

**An exploration of the use of homework as teaching and
assessment strategy in the Foundation Phase: The case of three
Durban North schools**

by

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DECLARATION

I, **Melody Nkosingiphile Mtshali**, declare that

1. The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, and is my original research.
2. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
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SUPERVISOR'S STATEMENT

As supervisor, I hereby approve/ not approve this thesis for submission to be examined

Professor Thabo Msibi:

Signature _____

Date _____

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to:

The **Lord Jesus** who has taught me to walk in the obedience of His ways, and who continually moves me into the purpose for which I was created.

My late father Jabulani Steven Mtshali, who instilled in me the importance of education. My mother Cabangile Grace Mtshali, who always emphasised independence in me as a woman. My sister Nombuso Princess Mtshali, who encouraged me to do this course, for always assuring me that this course is do-able. My mentor Dr Sarasvathy Moodley, for her kindness, wisdom, inspiration, encouragement and support at the beginning of this journey.

My child, Wakhiwe Mawande Mahlobo, whose support and patience made this work worth the while and for the sacrifice of his time and understanding me through my hard time journey. May you know that education is the key to success. May God bless you and shine upon you at all times.

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- I look back with appreciation to all my family and friends who constantly motivated me and encouraged me to persevere.

ABSTRACT

Homework in general is defined as schoolwork assigned to learners for completion at home. Teachers assign homework to consolidate what was taught during the class or to provide some consolidation tasks for learners. South Africa, being a developing country, has high levels of resource inequality and family structures are often unstable, with either one or both parents not being present. This can contribute to children not getting the home support that they need.

This focus of this study was to explore the utilisation of homework as a teaching and assessment strategy in the Foundation Phase. This study adopted a case study methodology, with the case being schools located in the North of Durban. The following research methods were used to generate the data: semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis. Both these methods were utilised in order to generate the rich, thick data required in qualitative research.

The sampling procedure considered appropriate for this study led to the selection of six grade three teachers. These teachers came from three different schooling contexts, i.e. a former Model C school, a former House of Delegates (Indian) school and former Department of Education and Training (African) school in a township. The data was analysed using thematic analysis.

The findings revealed poor administration of homework by teachers. Most teachers assign homework in the Foundation Phase for the sake of giving it, in accordance with school policy. Learners do not benefit much from doing homework as generally teachers do not give any feedback, and complain about having no time to do this. Homework does not feature in the plans and time-tables for teachers. Moreover, Listening and Speaking periods are being used for assessment of learners' homework.

It was also clear that teachers work in deprived schooling contexts, where learners have no parental support to complete their homework tasks. There was also very little variation in the type of homework that was allocated to learners; all learners were mostly allocated the same homework, regardless of their learning barriers. Based on these findings, the study fundamentally asks whether the assignment of homework to younger learners is worthwhile, and also calls for more work in this area.

ACRONYMS

CAPS	Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements
DoE	Department Of Education
FP	Foundation Phase
HOD	Head of Department
SA	South Africa
US	United States

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1. CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

1.1 Introduction

The poor performance of South African learners on national and international benchmarks tests in Mathematics and English has prompted the South African Department of Basic Education to think deeply about educational innovation (Mathews, Mdluli & Ramsingh, 2014). Homework has been seen as one of the intervention strategies that have been advocated for learners in order to consolidate their schoolwork at home.

There is contestation in the literature about the usefulness of homework as a teaching and assessment strategy (Kunene, 2016). This is because literature suggests that teachers often battle to select appropriate tasks to be undertaken as homework and also often do not take the abilities of learners into account. Furthermore, teachers have been found in some studies not to be actively considering the household needs of learners, including the family backgrounds that learners come from when assigning homework (Sewpaul & Pillay, 2014)

Sewpaul and Pillay (2014) acknowledge the relationship between household structure and family supervision when learners are completing homework. In South Africa the two-parent family structure is often replaced by single-parent, grandparent-headed or other alternative family structures (Sewpaul & Pillay, 2014). This invariably has an impact in the ways in which learners are able to complete homework or receive support when they get home after school.

The allocation of homework in the Foundation Phase is also an issue much contested by parents and teachers (Rudman, 2014). Often, there is no clear homework policy amongst teachers about how to plan, design and mark homework when allocated to younger learners (Rudman, 2014). Rudman (2014) furthermore notes that there is no effectiveness in the allocation to younger learners, especially as it relates to homework as a teaching and learning tool. Other studies conducted around the world show that homework has almost no effect on children's learning at primary school level (Rudman, 2014). In addition, the allocation of homework to younger learners in a uniform manner is often contested. Rudman (2014) argues that if homework was assigned according to different abilities to meet the learners' preferred learning styles then it would become a more effective learning tool. Often teachers assign similar homework task for all learners.

While there have been multiple criticisms directed at the practice of homework allocation, there also have been strong voices in support of homework. Holte (2016) argues that homework plays an important role in supporting childhood development. This view has also been found to be supported by teachers who claim that homework is important for learning both school subject and a good work ethic (Holte, 2016). Ndebele (2015) suggests that if parents are involved in supporting their children, homework in the Foundation Phase can aid learners' development in English and Mathematics. Moreover, it is claimed that, when parents are involved in reading-related activities outside of school, children's reading performance is likely to improve, along with English and language skills and their general love for reading (Ndebele, 2015). However, some other studies have found little effect on the development of a good work ethic, and have argued that homework may be counterproductive as children develop strategies to get away with doing as little as possible, experience physical and emotional fatigue, and lose interest in school (Holte, 2016).

In South Africa, given the great emphasis that has been placed on homework allocation and completion through the curriculum, important question gets raised: Might homework be the panacea in sorting out South Africa's educational problems? Furthermore, given that there continues to be illiteracy amongst parents and grandparents who are tasked with supervising the children with homework (Ndebele, 2015), a serious question ought to be asked: who supervises the homework at home?

