a postmodern critical perspective I cite Weinstein’s (2001) promising directions in adult English second language literacy instruction as my guide for a curriculum framework. Firstly, teachers should take an inquiring stance and learn about learners because they are in the best position to address their needs. Secondly, there should be a balance between engaging learners in acquiring the mechanics of language as well as gaining proficiency with language and literacy to use it for a deeper emancipatory purpose. Thirdly, the curriculum must follow new trends or react to changing pressures in society. It is important to keep focused on one’s own vision for the fabric of lesson planning and curricula. Fourthly, there should be an emphasis on mutual accountability; teachers should hold learners accountable for attending and doing their work and learners should hold teachers accountable for meeting their needs. Finally, it is important to create communities of learners. Learner stories and experiences are a good source as raw materials to begin the conversation and for further planning and action. Learners who have been marginalized find strength and support in a nurturing classroom. Slimani (2001: 287) observes that as much as the lesson can be planned in advance, learning outcomes are not necessarily the reflection of the teacher’s plan. In the process of accomplishing instructional objectives the teacher’s interactive work takes place among the learners and leads to the creation of a whole range of learning opportunities, many of which are perhaps unexpected.

The data reveals that the curriculum that I had mediated was situationally specific to cater for the needs of marginalized adult learners who were domestic workers:

*Bongiwe : English helped me to talk. Before if I go to the bank I have found an African worker that will help me. I was so scared, even in shop too. I did not know how to fill the form.*

*Agnes: I was feeling shy. I should ask the security guard only because he speak my language. But now I can speak English I fill the form in the post office*

From the literature reviewed and the data presented, it is evident that for the English literacy curriculum to be meaningful and successful it must be tailored as close as possible to the students needs (Bhola, 1979 & Freire, 1998a).

Bongiwe and Agnes illustrated how they no longer need crutches (English interpreters) to function in society. Their acquisition of English competency skills has to some extent liberated them from oppression. They are now able to use some of the essential functional skills of reading and writing in a South African society. The learners have demonstrated that these essential services would not be accessible to them without the acquisition of the English language. From the theoretical perspectives that I have taken, (Bhola, 1979 & Wigg, 1994) there is need to hold the learners' attention with material that is relevant to their lives. Adult literacy programmes should be linked to a course of action that improves life in the community. Agnes showed how prior to English literacy classes she was unable to read her employer's recipes but after acquiring English competency skills, she was able to so. This has been relevant in her life, as a domestic worker:

*now it's easy for me to read my Madam's recipe book.... read the labels... read how to put the bag...*

This is not to suggest that the curriculum must be geared only to cater for the job market, which will contradict the findings in the other three chapters and my thesis, that pedagogy should empower, conscientize and liberate the mind. There needs to be a balance in the curriculum as adults also seek a curriculum that is relevant to their lived experiences.

Oppressed people must write and talk about their own lives, and then only will they begin to value their opinions, which should give them more confidence

(Freire, 1998c). The data revealed that the English literacy curriculum was situationally specific for AABEC learners who hailed from marginalized settings and who were mainly domestic workers. The respondents were able to acquire English competency skills because they were motivated to learn about issues that had a direct impact on their life-world. The data revealed that the learners were able to:

- Become more effective and confident English speakers in their communication with their employers and the wider community. This enhanced their self-image
- As domestic workers they were able to complete their duties more efficiently because they were able to follow the English instructions on appliances, recipes and labels before doing the washing or take down telephone messages

Having acquired the relevant English competency skills learners became more effective members of community. They were able to go to the banks, post office and complete the forms themselves. Johns & Price-Machado (2001: 44) argue that a programme of English for specific purposes is based on the proposition that all language teaching should be tailored to the specific learning and language needs of the identified groups of learners. In mediating the literacy curriculum to the adult learner, time should not be wasted, teaching ought to be relevant to the learner, it should be successful in imparting learning in a more effective manner than 'general English'. The arguments presented in the English for Specific Purposes hold much promise for the adult learners. Presently (2004) the SETA learnership programmes for domestic workers offer courses to domestic workers, which are held during the day. Employers are encouraged to send their employees to such programmes because they are subsidized by the state. However, many domestic workers find it difficult to be given time off to attend such programmes.

### 8.8.3 Writing

From the data, the authentic writing and autobiographies were shown to be effective pedagogical tools to acquire English competency skills. Authentic writing was shown to have a positive impact on learners. Hinkel (2001: 443) explains that to become proficient and effective communicators, learners need to attain second language socio-cultural competence. An example cited is that the second language learner might know how to say “thank you” but that does not necessarily mean he/she knows when to say it, how often or whether an additional action is called for. Hymes (1996) emphasizes that the learning of culture is an integral part of language learning and education because it influences the values of the community, everyday interaction, the norms of speaking and behaving. The curriculum should provide such socio-cultural goal where the second language learner acquires speech acts such as requests, apologies, complaints and compliments.

Bongiwe recalls the letter writing exercise and her autobiographical writing as lessons that taught her invaluable lessons in life. In the authentic writing, learners were required to write letters to whomever they chose. The natural speech was to be maintained (code switching was acceptable); the salutation had to remain authentic and the message had to be genuine. The letters were posted.

*Bongiwe: To write a letter to a friend or someone we must know on the farm and the one where we had to write about how we were when we were small right up till today. So we did a lot of things that made me think about my life and to write about my life. I felt so good that I could write a little story about my own.*

Learners were given an opportunity to use writing skills in an authentic form. This made learning meaningful. Writing must not be seen as an isolated exercise taught in adult literacy classes. Exercises must be drawn from real life experiences. The following examples of authentic writing assisted learners:

- Write a letter to the municipality requesting the provision of water
- Write a letter to a school informing the teacher why your child was absent
- Filling of forms e.g. bank, post office, school

- Write a letter to someone to whom you wish to convey an urgent message to inform them about recent happenings in your life

The data reveals that the writing of autobiographies had an impact on learner's self-images. Cindy hoped that her writing would some day make her famous:

*I also like when I write the story. I think my story can become Mpho's story.*

Maria's account of the autobiographical writing shows that it provided her the space to be reflective. She aptly describes it as a journey where she discovered herself through an uncharted course:

*It made me feel I learnt a lot about my self that I did not know. I learnt how to act where to go from here to there. At the beginning I thought it was impossible, four pages, we ended up writing more. But in the end we did and I enjoyed and learnt about each other too. The pictures say more about us.*

Through reflection and later reflexivity of their own autobiographical writing, learners showed their critical understanding of being oppressed. The data disclosed how the women who were once manipulated and subjugated were able to fight and challenge their exploitation. In this research the autobiographies have emerged as powerful pedagogical tools to liberate the minds of the learners by making them critically conscious. This enabled them to overcome some aspects of female oppression in society and to transcend the boundaries of poverty.