While this study does not seek to respond to these important questions above, its design and focus pertain to the ways in which homework is adopted as a teaching and assessment strategy by teachers in the early years of schooling. Fundamentally, the study is concerned with the exploration of the various ways in which Foundation Phase teachers use homework as a teaching and assessment strategy.

1.2 Background and rationale

I have 15 years teaching experience and I am a parent of a 15-year-old boy who is an average learner. Regarding my topic, I have teaching experience both as a manager (Acting Head of Department), teacher and as a parent, as I have also assigned homework to learners, sent learners for detention for incomplete homework and held meeting with the parents for incomplete homework. As a teacher who has taught all the Foundation Phase classes from grade one to grade three, I have observed the advantages and disadvantages of homework as a learning and assessment strategy. Furthermore, as a parent I have observed the frustration at

home whereby my child was not coping because of a new concept that was taught at school and that was given as homework. As a parent, I could not help because of my lack of knowledge of concepts taught in that particular subject area. In my school, I have observed that some learners do not complete homework due to the number of reasons, like lack of parental support and different learning abilities.

In this study, I seek to explore the various ways in which homework is administered by teachers in the Foundation Phase. This study is particularly focused on the Foundation Phase, given the recent findings by various studies suggesting that the early years are critical for educational achievements and the life success of any child (Black, Walker, Fernald, Andersen, DiGirolamo & Devercelli, 2017). I selected three schooling contexts, a former Model C school, a former House of Delegates (Indian) school and former Department of Education and Training (African) school in the township. The study was also informed by existing literature internationally raising serious questions about the effectiveness of homework in the early years (Cooper, Robinson & Patall, 2006). I therefore respond to this existing international work by exploring this area, the Foundation Phase (FP), in which there still exists serious inequalities (racial, class, gender) amongst learners, which affect their educational attainments. Thus, in a context of inequalities, I ask whether homework can be administered successfully, especially in the early years of schooling.

The homework process begins with teachers; teachers not only assign homework but they design it (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001). Due to the experience I have regarding homework, when designing homework, I give reasonable homework so that my learners are able to manage at home without frustrating their parents. However, this practice is not always followed by all teachers.

Apart from the personal motivation that led to the interest in pursuing the study. I also had scholarly reasons. Studies have found that teachers allocate homework haphazardly, without a clear strategy. Studies have observed that teachers often do not know how to allocate homework nor do they have a sense of how much homework is considered useful. Coutts (2004) suggests that too much homework for primary school children could have a negative impact on children's attitudes towards school. In this regard, teachers sometimes expect a parent to teach a child a new concept through homework. In Australia and Sweden, the parents called for a national policy to limit homework time for the children (Marzano & Pickering, 2007) due to poor administration of homework by teachers in school. Määttä and

Uusiautti (2012), in Finland, note that the curriculum for all early childhood development focusses on the significant role of play in fostering children's physical, cognitive, social and emotional development. Thus, homework is never allocated in that country. The aim of the FP is just to prepare children for reading and mathematics through age-appropriate preparatory activities.

The third concern that led me to do this study pertains to the actual work gets done at home. In South Africa, according to the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements, projects and assignments should be given to learners as homework. Such projects and assignments earn the learner's marks. However, the question is: at FP level, who does these projects at home? Is it the learner or parent? This question gets more complicated in the early years where the independence of learners is still very much in question. This issue becomes even more complicated if a child has learning difficulties (Dudley-Marling, 2003). I wanted to contribute to the existing literature on homework in order to unpack the ways in which this is administered and its effect on the life of the child.

Furthermore, there are gaps when it comes to the teachers' allocation of homework at the FP level when looking at the South African literature. I therefore also wanted to contribute to advancement in this field, in order to assist those involved in the education process to gain an understanding of existing practices in schools.

Apart from the local South African contribution on homework, I also wanted to contribute to the existing international literature. International studies have shown that there are homework policies in place which the schools and the teachers follow when administering the homework programme. I wanted to do the study given the existing inequalities in SA (South Africa). International studies completed have largely been in global contexts where resources, parental support and an ideal environment for the administration of homework in early years may be in place. This dissertation is therefore both responding to a personal motivation as well as the scholarly gaps that exist in the literature.

1.3 Focus and purpose

The focus of this qualitative case study is on six grade three teachers from three different schools in North of Durban. The purpose of this study was to explore the use of homework as teaching and assessment strategy in the FP and how teachers utilise homework as a teaching and assessment strategy in the FP.

1.4 Objectives

The objectives of this study were to understand how homework is utilised as a teaching and assessment strategy in the FP. In more specific terms, the study had three objectives:

1. The study sought to understand the reasons for the use of homework by teachers in the FP.
2. The study sought to explore the various ways in which homework is being used by the teachers as a teaching and assessment strategy.
3. The study sought to understand the reasons behind the use of homework in the way it is being used.

1.5 Research questions

The undertaking of this research study was guided by the objectives, outlined above, which are in line with the following three research questions:

1. Why do teachers use homework as a teaching and assessment strategy in FP?
2. How do teachers use homework as teaching and assessment strategy in the FP?
3. What are the underlying reasons for the ways in which homework is being used as a teaching and assessment strategy in the FP?

These research questions drove this study. In answering the first question, I set out to find out the reason why teachers use homework as teaching and assessment strategy in their classrooms. I wished to gain an insight into teachers' personal experiences and views about homework. In the second question, my intention was to see, from the teachers' and learners' homework books, how the homework programme was being administered in schools by teachers as well as how often homework is being assigned. I wanted to understand the various ways in which homework is planned and designed by the teachers, including how learners may have been accommodated. I also wanted to explore the underlying reasons for the manner in which homework is being allocated by the teachers.

1.6 Research methodology

For this study I made use of a qualitative approach that is situated within the interpretative paradigm. Qualitative research normally studies people or system by interacting with and observing the participants in their natural environment. It focuses on their meanings and interpretation (Nieuwenhuis, 2015). In this study I analysed 18 homework documents of the learners and interviewed six teachers through a case study methodology, in order to understand the administration of homework and their understanding when it comes to homework. I used a case study approach as my research methodology as I believed that it would help me generate thick, rich data from my participants (Yin, 2009). Furthermore, opting for a case study approach also provided me some opportunities to work with the selected grade three teachers in close proximity, thereby adding a human element to the study.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2013) describe an interpretive paradigm as being concerned with the individual, and as aiming to understand from within the subjective world of human experience. It focuses on actions to establish the intentions of actors. The paradigm informing the study was thus interpretive.

1.7 Significance of the study

This study will contribute to scholarship on homework and its importance for teaching and learning. This study will also contribute to debates on inequality in education in SA. This study may give insight into strategies that work and those that do not.

1.8 Structure of the thesis

Here follows the systematic layout showing the remaining chapters of this research study. This current chapter, chapter one, has provided a brief background on the use of homework in South African context and some of the existing literature. This chapter highlights the background to this study and the rationale for the study as well the purpose. It explains the objectives of the study and indicates the research questions that drove this research undertaking. The chapter also explores the significance of the study.

The second chapter presents a review of the existing literature on homework in FP. Within this chapter, I also explain the theoretical framework adopted by this study. The chapter goes

on to review both national and international literature that contributes towards this study. The aim is to clearly establish the gap that this study sought to fill.

The third chapter presents and discusses the research approaches and methods used to collect and analyse data for this study. This study is qualitative in design, with a case study research methodology. Under this chapter I discuss research methodology. I also offer details about the research site and the sampling techniques adopted as well as the data collection methods adopted for this study. Reflexivity and ethical issues are also discussed towards the end of this chapter. This chapter further highlights the data analysis process used for this study: the study analysed data using inductive reasoning by searching for themes and categories.

The fourth chapter discusses and presents the findings of the study. Here the data collected from the interview sessions with the participants is presented. The chapter discloses the processes followed in organising the data and the themes that emerged. Through these themes, this chapter explains what the data reveals about the use of homework in grade three.

The fifth and final chapter discusses the implications for the study and provides a summary of the findings and concludes the study. This chapter further shows how this study has answered the three research questions. The implications of this study in terms of policy, practice and research are discussed.

1.9 Conclusion

In the above chapter, I have provided a brief overview of the use of homework in the FP. I have indicated the intention of this research undertaking by explaining the objectives of this study as well as the research questions and purpose. This chapter also highlights the significance of this study and goes on to explain the structural layout of this thesis, providing a brief outline of what each chapter discusses. The next chapter will discuss the theoretical framework and review existing literature.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Homework has been used instrumentally as an assessment strategy by teachers both locally and internationally due to its supposed benefit for many years. However, these ‘benefits’ are often falsely assumed to accrue equally across all stages of the schooling programme, forgetting the age of a child that plays a major role in the teaching and learning process. Margolis and McCabe (2004) claim that the use of homework in primary school as a teaching and assessment strategy has a negative impact on learners cognitively and it becomes a burden to parents (Dudley-Marling, 2003). In my journey to explore the use of homework by teachers as teaching and assessment strategy in the FP of schooling, I present the overview of homework usage nationally and internationally. This broad discussion is followed by an analysis of emergent themes from reading the related literature. The following themes emerged: benefits of homework in the learner achievement, learner socio-economic background, administration of homework (designing and feedback), parent involvement in homework and learner motivation. In this chapter I will discuss each of these themes, including the theoretical framework informing the study.

2.2 Overview

Homework has turned out to be an essential part of the school curriculum and policy, however the evidence base for its inclusion is contestable and questionable (Kunene, 2016). Kunene (2016) notes that, in South African schools, homework is a legal requirement. Schools are therefore expected to design and assign homework to learners. In addition, most schools have included homework in the standard teaching and learning process but the reason for its use is hardly understood by teachers (Kunene, 2016). Khan, Ahmad, Khan and Begum (2015) note that homework should comprise a limited amount of academic work given to the learners, which they need to complete at their homes. This indicates that homework should be relevant to the learners and manageable. Khan *et al.* (2015) note that learners are given homework for a variety of reasons, which includes completing the course in time, preparing learners for assessment and allowing parents to know about their child’s academic performance.

According to Valle, Pan, Regueiro, Suarez, Tuero and Nunes (2015), while there is adequate evidence on the connection between time spent on homework and learner’s academic achievements in the different educational stages, researchers are still far from reaching an

agreement on whether or not homework should be assigned. Furthermore, Murillo and Martinez-Garrido (2014) explain that for a few decades, there have been multiple arguments about the benefits of setting homework in schools. These have ranged from the minimum age of assigning tasks for homework as well as the appropriate kind and quantity of tasks.

Vatterott (2011) argues that homework started generations ago when schooling consisted primarily of reading, writing and mathematics; rote learning primarily dominated education at this stage. Simple tasks of memorization were easy for learners to do at home (Vatterott, 2011).

While homework has been generally seen as a positive practice and accepted without question as a part of learner routine, particularly as it related to rote learning, homework in U.S schools changed from one simply surrounding tasks of memorizing mathematical fact, or writing spelling words, to difficult projects (Vatterott, 2011). In addition, in the early 20th century, homework has been used in U.S schools to develop the automaticity of learners (Lowe, 2017). This implies that homework was given to discipline the learner's minds with assignments. Lowe (2017) suggests that during the 19th century, the major drive in schools was rote learning, meaning that homework activities involved memorising math facts and spelling words. However, this has gradually changed, with homework being used as an additional curriculum to enhance learning (Murillo & Martinez-Garrido, 2014).

In SA, Kunene (2016) indicates that The National Department of Education states that homework should be introduced to give learners the opportunity to strengthen skills, knowledge and attitudes which have been taught at schools. Kunene (2016) further emphasises that the balance between too little homework or no homework can deny a learner the opportunity for further development. In contrast, too much homework can be frustrating and stressful. In addition, he notes that the duty of a parent is to monitor and supervise homework at home, while the school management team administers the thorough organisation and supervision of homework in order to make sure that learners are not overburdened and deprived excessively of their free time to do other things, like watching television and having after school play time, especially in the FP (Kunene, 2016).