### 8.8.4 Reading

From the data (vignettes) it was evident that reading competencies were not acquired optimally. I used the discourse competence approach (see Savignon, 2001), which was concerned not so much with isolated words or phrases but with the interconnectedness of a series of utterances, written words and phrases to form a meaningful whole. This is also known as top-down approach. Using phonics for word recognition is also a useful approach. This is known as bottom-up processing.

In the adult literacy English class, 'easy readers' were used. Easy readers are any reading matter in any language, which makes concessions to a lack of proficiency in reading skills or to the difficulties with mastering the language of the text (French in Hutton, 1992: 240-241). From the literature reviewed, it was shown that easy readers have been promoted in countries such as Nicaragua, Tanzania and South Africa. Laubach (in Hutton, 1992: 241) has stated that newly literate people usually fall back into illiteracy without easy-reading material. In AABEC, I used the 'New Readers Project' easy reading material as well as short stories that were adapted for second language learners. This helped learners engage with the text. The easy readers are designed to cater for the needs of additional language learners. The choice of easy readers for the class was relevant to their cultural, socio-political and economic contexts of their lives. Learners were able to identify readily with plot and characters. This allowed for stimulating discussion on various issues that directly related to their lives, such as, alcoholism especially amongst men, female oppression in a Black society, cultural practices of Blacks who are now caught up in a changing Western society. Bongiwe's commentary on reading sums up all the issues discussed above:

*Bongiwe: Every week you gave us books to read, it helped us. It was easy for us because the books we were reading were from my culture –it was not written in Zulu but there is a name for Katazele and Sifiso like that. So I will think and remember the story better. I know the people it is so easy for me to understand. It is like I know the story before. It is like the books we read in class. We all read the books because it was about our sistas's and brothers...the story of the 'The Suit', 'The Lovers' like that ...*

Hinkel (2001: 452) suggests that for English second language learners' purposes, literature texts should be chosen carefully to allow learners to comprehend the text and enjoy it. He stresses that socio-cultural meanings and values greatly affect the learner's ability to comprehend text and the context in which it is employed. In authentic texts, such as those excerpts from advanced print media (i.e, as newspapers, magazines, 'easy readers' and literature) culture specific references, allusions, metaphors and symbolism play a prominent role. In teaching English second language students, one must gradually increase their cultural and linguistic complexity. Roberts (2001: 108) explains that one should talk of



language socialization rather than language acquisition because it better describes how learners come to produce and interpret discourse and how such learning is supported or not by the assumptions of society about multilingualism and second language learners.

From the research findings it was evident that the readers that were culturally relevant were a good reading resource material, especially for the additional language (second) English learners.

### **8.8.5 Collaborative Teaching Methods and Networking**

The vignettes showed that the collaborative teaching methods and networking with Universities and other non-governmental organizations and community leaders had a positive effect on the acquisition of English literacy skills. Maria's utterances clearly demonstrate the point:

*My meeting with Mpho and Professor Kendall<sup>1</sup> it gave me confidence. She made us feel worthwhile that we must not think we are just domestic workers... She made us feel like we are a 'some body' – she said if we want to do something we can achieve it.*

I used the expertise of persons from the university and the local community to assist me in my teaching. This produced great rewards, as evidenced by Maria's comments and the learners' writings. Members of the community also served to boost the confidence and self-image of the learners. The literature reviewed has demonstrated that in successful literacy programmes for women, there must be support from community leaders because the way in which community leaders interact contributes to the dignity and confidence of adult learners (Oglesby in Encyclopedia of Education, 1990).

### 8.8.6 Multi-Method Approach

It was evident from the data that the learners were able to develop their English competency skills because of the classroom methodologies employed. Anderson (1983) explains that it is important that the learners move away from thinking in their own language to thinking in the additional language (second language). Learners indicated that code switching would enhance their understanding of the English language. Cindy suggests: *Mam, if you speak in Zulu sometimes it will help us a lot. I think I can talk better English.*

Celce-Mercer (in Candlin, & Neil, 2001: 252) suggests that it is okay sometimes for a teacher to code switch to learners' first language if they judge it necessary. However, there should not be an over reliance on first language for meaning:

*The extent to which code switching between English and another language occurs in a particular setting will therefore be influenced by factors such as (a) the degree of fluency in English that members of a particular class have achieved; (b) the bilingual competence of teachers (c) the specific teaching goals; and crucially (d) the attitude of both children and teachers to the practice of code switching and to the languages involved (Mercer, 2001: 252).*

To develop proficiency in the additional language, the educator needs to make use of challenging exercises where the learners can use their developing competencies in the additional language. Dramatization as a technique employed in English additional language teaching ensured that learners gained sufficient confidence to develop their thinking skills in English. In most English lessons, learners dramatized the issues that required spontaneous use of the English language. Dramatization assisted learners develop their communicative skills:

*Maria: I acted in a play called 'Cinders' during the play I got so excited and forgot what to say. Acting in a play at AABEC taught me how to express myself as an actor. It was my first acting experience. It gave me confidence.*

*Agnes: The debates on madams and maids. I learn about madams when they talk. I also know that the madam must not do a lie. Talking is thinking. I felt happy taking part in debates and acting in class, I think it is*

*okay to take part because it helped me in English. It helped me to take away my shy after that I talk once and then I talk.*

*Cindy: I was shy for acting but now I like acting it teach me to talk English and learn about domestic worker. I also like when we dancing – Asimbonanga. It was so nice the teacher she teach us the Indian dances and the African. The whole school was dancing it was so nice even the T. V. came to make us be on television.*

Evidence from the data shows that using a repertoire of approaches or the multi-method approach has many benefits in literacy teaching. Learners were actively engaged in using the English language to construct meaning in participatory lessons. Acquiring a second language is not through protracted rule based instruction and correction but comes with exposure, comfort level, motivation, familiarity and practice in real communicative contexts. Krashen (1982) found unconscious acquisition of language to be much more effective. In further studies he found that people did not ‘acquire’ the new language because of what he called the affective filter, which operates when the student is not motivated, does not identify with the speakers of the second language, or is over anxious about her or his performance. This causes a mental block that prevents the language acquisition. Korean writer, Mia Yun (1998), felt a new freedom of self-expression when she learnt the English language, which she described as ‘putting on a new dress’. Writing in English made her feel fresh, see herself in a new way, offered her freedom to experiment. Savignon (2001) asserts that a communicative curriculum allows learners to experiment with roles, which they may be called to play in real life. She goes on to say that the curriculum must have a variety of communicative activities in English second language with the specific purpose of preparing learners to use English in the world beyond. It is a world on which the adult learners will depend for the maintenance and development of their communicative competence once classes are over. Some of the activities that made an impact on the acquisition of English competency skills are:

- Engaging in debates / discussions, dramatization, skits and role play on issues that directly affect their lives
- Song and dance
- Poetry recital

The data from the vignettes provide evidence that the methods employed in adult education such as collaborative teaching, dramatization, autobiographical writing, networking with institutions of higher learning, community leaders and organizations have all contributed in promoting confidence in the learners.

I learnt much from my own reflective teaching practice, collaborative networking, attending adult professional development workshops, AABEC's own professional development workshops and most of all, from the learners themselves.

### **8.8.7 Methodological Challenges**

As an educator I consciously tried to obtain content that was relevant to learners' lives and culture but during class discussion I was sometimes unaware of how my own South African Indian cultural background acted as a barrier to understanding the world of my learners. Agnes's comment demonstrates that learners did not always understand speaking about different cultures:

*...when you talking about Indian and other cultures sometimes we don't know. It's okay when you talk about Zulu culture.*

From the data it was evident that learners found some of the texts difficult. They specified that that the beginning of the text was difficult to understand but once the plot was established they were able to make meaning. Cindy explains how she was unable to cope initially:

*Cindy ....I can't understand at the beginning it was difficult but when you carry on and on then I understand.*

*Agnes: It was difficult but if we used to read and speak it won't be difficult ...but when you carry on and on then I understand... it was not too difficult.*

The learners' comments reveal that despite using easy readers that was written primarily for additional language learners, the language used in the text was initially difficult to understand. From the data it was found that the reading lessons needed to be more structured. A suggested method that can be used is the 'scaffolding'. A 'scaffold' is a temporary structure of poles or planks providing

workmen with platform to stand on while building. Similarly, the scaffolding method gives learners enough support to build their competencies and once they have acquired skills at a particular level, they can move to another. Thus the scaffolds can be used effectively as a support. Once the learner has mastered all the skills he or she will be able to stand without the scaffold. The data supported the need to be more cautious when teaching reading, particularly, to additional language learners. From the data my lessons also showed how learners faced some difficulties during English lessons but progressed after continued support was given. In teaching and acquiring an additional language, it is of crucial importance for learners to be involved in using the language rather than just passively 'reading' or 'listening' to the lesson.

### **8.9 Summary and Concluding Comments**

In this chapter I examined evidence from my various data sources, my reflective journal, autobiographies of learners, interviews and class lessons, to explore the discursive influences on teaching practice and the spaces that enable or constrain the participation of learners in the classroom.

Evidence from my reflective journal suggested that the practice of reflection serves to improve teaching practice. Differences in culture and class can become barriers to effective teaching in that the facilitator/teacher may not be sensitive to the lived experiences and needs of the adult learners.

Evidence presented showed that the dominant power exerted by some facilitators/teachers silenced the voices of the learners, created situations of inequality and subverted the attempts of the organization to create democratic space for the learners. However, other facilitators created enabling environments for voice, empathy and understanding.

As noted in the chapters, the narrative in the form of autobiography allowed spaces for reflective thinking, consciousness-raising and empowerment.

Choosing a relevant curriculum to empower adult learners for everyday life is vital. Adults need empowerment in various aspects of their lives. Besides a pedagogy for consciousness, adults need empowerment to function in a society that demands reading, writing and communicative skills in the market place, institutions, child support, the work situation and all walks of society. The dominance of the English language in all these spheres has placed a demand on learners to be multilingual in order to attain economic liberation. The data showed that learners had acquired skills in letter writing, form filling, supporting their children with their homework and in the work place. However, some learners still felt inadequate in certain spheres.

A multimodal approach to teaching has many benefits for literacy teaching. A repertoire of teaching approaches rather than a technicist approach of finding the one right strategy is suggested by the data. Collaborative or co-operative teaching has many benefits for adult learners and interactive learner participation elicited the best results.

## CHAPTER NINE

### MY JOURNEY WITH A MISSION UNFOLDING

#### 9.1 Introduction

In this thesis I used the metaphor of a traveller on a journey with a mission to discover truths. In Chapters Two and Three I travelled the information highways and byways searching for roadmaps for this journey. I used these roadmaps to charter my course for this journey of discovery. In Chapter Four I searched for an appropriate vehicle for this arduous and bumpy journey. I used the vehicle to travel around exploring the lived experiences of the people I chose to visit. Many truths were uncovered from exploring the lived experiences of the people and in this chapter I pause a while to make sense of these truths. In my sojourn at this point, I present my insights, conclusions and implications to fellow travellers who would perhaps use these findings to clear the fog as they journey ahead.