While these assertions from Kunene (2016) appear to be neutral and without needing question, there are emerging concerns from the international scholarship, particularly about the usage and appropriateness of homework as a teaching and assessment tool in the FP.

Another issue that emerges from an overview of the literature concerns the lack of policy clarity when it comes to issuing homework. Policies related to the use of homework differ from school to school and there is little understanding about the resources of evidence that support the wide practice of homework in schools (Kunene, 2016). In South Africa, homework is a requirement by the DoE, but it is the prerogative of the school to decide on the school's policy. Pfeiffer (2018) notes homework is generally defined as schoolwork brought home. However, if a homework policy is discussed, it is usually done in general terms, and different types of homework assignments are put together under the same policy. Often teachers lack the skills and expertise for designing and assigning homework, something that directly impacts on policy design pertaining to homework (Khan *et al.*, 2015). In the USA for instance, in 1901, the state of California banned the homework programme due in part to policy variations from school to school. Despite California's action of banning homework, in US, they have a policy that understands homework as a positive strategy to grow the minds of learners (Lowe, 2017), and still have in place differing policies from school to school.

While there may be differing school policies, Rudman (2014) notes the variety of ways that legislation and policy provide guidance to schools on homework. He notes that Australia and the United States of America are two leading contributors of homework allocation. Moreover, in Australia the state policy permits the principal of the school to decide what constitutes a realistic amount of homework. This suggests that in that context, while the policies may differ in each school, there is an overriding guide on what constitutes fair homework allocations; teachers only have to develop guidelines that follow school policies on designing, assigning and giving the feedback to learners.

Määttä and Uusiautti (2012) note that, in Finland, the Department of Social Affairs and the Department of Health are in charge of maintaining and developing family policy and the welfare of children, youth and families. However, these two departments work together with other departments to ensure the well-being of humans (Määttä & Uusiautti, 2012). Määttä and Uusiautti (2012) report that Finnish family policy rests on three pillars: a child-oriented society, thriving families with children and the prevention of social exclusion. Moreover, Määttä and Uusiautti (2012) state that Finnish early education is characterised by the EDUCARE model, which means the interconnectedness of education and care as well as learning as the foundation of pedagogical action.

Furthermore, Tam and Chan (2016) state that, in Hong Kong, its Curriculum Development Council gives emphasis to the setting of meaningful homework so that the essential functions can be met by stressing its quality, not quantity. Zhu and Leung (2012) indicate that the historical up-and-down status of public attitudes toward homework shows that understanding about the role of homework in children' learning is far from comprehensive and clear.

In the above situation, I have provided an overview on homework usage, including history and policies. It is clear that there are contestations in literature on the usefulness of homework as a teaching and assessment strategy, including the manner in which homework is handled from one context to the next. Given these contestations, it is then important to explore existing work on how homework is being used by teachers as a teaching and assessment strategy. In exploring this point, six themes emerged from the literature. These are: the benefit and effects of homework in learner achievement, homework and socio-economic background, homework and the prescribed curriculum, administration of homework, homework and parental involvement and homework and learner motivation. I begin with the first theme below.

2.3.1 Benefits and effects of homework on learner achievement

A review of literature I engaged with suggests that there is still a lack of strong experiential support for the idea that homework assists learner achievement, despite tangible evidence supporting this (Trautwein, Koller, Schmitz & Baumert, 2002). For example, a study conducted by Trautwein *et al.* (2002) in Germany showed that there is a positive effect when Mathematics homework is frequently given to learners. However, only brighter learners showed results. Conversely, cognitively challenged learners performed poorly. Carr (2013) states that studies have found that learners with disabilities experience more difficulty with homework compared to their classmates with no disabilities.

Many learners with learning disability experience challenges with organising and maintaining attention, as well as problems with completing assignments and bringing home the appropriate materials to complete homework assignments (Walker, Collins & Moody, 2014). Margolis and McCabe (2004) argue that homework is often too difficult for learners with learning barriers. This is more so the case as teachers gives the same homework to all the learners forgetting to cater for the learners with disabilities (Margolis & McCabe, 2004). Learners with learning barriers avoid tasks like homework because it requires them to work independently (Margolis & McCabe, 2004).

Some studies have highlighted that learner achievement results can only be achieved if homework is assigned in a measured manner. For instance, Núñez, Suarez, Rosário, Vallejo, Valle and Epstein (2015) show that there is a positive relationship between time spent on homework and achievement. Research suggests that homework assignments that are too lengthy have a negative effect on learners (Trautwein *et al.*, 2002). This implies that, even in the FP, assigning too much homework to bright learners may have a negative effect. Rudman (2014) thus suggests that homework should be allocated according to the different abilities of learners.

Another emerging point in relation to learner achievement pertains to the age and levels of study. For instance, literature suggests that the positive effects on academic achievement are shown in high schools rather than primary schools (Trautwein *et al.*, 2002). Núñez *et al.* (2015) argue that homework helps learners to develop study habits and thus improve their academic achievements, but this does not apply in primary school, as learners at this stage are too young to undertake homework in any meaningful manner. Núñez *et al.* (2015) support this point. Their study showed that learner achievement in the FP was insignificant. In addition, the younger children were shown to have less well-developed study habits, with parents also minimally being involved in the work of their children (Rønning, 2011). This suggests that, while older children may benefit from homework programmes in terms of developing good study habits and improving their academic achievements, younger children may not benefit as they are still young and they need to enjoy after school activities at home, activities like playing and bonding with parents and siblings.

Rudman (2014) presents a negative sight of homework for younger children. He claims that homework does little to increase the child's learning and can even hinder a learner's learning experiences. Moreover, it disturbs family life and confuses parents and children. Rudman (2014), in his study, found that the findings of studies on homework and learner achievement revealed a negative relationship between the two.