In this study I used an eclectic approach, which included the feminist, critical postmodernist approaches to interrogate my critical question: What is the impact of adult English literacy curriculum on the lives of female adult learners? I use the metaphor of the journey with a mission unfolding, in the critical postmodernist sense to illustrate that there are no dead certainties in life or research (Hargreaves, 1995). From a 'scientific' research study in Harvard we are told by the mass media that drinking coffee might reduce the risk of the most common form of diabetes (Daily News, 2004: 5)<sup>39</sup>. On another day we are told that coffee is deleterious to human health and may cause cancer. On a daily basis we are bombarded with contradictory findings: on one day cholesterol causes heart attack, the next it does not. The great question is what is to be believed? Are there any answers? I do not claim to know all the answers. In my quest for the truth I found that a rigorous search for empirical evidence is imperative in research. It is

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<sup>39</sup> Daily News, Sapa, 2004, Sugar-Sweet News for Coffee Swillers Scared of Diabetes. January 7p5

within this context of continuous search for truth and meaning in a dynamic, changing society that I present my insights.

## **9.2 Methodological Insights**

### **9.2.1 Researching in a Matrix**

Researching in spaces that are in a constant state of flux presents many challenges. For instance attendance at adult literacy classes is erratic with a high drop out rate. Therefore, choosing candidates for a study becomes a challenge. Well laid research designs, sometimes need to be abandoned or improvised. Being attuned to serendipitous situations or events is a great help. The first serendipitous key that unlocked the door to finding rich data about the adult learner was 'letter writing'. Maria's letter provided me with an entry into a more intimate and personal world, revealing her voice as a mother, a South African citizen, a domestic worker and an entrepreneur. The authentic letters revealed insights about her family, how politics played out in her life, her financial circumstances, her social world, her relationship to me and my family, her trials and tribulations in life and how adult literacy impacted on her life.

Through letters we see the constraints of social structure on human agency and the complex relationship of the individual in a socio-cultural context. From the letters it was evident that adult literacy established meaningful friendships that went beyond the adult literacy classroom. The Personal Narratives Group (1989: 4) shows how feminist theory, which is grounded in interpreting women's lives use personal narratives as essential primary documents for feminist research. They can take many different forms including, biography, autobiography, life history, letters, diaries and journals. The letters were not an intended data source but because of Maria's circumstances, I had to make use of letter writing as means of obtaining data.

In this study, Maria relocated to her hometown Phalarbowa and was therefore unable to complete Interview Schedule Three. The main means of communication



was letter writing. Marks (1989) refers to the discovery of letters between the seventy-four year old White socialist Mabel Palmer, a fifteen year old Xhosa school girl, Lily Patience Moya and Violet Sibusiswe Makhanya, the first Zulu woman to train as a social worker in the United States of America. The letters provided Marks (1989: 39) with a “glimpse into a painful yet uncommon relationship at a particular moment in time”. Marks (1989) writes that the letters between Mabel Palmer, Lily Moya and Sibusiswe Makhanya help to move one beyond the ambiguities of life. They revealed the separate ways in which we all live but are made more frightening and separate by division of age, ethnicity and race. Through the contextualization of the letters of Mabel Palmer, Lily Moya and Violet Sibusiswe Makhanya, Marks (1989) points out that something of a differentiated meaning of the complex South African social order can be seen where race, gender and class are closely interwoven.

Research can become chaotic especially when well-laid out plans do not go according to schedule. The respondents, who were domestic workers, were unable to attend interview sessions because of their long hours at work or other demands on their lives. This necessitated conducting *in loco* interviews at informal settlements or at places of employment. I established better rapport in the interviews during the *in loco* visits, as these spaces provided more unfettered communication between interviewer and interviewee. The interviews *in loco* opened my ‘middle class Indian eyes’ to the situational realities of the learner and gave me pointers to the curriculum needs of the learners. How can one provide a relevant curriculum without knowledge of the realities of the learners’ lives?

For English literacy to have relevance, the content needs to be closely embedded in the learners’ everyday lives. I probed their life world and being *in loco* gave me rich insight into the way learners’ lived, their economic position and how adult literacy finds meaning in their life world (for more detail see chapter 6).

### 9.2.2 Autobiographical Writings, a Voice for the Marginalized Women

The autobiographical writing captured rich data in written language that helped to fill the gaps left by the interviews. It helped to triangulate data gathered from the interviews. The narrative offered the learners the space to be reflective; it allowed them the discursive space to delve deeply into issues of identity, early childhood, cultural, political and educational experiences. It also helped to explore their feelings as domestic workers and to write about their dreams and aspirations for the future. The narrative opened a window for me as the researcher to look into the subjective world of the learner. An impact study of this sort is incomplete without delving into the consciousness, the mind and emotions of the respondent. Designing methodologies or instruments to probe into these aspects of the human psyche is complex and challenging. Using a critical feminist postmodern perspective in this research, I have demonstrated that educational research is a non-linear and complex activity because there is no tangible reality out there. The methodological insights cited provided a more adaptable way of dealing with multiple realities because the methods exposed more directly the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the researched.

In constructing women's life stories, it becomes imperative to make use of methodological tools that will reflect and reveal a woman's life story in a multiplicity of ways. My task in using life history was to engage in learners' telling their story so that the *truth* emerged. But truth is an elusive concept and difficult to attain because each individual constructs reality from her own perspective and this depends on where the reality is being constructed. Although not a perfect instrument, the autobiography provided me rich data to make trustworthy pronouncements. The narrative inquiry that focuses on personal storytelling is intended to be emancipatory (Gough, 2001a: 21). Gough (2001a) finds that reflecting critically on stories that one reads, writes, hears, lives and tells may help one to understand how one uses them more responsibly and creatively and frees one from constraints.

As a pedagogical tool, the narrative in the form of autobiographical writings and letters has enormous possibilities for the educator and learner. In this study the narrative became a vehicle for consciousness-raising, self-reflection and emancipation of the mind. The narrative was also cathartic for the learners as it gave them the space for an outflow of suppressed, marginalized voices. Through their autobiographical writing skills they demonstrated their ability to articulate the often invisible, marginalized, female voice.

However, there are researchers who claim that the autobiographical writing is parochial and not objective enough (White, in The Personal Narratives Group, 1989). Le Guin (in Gough 2001c: 47) states that there is no such thing as:

*A total factual narrative were there is such a thing, it would be passive: a mirror reflecting all without distortion but fiction does not reflect, nor is the narrator's eye that of the camera. Fiction connects possibilities and by doing so it is useful to us.*

Harraway (in Gough, 2001c: 47) calls it diffraction, where the narrative is useful to educational researchers to (re)present the texts as fiction (the stories) rather than 'factual' narratives. Harraway (in Gough, 2001c: 47) explains it as an optical metaphor, which is not a reflection but a complex practice of making a difference in the world rather than displacing the same elsewhere. Gough (2001c) explains that critical storytelling can move beyond the reflexivity of texts where the narrative has the potential to allow discursive spaces within which knowledge and understanding can be produced by researchers. My research findings from Chapters Six to Nine reveal how diffraction can give researchers as well as adult learners, the knowledge and understanding to make a difference in the world. This resonates with Gough's (2001c: 21) contention that stories can be a powerful medium to emancipate and empower individuals.

### 9.3 Writing as a Means to Diffraction

The empirical evidence from all the data sources revealed that the adult female learners in this study were fettered by: poverty, power of class, race, politics,

employers, certain cultural practices and men. The study provided ample evidence from the lived experiences of the learners that feminist, critical postmodernist approaches to mediating the adult literacy curriculum can go a long way towards unfettering the shackles of the multiple forms of oppression mentioned above. However, the hegemony of dominant cultures had an equally compelling influence and impact on Black female adult learners. Adult literacy allowed learners the discursive space in the classroom to engage in critical literacy that raised their level of consciousness on issues that related to their life world but they were not always able to assert their empowerment because of the dominant mediating factors such as economic power relations and socio-cultural factors.

This research has revealed that adult learners were able to show a critical understanding of the political system of apartheid in South Africa and issues in the post-apartheid era. The learners understood their rights as domestic workers but they were unable to assert their empowerment because of the economic power that their employers had over them. The power relations between the employer and employee were in many cases hegemonic. Adult literacy gave learners the necessary tools to gain insight on the empowerment of domestic workers. But Black female learners who hailed from marginalized settings were unable to translate tangibly their knowledge and skills that they acquired.

The study has shown that poverty was a defining feature in the lives of the adult learners: it oppressed and excluded them from the mainstream of society. They experienced different kinds of poverty such as: physical poverty where there was lack of basic essential resources such as water, sanitation and lack of living space; economic poverty or the lack of finance to purchase basic food and clothing; political poverty, as a result of the politics of the land which certain privileged groups such as those from the dominant culture had greater power and they used this power to manipulate the disadvantaged Black people.

The learners expressed through their autobiographical writings and interviews how their employers, some adult educators and people with power, were able to

use their power to subjugate them. As female learners they were further discriminated against and experienced female oppression from the men in their family, spouses and society. Adult female learners thus experienced multiple-oppression in their daily lives. The experiences during apartheid and present day context made the learners believe that the dominant class, culture and language were superior. This resulted in a 'them' and 'us'. Society is divided between those that live in economically disadvantaged situations and those who are economically privileged. By being boxed into such categories as the 'other', learners have created tensions, which resulted in a blurring of identities and wanting to assimilate more characteristics of the dominant culture. The data affirmed that learners were critically conscious of their identity. They were proud of their Black identity. The majority of the learners did not reject their own African customs but they were trapped in complex, dynamic world with competing forces that resulted in desiring to be a part of the dominant cultures' identity (see Chapter Eight).

One major impact of the adult literacy education programme in this study is that it provided learners with a language of criticism, a language of hope and a language with which to analyze their social and material conditions. The narrative writing and spaces provided in the class discussions gave the learners the opportunity to reflect, to be critically conscious of their poverty, to act and to dream of their emancipation. Autobiographical writing was shown to be a good pedagogical tool which helped learners to journey from being merely reflective to being 'diffractive' where they were able to act upon their situation and bring about transformation wherever possible. Two of the four learners managed to lift themselves from the ravages of poverty and the other two, though materially poor are striving to improve their lives. All four have triumphed in spirit in very oppressive conditions. I cannot claim that adult literacy was the sole influence in this regard as the biographical experiences of the learners have to be taken into account; but adult literacy has certainly contributed in some way to empowering the learners.

Literacy raised their awareness of female consciousness and female oppression. The data did not show radical changes in the way learners interacted in society but it did reveal that learners made attitudinal shifts and showed how they asserted themselves within the changing Black South African cultural norms. Learners are no longer willing to accept the *status quo* at face value. Although, race, class, the patriarchal African society and certain African cultural norms and mores have impeded Black female learners, critical literacy offered them an opportunity to understand their rights as domestic workers and to acknowledge that their oppression, manipulation and exploitation are not of divine order but because of the ideological, economic and political contexts in which they live. Feminist pedagogy allowed learners through this autobiographical writing to uncover women's oppression and at the same time provided the source of insight and the means of action that could lead to social action and transformation.

### 9.4 English Curriculum Insights

#### 9.4.1 The Triple Bind of Language

In this research the learners experienced a triple bind. The first bind refers to the learners' quest for the English language to gain access in a market-led global economy that responds to globalization. As a once colonized country, in South Africa the English language gained dominance. With the impact of globalization, the English language is further entrenched as a dominant world language. I recognize the learners' quest for English as a passport to economic freedom, while I simultaneously recognize the importance of the learners' own language. The challenge is to recognize 'English' in the global economy of knowledge but to give equal prominence to the learners' own language and to develop counter practices which accords equal status to the learners own and other languages and to improve its currency in society. Learners have been forced to acquire the English language as this gives them opportunities for economic mobility, job security and access to essential services in society. Learners were denied access to

essential services in society because they did not have the necessary English competency skills.

The opposing forces of the double bind result in a tension between the need for their own indigenous language in daily life as well as English in many facets of their daily life.

The third bind occurs when the learners become marginalized within their own Black African communities when they cannot speak the dominant indigenous language within their own informal settlements. The derogatory word *Isilwane* is used to refer to those people who cannot speak 'pure' IsiZulu. Three of the four learners felt alienated and excluded in the community, because of the language barrier. They could not speak 'pure' IsiZulu. Thus the language had created a negative self-image in the learners.