Furthermore, Rudman (2014) contests the idea of homework being better for older children. He notes that as children grow bigger and obtain more homework, they find homework more boring; their attitude towards homework therefore changes. Long-term academic benefits, such as better study habits and skills, greater self-direction, greater self-discipline, better time management and more independent problem solving have been found to be some of the

benefits achieved when doing homework. This applies to older learners; however these ideas are also contested, as the above section clearly shows.

2.3.2 Homework and socio-economic background

The solid legacy of apartheid and the resulting correlation between wealth and education have meant that in general, poorer South African learners achieve worse academically (Spaull, 2013). Furthermore, racial segregation was abolished more than 20 years ago but schools that were White dominant during apartheid remain functional, while the schools which served Black learners remain dysfunctional. Spaull (2013) states that, in South Africa, there are two different education systems and these two sub-systems can be seen when splitting learner performances by former department, by language or by socio-economic status. UNESCO (2006) emphasises accessibility as part of the curriculum spider web. The components in the spider web are all interrelated (UNESCO, 2006). Those components are: aims and objectives, rationale, content, time, learning activities, learning environment and materials, accessibility, teachers and teacher professionalism and assessments. It states that children should have access to education, regardless of their ethnicity, socio-economic status or gender.

Niemi, Toom and Kallioniemi (2016) note that Finnish education system has its own strengths. One of its strengths has been learners' advanced reading literacy skills (Niemi *et al.*, 2016). Additionally, the Finnish school system offers highly equal educational opportunities, regardless of the learner's place of residence and learners' socio-economic background (Niemi *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, Niemi *et al.* (2016) argue that, in Finland, learners' engagement, self-efficacy, reading habits and reasoning outcomes are higher than in any other country. In addition, Määttä and Uusiantti (2012) state that, since the twentieth century, providing all learners with equal educational opportunities and removing hindrances to learning, especially among the least successful learners, have been the leading principles in Finnish educational policy.

Similarly, Motshekga (2011) states that the South African curriculum aims to ensure that learners acquire and apply knowledge and skills in ways that are meaningful to their own lives. In addition, Motshekga (2011) indicates that it aims to equip learners, irrespective of their socio-economic background, race, gender, physical ability or intellectual ability, with the knowledge, skills and values necessary for self-fulfilment, and meaningful participation in society as citizens of a free country. The above discussion on inequality is noted to highlight

the point that scholars have flagged in relation to the connections between attainment in homework and the social class of learners.

Katz *et al.* (2012) argue that homework creates a stressful environment among many parents and learners. This suggests that the learners who are coping well with their school work enjoy homework. Conversely, the learners with learning difficulties find homework very challenging.

Trautwein *et al.* (2002) argue that the home environment is critical in supporting those children who achieve low marks to gain more. This is more so as there is no time restriction at home and there is a possibility for a slower learner to catch up. Nevertheless, the home set up depends on the family structure (Ndebele, 2015). Ndebele (2015) claims that, for teachers and learners working and living in poor communities, homework remains a challenge. Furthermore, in South Africa, little has changed in poor schools and communities since the collapse of apartheid (Janks, 2014). Moreover, considering the sociocultural location in relation to language and reading ability education, the learners with poor economic backgrounds face challenges when homework is assigned to them (Janks, 2014). Learners often lack resources like learning spaces and stationery to work with at home as their homes are small and overcrowded, not to forget to mention that some live in destructive neighbourhoods. In addition, Janks (2014) explains that learners who speak languages that do not frequently appear in print, for example learners who have no access to magazines, books, magazines at home, are likely to have incomplete homework.

Another study with a similar argument is that which was completed by Chu (2014). Chu (2014) notes that socioeconomic background correlates with academic performance. Learners from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are inclined more to have higher grades compared to learners from lower socioeconomic background (Chu, 2014). Additionally, the education level of the parents has a bearing on the amount to which they can help their children with homework, as well as their ability to communicate with teachers effectively. This suggests that educated parents often involve themselves in their children's homework. The findings of the Taiwan study by Chu (2014) found that the lower level of education of some parents had a negative effect on the academic achievements of learners, as they often struggled to assist them with homework.

Apart from the issue of resources, the location of learners has also been found to play a profoundly important role in learner's inability to complete homework. Czerniewicz and Brown (2014) note that learners from remote areas attain worse results compared to learners in urban areas. Learners from remote rural areas often battle for instance to complete homework due to the distance that they must travel to their respective homes (Czerniewicz & Brown, 2014).

Spaull (2013) presents a similar argument. He reports that learners in underprivileged schools do not receive homework often and even if homework is assigned to them, they hardly ever complete the homework because of accessibility reasons. Furthermore, Mudzielwana (2014) claims that parents from poorer backgrounds are less supportive when it comes to children's academic activities. Therefore, parents from the poor background are less supportive when it comes to homework.

2.3.3 Administration of homework

A major point that emerges from the literature concerns the critical role that teachers ought to play in the effective administration of homework. Tam and Chan (2016) explain that teachers' views and beliefs are major factors in determining the type and load of homework. Some of the reasons for the assigning of homework include fostering learner's personal development, practising skills taught in the classroom, building parent-child communication about school work to foster learner's personal development, practising skills taught in the classroom, building parent-child communication about school work and following the prescribed curriculum policy about homework (Tam & Chan, 2016).

A study conducted by Tam and Chan (2016) in Hong Kong, on Chinese primary school teachers' homework conception, found that teachers used homework for consolidating work done in the classroom. Moreover, the findings showed that teachers view homework as a remedial solution (Tam & Chan, 2016). In addition, teachers felt that homework served as a diagnostic plan for their teaching because, if most learners are showing confusion in a certain area in an assigned homework, it means that a teacher has to re-teach that particular section. Bembenuddy (2011) suggests that the value of homework is enriched by teachers who understand the educational benefits of homework by giving homework when it is necessary, and by providing homework that appeals to the learners' interests while keeping solid

curricular goals. Vatterott (2011) notes that, when homework comes prematurely, it is hard for learners to cope with assignments and homework independently.