### 9.5 Schisms in Identities

The study provides evidence that the language has created schisms in the learners' identities. The learners' identities are located spatially and in the way language is interacted. Learners were discriminated against for the way they spoke the English language. This affected the learners' psyche and identity. Those who had a better ability to speak the language were given a higher status in their societies, which enhanced their self-image. Those with poor English communicative skills, who were not necessarily intellectually incompetent, were labelled 'dom'. The word 'dom' in Afrikaans means stupid. This label affected their self-image and created schisms in their identities. The learners began to believe that proficiency in English was an indicator of superior intelligence, thus doubting their own abilities. I use the term *schism* to explain the split caused in the learners' identities. Learners acquired English literacy skills but this sometimes led to class stratification where those who acquired the language were regarded as high. This is what I call the Eliza Dolittle effect (see Chapter Nine). The hegemony of

English was so entrenched that it affected the learners' psyche and made them believe that "*English was a better way of life*" (see Bongiwe's autobiography). Learners who were unable to speak the dominant indigenous language of their own local community felt further ostracism. They were given the derogatory label *Isilwane* because they were unable to speak pure IsiZulu. This added to their negative self-image.

## **9.6 Implications for Curriculum**

Adult Basic Education in KwaZulu-Natal is too structured and formal, with great emphasis on the summative examinations. If adult education continues in the same direction as it is with the emphasis merely on certification and qualification and not on the needs of adult learners, there will be no incentive for learners to work towards a programme that has an impact on the lives of marginalized adult female learners in particular. Thus the educator has to work within the constraints of a curriculum that is not wholly relevant to the learners' lives and assist the learners in their quest for a better life. These were some of the realities that spurred me on to find creative ways to balance the need for empowerment and the functional realities of every day life. The reasons that motivated some of the learners to participate in the English literacy at AABEC were as follows:

- The educator made English literacy situationally relevant to the adult learners' needs
- The teaching methodologies and techniques were designed to suit the needs of adult learners' as additional language learners
- The learning and teaching environment was one where learners were given the discursive space to engage in critical dialogue, which sometimes led to the conscientization and liberation of the human mind
- The adult literacy class was viewed as a social institution, where learners were able to engage in authentic human development. Learners attended adult literacy classes because they found it as a social institution where they could meet friends, develop firm friendships and engage in activities that



improved their self-esteem. They developed strong friendship and support systems for one another that went beyond the boundaries of the classroom and continued after they were no longer part of the institution

The programme kept learners motivated, by improving their self-confidence and self-concept by employing and promoting co-operative learning, engaging in creative and dynamic teaching techniques and methodologies such collaborative teaching; acknowledging the practical constraints under which the women learn and accommodating these in the education programme and acknowledging the women's previous educational experience. The dominance of the English language in all these spheres has placed a demand for learners to be multilingual in order to attain economic liberation. The data showed that learners had acquired skills in letter writing, form filling, supporting their children with school and in the work place. Thus the challenge for curriculum developers is to provide a balanced curriculum that can provide the space for a feminist critical postmodern pedagogy and the pragmatic or utilitarian demands of income-generation.

### **9.6.1 Mediating the Curriculum**

A multimodal approach to teaching has many benefits for literacy teaching. A repertoire of teaching approaches rather than a technicist approach of finding the one right strategy is suggested by the data. Collaborative or co-operative teaching has many benefits for the adult learners and interactive learner participation elicited the best results.

Providing space for democracy in the classroom is the ideal for which all educators should strive. However, the dominant power exerted by some educators suppresses the voices of the learners and subverts democracy in the classroom.

### **9.7 Implications for Policy**

In line with the imperatives of the South African Constitution and the Bill of Rights, the ABET policy makes pronouncements of the state's intention to

achieving equity, equality and redress for the marginalized and disadvantaged people of the past. Ten years down the road, little has changed for the thousands of women who are still illiterate, marginalized and voiceless. The most recent census show that the illiteracy rate for women in South Africa is still too high (see Table 1.1). The Language in Education Policy (1999) and the ABET Policy document (A National Adult Basic Education & Training Framework, 1997) spelled out clearly that all official languages in South Africa are to be given equal status. However, in reality the implementation of the policy is far removed from its pronouncements. In KwaZulu-Natal ABET examinations and text books in most learning areas are written in English. This is in direct contradiction to the ABET policy document (A National Adult Basic Education & Training Framework, 1997) which states that learners should be given a choice to write their examinations in their preferred medium of language. In most tertiary institutions only English and Afrikaans are the medium of instruction. The matriculation examination is written either in English or Afrikaans and this is a passport to the learners' future in tertiary education, vocation, commerce and industry. The above anomalies have entrenched English as the language of dominance, which motivated adult learners to attend ABET and marginalized their African languages.

The ABET Act (2000: 2) makes special mention of giving redress to women by ensuring 'access to adult basic education and training by persons who have been marginalized in the past, such as women'. The 2001 Census figures have indicated that Black women in South Africa have been most excluded from adult education. The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education & Culture (2002) enrolment figures have shown an increase in the number of women enrolled yet the needs of female learners in informal areas such as the Mpolweni Informal Settlement have not been adequately addressed. The contradictions between policy and practice are that policy advances a rights-led approach, but market-led forces, serving the interests of international agencies and globalization, lead practice.

## 9.8 Implications for Further Research

This study has opened up pathways for future research. The following are suggested areas:

- Researching in spaces that are in a constant state of flux, with uncertainty the only certainty, is a methodological nightmare. With the lives of adult learners in continuous change, the researcher has to look at creative or alternative methods of inquiry. Impact studies require a protracted time span and some innovations. In this effort, telephone conversation and letter writing became useful instruments. To what extent does the researcher rely on serendipity in uncovering truths? More research needs to be done in this regard.
- The narrative in the form of autobiographical writing provided a rich data source. This source allowed me to peep into the minds of domestic workers. Since there has been a paucity of autobiographical research in the field of adult literacy in South Africa this opens up another avenue for further investigation.
- The power of language to cause schisms in identity requires further research and interrogation.
- Developing a balanced adult literacy curriculum that provides space for feminist, critical postmodern pedagogy, in conjunction with a curriculum for income-generation poses many challenges and needs intensive interrogation.
- More research needs to be conducted on the effectiveness of the NGO in supporting and supplementing the implementation of the ABET policy.
- Much has been written about the advantages of multilingualism but not much researched information has been offered to teachers to deal with its practicalities in the South African classroom.