Núñez, Suarez, Rosário, Vallejo, Cerezo and Valle (2015) note the importance of differentiating between quality versus quantity when it comes to assigning of homework. They note that the homework tasks given to the learners are often either too easy or too difficult. In addition, the insufficient time to prepare effective homework tasks and deliver feedback to learners and parents often hinders the positive outcomes from the allocated homework (Núñez *et al.*, 2015). Núñez *et al.* (2015) found that teachers' involvement with homework occurs at two moments. Firstly, when they plan the homework and the number and type of homework tasks to be given to learners. Secondly, when they deliver feedback on homework to learners. Their findings showed that higher grade levels from grades five to 12 were correlated with lower levels of perceived homework feedback from their teachers. Xu (2009) conducted a study in China and found that the learner-level motivation played a major role for Chinese high school learners and this was positively encouraged by the excellence of teachers' feedback on their homework assignments. This suggests that when teachers are consistent when it comes to homework feedback, the homework programme becomes effective. However, as can be seen from the above literature, teachers often do not administer homework properly, nor do they provide the necessary feedback on completed homework tasks

Epstein & Van Voorhis (2001) agree, noting that the process of homework begins with teachers who choose the topics and content for consolidation. This suggests that, if a teacher fails to choose the relevant work, it can result in incompleteness of homework. Designing homework thus requires teachers to consider the purposes, format and other elements of project that will be used by the learners to succeed (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001).

According to Pfeiffer (2018), it is significant that teachers be given guidelines for prescribing and utilising homework as a teaching tool, guidelines like; planning and assigning of homework. In order for the homework to be managed effectively with thorough, co-ordinated planning, guidance and control by all role players, including that the intention of homework should be to reinforce and extend classroom learning, to consolidate basic skills and knowledge, and ultimately to extend to developing a routine of independent home study.

2.3.4 Homework and parental involvement

The household structure and space available for children have also been found to play an important role in the learners' support to complete homework. Sewpaul and Pillay (2014), who conducted their study in Chatsworth (KwaZulu-Natal), found that the two-parent family structure is being presently being replaced by single parents, grandparent-headed households or other family structures, which impact on learners' abilities to complete homework. The involvement of parents in learners' education and its importance has received huge attention from the media, researchers, parents, teachers and politicians in the past decade (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2009).

Dumont, Trautwein, Ludtke, Neumann, Niggli and Schnyder (2012) conducted a study on parental involvement and the learner achievement. Their findings suggest that relationships between learner achievement outcomes and parental homework involvement were not strong. However, this has been contested. Many studies have found that parental support is critical for successful completion of homework. In addition, Epstein and Van Voorhis (2009) state that many parents believe that helping their children with homework is a parental responsibility. Moreover, Dumont *et al.* (2012) indicated that it is important to differentiate between different extents of parental homework and not to concentrate only on homework quantity.

Crozier (1999) conducted a study in 1999 on teachers' perspective towards parents and homework. The results of the study were that teachers had a particular set of expectations of the parents' role. In contrast, parents were not aware of those expectations and therefore were referred to as being not supportive (Crozier, 1999). Crozier (1999) claims that, according to parents, their roles were to provide necessities like school uniform and books.

A study conducted by Bojuwoye (2009) in KwaZulu-Natal, regarding parents' and teachers' attitudes towards homework, agreed with Crozier (1999). The study concluded that some parents felt that homework is time consuming and an extra responsibility, and that children's education should be left to the experts of the teachers. Conversely, some teachers felt that no school can successfully educate learners without inputs from homes and parents.

As eluded to earlier, the socio-economic background of parents also impacts on homework completion. Ndebele (2015) argues that the low social and economic status of families contributes negatively when it comes to parental involvement and it has more effects on parental participation. Low-income parents participate less in school activities, including

homework, compared to high-income parents (Ndebele, 2015). Ndebele (2015) conducted a study in Gauteng province, with FP learners. The findings showed that many parents from lower socio-economic settings were found to never check, sign and supervise their children's homework (Ndebele, 2015). This was largely because parents in low socio-economic environments work long hours and most of the time get home late as they travel long hours (Ndebele, 2015). Parents thus have no time to supervise, check and sign their children's homework.

Sewpaul and Pillay (2014) had similar findings to those of Ndebele (2015). They found that children from low social economic environment received no parental supervision when it comes to homework and school activities. Trautwein *et al.* (2002) explain that learners doing homework without an adult's supervision may adopt incorrect study and homework routines. Moreover, a study conducted in Limpopo province, by Mudzielwana (2014) revealed that most parents located in remote areas were not able to read and write. Mudzielwana (2014) also found that single working parents do not have time to help their children and some of the parents who lacked information were discouraged from being involved in school activities, including homework. This thus suggests that socio-economic background plays a major role in homework.

2.3.5 Homework and learner motivation

Katz, Eliot & Nevo (2014) explain that delaying the performance of work given is called procrastination. Procrastination has been identified as the reason for lower achievement amongst learners and often results in heightened levels of anxiety and high levels of stress (Katz *et al.*, 2014). In the case of homework, some learners have been found not be self-motivated to do homework assigned to them. Katz *et al.* (2014) conducted a study with the aim of exploring the role of motivation in terms of procrastination and self-efficacy in lower primary students. The findings of their study highlighted the significant role of the motivation of learners in informing attitudes towards homework.

Another point that emerges in the literature concerns the ways in which homework situations become everyday stressor for young learners (Katz *et al.*, 2012). Katz *et al.* (2014) argue that, most of the time, interactions concerning homework involve negative emotions and conflicts. Younger children rely on adults to help with homework. As a result, families battle over

homework daily (Katz *et al.*, 2014). Homework has been found to take away young learners' precious time after school.

Núñez *et al.* (2015) report that, in their study, homework time management and the importance of homework was stronger at the high grades like high schools compared to lower grades, especially in the FP. Moreover, poor grade levels may be due to the fact that younger learners have less effective study habits and are not capable of avoiding distractions (Núñez *et al.*, 2015). In addition, higher level grades learners may be more motivated to do homework due to maturity when compared with lower grade learners, who may rely more on adult's motivation to do their homework (Núñez *et al.*, 2015). The literature suggests that too much homework might damage learners' motivation, especially that of younger children (Trautwein *et al.*, 2002).