### 9.9 Conclusion

As a traveler in my journey to uncover truth I conclude by quoting from Mandelas's (1995: 617) *Long Walk to Freedom*:

*I have walked that long road to freedom, I have tried not to falter; I have made missteps along the way. But I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come. But I can rest only for a moment, for with freedom come responsibilities, and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not yet ended.*

Like Mandela I feel like a traveller who has come to the end of the journey feeling unfettered but sees the boundless routes ahead. After making this long journey through many hills, mountains and plateaus, I take a break to pause and look back on what realities have been uncovered from the lived experiences of the people I met on the way. Having uncovered some of these realities I realize that there is no end to this journey as an eternity lies on the horizon and more truths or realities are to be uncovered.

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## APPENDIX 1

### AN EXEMPLAR OF A CHARACTER REFERENCE

The learners obtained certificates after writing their examinations but this brought little change to their lives except for the fortunate few, like Bongiwe, who were able to use the certificates for upward mobility. However, the character references given at AABEC served as a 'report card' to improve attendance, punctuality and motivation for adult literacy. It also held some small promise for learners to use as a character reference to obtain a job.

#### CHARACTER REFERENCE: BONGIWE

Bongiwe has been a learner at Asoka Adult education institution for three years. During this period she was an individual with a great thirst for knowledge and who reached for her dreams. She was always punctual and took great pride over her work. Her dedication, commitment and intellectual prowess paid dividends when she obtained a Merit pass in the Level Two Communications in English with the Independent Board Examination. Bongiwe has always been a role model for the class, offering motivational talks on how to cope during difficult times. The learners looked up to her because she was one of few learners who broke through the mould of being a domestic worker and moved to greater heights.

AABEC was proud when she worked at Olympic Security Services and was trained on the use of a gun. In her full security uniform Bongiwe achieved part of her dream to get rid of crime off the streets. Danie, her boss recognized her potential and soon set her up in the office where she worked as an assistant. When she lost her job through retrenchment, she soon found a job as a PRO for an Indian spice emporium. Her job entailed promoting and selling curry powder. In order to increase sales she found an innovative idea by preparing mutton curry and requesting customers to sample, which increased her sales.

As a single parent Bongiwe prides herself in setting values for her daughter. They have a healthy balanced life style. She jogs at least four times a week and believes in eating healthy foods. In Bongiwe's room is a little box that contains books. On top sits a Bible that takes pride of place. She calls that her library. Improving her education has always been the hallmark of Bongiwe. Her perseverance to continue with education by attending adult classes reveal that she is an individual who will strive and seek and will never yield to obstacles until her dreams are fulfilled.

*Mrs. K. Perumal*

Asoka Adult Basic Education Co-operative(AABEC)  
H.O.D. Languages Inanda Newtown Comprehensive

*This reference was written in 2000 for Bongiwe.*

## APPENDIX 2

### CONTRACT BETWEEN MEMBERS OF AABEC

The Asoka Adult Basic Education Co-operative (AABEC) is a programme for adult learners in the neighbourhood of Reservoir Hills who have not completed their formal education. It finds jobs or houses and cannot help with the financial or social problems.

AABEC will:

- Provide classes on Tuesdays and Thursday evenings during House of Delegate school terms;
- Provide classes in Zulu literacy, or English literacy as a second language, English and Math's;
- Provide other classes if asked for by learners and if there are facilitators to teach those classes;
- Make small payments to facilitators for their attendance as funds allow;
- Give learners a place on the programme if they attend regularly;
- Provide classes free unless payment is agreed by the learner-facilitator meeting;
- Provide writing books and workbooks as required;
- Provide transport as funds allow for learners coming from far away.

The learners will:

- Attend on time;
- Attend regularly so that they do not delay other learners;
- Let the teacher /co-ordinator know if they wish to leave the programme;
- If they do not attend for three lessons in a row without telling the facilitator they will lose their place in class.

#### General

- No-one should laugh at any other learner's efforts;
- Facilitator's should ensure that slower learners have a chance to understand;
- If homework is set learners should do work;
- Everyone should listen politely to the person who is speaking and not interrupt;
- Learners should speak freely to their class teacher about any difficulties;
- Each class will elect two representatives who can talk to the class teacher. Each class shall have a meeting once a month with their representative to give ideas or talk about problems. Class representatives can then meet with the teachers or the project co-ordinators. The co-coordinating co-committee will try to answer the learners educational needs
- First names can be used between; learner and learner; and learner and teacher.

## Appendix 2 (cont.)

- Everyone will respect and help each other and share what they know:
  - Learners and teacher
  - Teacher and learners
  - Learner and learner
  - Men will respect the women
  - Women will respect the men
  - Each will respect each other's political beliefs, religion and culture
- No alcohol to be drunk before classes;
- No weapons to be brought to classes;
- All books and writing materials and library books belong to the project and must be looked after and returned.
- Learners to bring pens and pencils;
- The classroom and surroundings must be kept clean and tidy;
- Other people's belongings must not be touched.

I agree to this code of conduct drawn up by learners and facilitators of the Asoka Adult Education Co-operative.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX 3

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

In the first unstructured interview schedule, the learners were asked about their life history. The interview schedule proceeded as follows:

- Focus questions for the interview were:
- What can you tell me about your early childhood?
- What was your early schooling like?
- Why did you leave school?
- What did you hope to achieve from an ABET course?
- What are some of the roles you played in your home, family, community?

#### **Interview Schedule One- Unstructured Interview**

##### **Biographical Details:**

1. Name:
2. Home Languages
3. Schools attended
4. Place of birth

##### **Interview Questions**

1. Describe your childhood.

- ∖ Prompts: Comment on the kind of relationship you had with your:
- Parents, Mother
  - Father
  - Siblings
  - Friends

2 Describe your early childhood?

- Prompts:
- Happiest childhood experiences
- Challenges and obstacles that you had to face
- Social issues
- Cultural practices
- Political issues
- Historical issues

3 Describe your primary school days?

- Prompts:
- Role of the teacher
- The use of English at school
- The teaching of the English
- Resources: types textbooks, readers and access to libraries
- Discipline
- Teaching methodology
- Subjects taught
- Quality assurance-Pass rate of learners
- Finance
- Support from parents/ siblings

4 Describe the relationship with your partner.

- Prompts
- Decision-making
- Finance
- Control/power
- Physical/emotional abuse
- Cultural issues
- Social issues
- Empowerment

- Expectations
  - Children /expectations
- 5 Discuss the various roles you play in your community.
- Prompts
  - Religious organizations
  - Political organizations
  - Community organizations
  - Educational organizations
- 6 What did you expect to gain from ABET?
- Prompts
  - Why did you attend?

### **Interview Schedule Two- Semi-Structured Interview**

The purpose of this interview schedule was to probe:

- What skills ABET had equipped adult learners for the adult world.
- Whether ABET assisted in improving their English lessons.
- Whether ABET assisted them as domestic workers.
- Whether ABET improved their self-esteem.
- Whether ABET empowered adult learners.
- Whether physical resources assisted in the teaching-learning situation
- Whether examinations and portfolio assessments benefited the learners in any way.

### **Skills**

1. Discuss the type of skills that an ABET programme should offer?
- Prompts to be given only when the learner cannot initiate discussion:
  - Bank forms
  - Job application forms
  - Opening account
  - Post Office
  - Letter writing



## **Lessons**

1. Did you understand the language used by the facilitators?
  - Text used in the classroom
  - Cultural issues in the texts
  - Was the syllabus catering for the adult domestic workers' needs?
2. Express your views on code switching.
3. Comment on the various aspects of English literacy.
  - Reading
  - Writing
  - Grammar
  - Orals
4. Do you think ABET assist you in acquiring English?
5. What were some of the difficulties you faced in your English lessons? ?
6. Describe your teaching learning experience at AABEC? Comparative questions /primary school
  - Prompts:
  - Role of the teachers
  - The use of English at AABEC
  - The teaching of the English AABEC
  - Resources: types textbooks, readers and access to library books
  - Teaching methodology
  - Subjects taught
  - Quality assurance-Pass rate of learners

## **As A Domestic Worker**

7. As a domestic worker what would you consider relevant in an ABET curriculum?
8. Did your employer acknowledge your certificate?
9. Did literacy help you obtain a better job?

## **Assessments**

- 10 Do you think it was good to have the portfolio segment in the testing programme?
- 11 Did you enjoy doing the portfolio?
- 12 . Did it help you in any way?
- 13 How did you feel about participating in discussions, debates and drama?
- 14 Did you think it was good to write examinations?
- 15 . How did you feel about obtaining your I.E.B? Certificate?

## **Physical Resources**

16. Were you able to understand the readers?
17. How did the circular seating arrangement during discussion compare to being seated in rows during normal teaching?

## **Literacy For Empowerment**

18. How would you describe the way the facilitators taught at AABEC?
  - Was there scope for learners to communicate freely in English in class?
  - Were learners free to challenge ideas given by the facilitators?
  - Did only the facilitator do “teaching” or was it a two way process?
  - Would you say there were times that learners had differing viewpoints but were unable to express it at literacy class?
  - During the learner representative meeting could learners speak freely?

## **Interview Schedule: Three**

### **The purpose of interview schedule three was:**

- To trace the impact of the English literacy curriculum on four adult female learners (post literacy).
- Probe whether English literacy empowered them in the community, family, employment and relationships.
- Probe whether ABET fulfilled their desired needs.
- Probe whether literacy skills helped them to change their vocation.
- Probe whether any literacy skills had taken place.

### **Interview Questions**

1. Since leaving AABEC were you able to use the IEB certificate for any personal gain?
2. Have you been able to change your job since 1998?
3. After leaving literacy classes did you continue with any other training?
4. If literacy classes were offered in 2002 what would be the main skills you would like ABET to offer?
5. What do you consider important in an ABET class income-generation skills or literacy skills?
6. Do you think the literacy skills that you acquired have helped you in any way over the past few years?
7. Have you read a book since you left ABET?
8. Do you read the newspapers?
9. Do you think that you might have forgotten some of the English literacy skills that you were taught?
10. Do you think you are able to write in English at the same level, as you were when you attended AABEC?

11. Would you say, in the year 2002, that there has been any change to the way you are treated by your;

- Husband/boyfriend
- Employer
- Children

## Appendix 4

Reservoir Hills  
Durban  
4091

To Whom It May Concern

Request: Permission to use AABEC as my case study.

I am currently working towards my doctoral thesis and would appreciate being granted permission to use AABEC as my research site. The knowledge I obtain from this thesis will be invaluable in contributing to a much-needed field of research.

As an adult facilitator I always had a burning desire to enquire why adults learn? And to have an understanding of the purpose as well as the impact literacy has on the learners' life worlds. The research from AABEC will provide clearer insights on the impact of English literacy curriculum on adult learners.

For this research I will require to observe lessons and interview learners. I look forward to your co-operation.

With kind regards

Krishnee Perumal

## APPENDIX 5

Your Ref.: Krishnee Perumal  
Reservoir Hills  
Durban  
4091

Dear Learner

### Request: Permission to have you as a Respondent in D.Ed Studies

I wish to inform you about my D.Ed studies and my desire to interview you for the research. This study requires, approximately ten interviews, during different periods of the year. The research would be conducted over a long period.

I request your participation in this research project mainly through interviews. I will make every attempt to accommodate your needs for the interviews. My research is based on the impact of adult English literacy curriculum on female learners from AABEC. I will be using some of your written efforts, taped English lessons and interviews.

Your co-operation in this project would assist in contributing to the field of ABET. I hope it gives you an opportunity to express your concerns about ABET.

With kind regards

Krishnee Perumal

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