2.3.6 Homework as an assessment strategy

Valle, Regueiro, Nunez, Rodriguez, Jose, Nunez, Poneiro and Rosario (2016) state that homework helps the learners to consolidate the learning content taught at school. The learners are given tasks to do at home, task that is related to the knowledge already taught at school. (Valle *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, Valle *et al.* (2016) mention that the comparison surface versus deep constitutes an easy to perceive conceptual framework, both in the classroom setting and in other educational settings, for example, doing homework at home.

Moreover, Valle *et al.* (2016) suggest that this strategy has been shown to be a powerful tool for parents, teachers and learners when conceptualizing the ways learners approach school tasks. Valle *et al.* (2016) indicate that the process of doing homework focuses on what learners do when completing homework, which is, how they approach their work and how they manage their personal resources and settings while doing homework.

Strandberg (2013) indicates that homework and projects are assigning to learners and corrected by teachers. Activities like assignments and projects related to homework are part of a teacher's daily work. In addition, when teachers give homework and projects, parents and other adults are also indirectly involved, since their assistance is expected by teachers and by society (Strandberg, 2013). Moreover, Strandberg (2013) indicates that formative assessment is concerned with how judgements about the quality of learner's responses (performances, pieces, or works) can be used to shape and improve the learner's competence.

Modisaotsile (2012) suggests that in S.A, there are many good reasons why parents should be involved in their child's education. One of the reasons is the ratio of teacher and learner in the classroom. In other words, the ratio of learners to teachers is too high. The greatest resource any classroom teacher can utilise is the parents (Modisaotsile, 2012). Moreover, Modisaotsile (2012) mentions that one simple thing that parents can do is to assist with homework and projects at home and knowing and understanding what they are doing in class. The literature suggests that parents, guardians and other care givers should take part in homework related activities.

From all the above sections, it is clear that most of the research on homework has been done in the higher grades of study. The few studies done on the FP in S.A have not explored the use of homework by teachers. They are largely found on parental involvement and school practices. Therefore, this suggests a serious gap in literature, especially when it comes to the administration of homework in the early years, for the purpose of assessment and teaching. Thus, this study explores the utilisation of homework by teachers as a teaching and assessment strategy in the FP. I ask the following questions: Why do teachers use homework as teaching and assessment strategy in the FP? How does homework get used as a teaching and assessment strategy in the FP? What are the underlying reasons for the ways in which homework gets used by teachers in the FP?

2.4 Bourdieu's cultural capital and habitus

My research attempts to explore the utilisation of homework in the FP. For this study, I have decided to use as my theoretical framework Bourdieu's theory on cultural capital and, habitus. In educational sociology, Bourdieu's work has been used to enhance the understanding of the ways in which the curriculum, both obvious and hidden, along with pedagogies, and their implicit taken for granted cultural capitals, contribute to both the reproduction of inequality and its legitimisation through the misrecognition of social experiences and cultural inheritance as individual capacities. Costa and Murphy (2015) note that Bourdieu's theory has been useful in research theory contexts such as educational identities, inequality schooling, leadership and management and teacher education. In particular, Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital and habitus were foregrounded in this study to understand the ways in which teachers used homework as a teaching and assessment strategy in the FP.

The concept of *cultural capital* relates to the ways in which certain cultural traits advantage some people over others when negotiating their presence in certain spaces. Learners from the

working class, for example, often lack the cultural capital to negotiate the middle class positioning of schools. Bourdieu framework argues that schools reflect and are under the control of the cultural orientations of the dominant class (Kingston, 2001). For Kingston (2001), elite children are strongly socialized at home into their class culture. They come to school with characters that clearly fit the cultural biases of this institution and are rewarded in school for their particular cultural orientations. Such rewards may include the manner in which homework gets allocated. This implies that learners who have a culture of learning at home and who have fully parental support may tend to respond better as far as homework is concerned. Teachers may at times treat this cultural capital as natural and normal and thus ignore its significance.

Habitus on the other hand relates to the social norms that guide our behaviour. These become habits that we enact on a daily basis. Naidoo (2009) argues that Bourdieu describes habitus as the system of dispositions that acts as a go-between between structures and practice. Habitus signifies knowledge about one's place in the world and connects the social structure of a field with the actions of individuals within a field (Naidoo, 2009). Naidoo (2009) notes that an individual's habitus is influenced by external conditions of existence, including social class and family, which in turn become the basis of perception and appreciation of all subsequent experience. Hart (2018) indicates that it is inevitable that an individual will be guided by their ingrained habitus or swayed by corrupt or inert situations.

In this study, it was thus important to observe some of the habits that get practised in the administration of homework to FP learners, while also exploring some contextual practices that advantage some learners over others in the ways in which homework is administered across differing sites.

2.5 Conclusion

The purpose of this section of the chapter was to engage the literature that explores the use of homework as teaching and assessment strategy. This chapter started with a historical overview of the use of homework in South Africa and internationally. This section discussed the policies that other countries have regarding the homework. This chapter then presented five key themes that emerged from a review of literature. These themes were: benefits and effects of homework in learner achievement, homework and socio-economic background, administration of homework and homework and the learner motivation. In the next section, I present a discussion on the theoretical framework.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I looked at relevant literature for my study. This chapter gives details of the research design and methodology I adopted. In this chapter, I first explain the research approach I used in my study and the research methodology adopted. Case study methodology was selected as the underpinning methodology for this project. After this section, I discuss the reason why I selected three schooling contexts, i.e. a former Model C school, a former House of Delegates (Indian) school and former Department of Education and Training (African) school in the township. In addition, I will be looking at the participant selection processes, data generation method and processes as well as the analytical framework that was adopted to analyse the data in the study. I will also explore the ethical procedure that was followed in the study.

3.2 Qualitative research

This study adopted a qualitative research approach. Leedy and Ormrod (2005) note that qualitative research studies normally serve one or more of the following purposes: description, interpretation, verification and evaluation. Moreover, qualitative studies do not permit the researchers to identify cause-and-effect relationships, or to answer questions like: What caused what? Or, and why did such-and-such happen? (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Leedy and Ormrod (2005) argue that often the following methods are used when conducting qualitative research: case study, ethnography, phenomenological study, grounded theory study and content analysis. Additionally, Maree (2007) states that a qualitative research approach focuses on people, how they interact with each other and their motives and relationships. Williams (2007) claims that qualitative research includes discovery. Qualitative research is also defined as an unfolding model that happens in a natural situation and that permits the researcher to develop a level of detail from high involvement in the real experiences (Williams, 2007).

Moreover, Leedy and Ormrod (2005) state that studies in qualitative research can disclose the nature of certain settings, situations, relationship, processes, systems or people. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005), qualitative research allows the researcher to gain new insights into a particular phenomenon, develop new concepts about the phenomenon and discover the problems that exist within the phenomenon. Lastly, they provide a means through which a researcher can judge the effectiveness of particular policies and practices (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). In my study, I sought to explore the ways in which FP teachers (in this case grade three teachers) use homework as a teaching and assessment strategy, and the reasons why they do this, including the various ways they use homework as a strategy. Given the fact that I sought to understand and explore a real life situation, focusing on real life action and experiences of people, qualitative research became the natural approach that drove the design of the study.

Williams (2007) explains that qualitative research is defined as the most active model that happens in a natural setting. Additionally, in qualitative research, a researcher is able to gain an understanding and advance new theoretical viewpoint about the phenomenon. Furthermore, in qualitative research, a researcher can be able to examine the trustworthiness of certain claims, assumptions and theories in the real-world situations (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Thus, given that the aim of my study was to explore a particular phenomenon, with a view of presenting an understanding that can lead to theoretical positions, I adopted qualitative research as the underpinning approach for this study.

3.2.1 Philosophical underpinnings

In this qualitative study, its ontology (the nature and form of reality) was based on the understanding that the world is made up of multiple realities, and these realities can be created (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2013). Thus, a subjective epistemological position was adopted.

Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) note that the paradigm adopted plays a major role in the way knowledge is studied and interpreted. It is the selection of paradigm that sets down the intent, motivation and expectations for the research (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) also argue that it is vital to select the paradigm as one of the first steps when conducting a research. In this study, interpretivism was adopted as the driving paradigm. Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) argue that the intention of an interpretivist paradigm is to understand the world of human experiences. Interpretivists work on the assumption that

reality is socially constructed. Moreover, the researcher in the interpretivist paradigm relies on the views of the participants, as the aim is not to pass judgements, but to obtain in-depth information on experiences as narrated by the participants.

Denscombe (2014) states that the interpretivist paradigm sees social reality as something that is subjectively created by people's thoughts and actions. This indicates that researchers can never hope to be totally objective. In addition, the interpretive researcher begins with individuals and set out to understand their interpretation of the world around them (Cohen *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, this study is situated within the wide category of qualitative research, using an interpretive paradigm to explore the phenomenon of the utilisation of homework as teaching and assessment strategy in the FP.

3.3 The research design: A case study

Leedy and Ormrod (2005) suggest that, in a case study, a particular individual or event is studied in depth for a defined period of time. Maree (2007) further explains case study research as characterised by using a single local instance as a concentration of the global, since a case study is incapable of providing a generalising conclusion. Yin (2009) notes that the case study method permits researchers to retain holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events. This study looks at the homework utilisation as a real-life event among FP (grade three) teachers. In addition, case studies often serve to recognise voiceless and powerless people (Maree, 2007). Furthermore, the case studies give a thorough and in-depth method of analysis focusing on a real-life situation, using different sources of data (McGloin, 2008). Yin (2009) argues that the case study research method permits researchers to keep the holistic and important features of real-life events. For Yin (2009), a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. In this regard, I am sought to explore the utilisation of homework by teachers in the FP. The focus was on these teachers in their teaching spaces, in order to explore also to unpack the role of context in the practices adopted by the teachers who participated in the study. Cohen *et al.* (2013) state that a case study offers a unique example of real people in real situations.

Leedy and Ormrod (2005) claim that a case study might be appropriate in creating knowledge about a poorly understood situation. In addition, a case study may also be useful for investigating how an individual or programme changes over time, perhaps as the result of certain situations or interventions (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005).

Moreover, in a case study, the researcher collects extensive data on the individual(s), programme(s) or event(s) on which the investigation is focused (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Leedy and Ormrod (2005) note that these data often include observations, interviews, documents, past records and audio visual materials. Leedy and Ormrod (2005) further note that, in many cases, the researcher may spend a lengthy period of time on site and spend more time with the person or people being studied. The researcher also records details about the context surrounding the case, including information about the physical environment and any historical, economic, and social factors that have bearing on the situation.

Yin (2009) argues that researchers ought to clarify the case that they seek to explore. In the case of this study, the case was multisite and contextual, with Durban North being the contextual area of focus.

3.4 Rationale for these three schools

Cohen *et al.* (2013) indicate that adopting a suitable sample strategy is vital for the quality of research. Research requires not only appropriate data collection methods; the selection of participants is also critical. The decision of sampling must be taken early by a researcher to ensure good quality research (Cohen *et al.*, 2013). Additionally, time, expense and accessibility are important factors that need to be considered when planning research. According to Cohen *et al.* (2013), there are four factors to consider in sampling. Those key factors are: the sample size, the representativeness of the sample, access to the sample and the sampling strategies to be used (Cohen *et al.*, 2013).

Leedy and Ormrod (2005) note that convenience sampling, also known as accidental sampling, makes no pretence of identifying a representative subset of a population. Convenience sampling takes people or other units that are readily available (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Leedy and Ormrod (2005) argue that this type of sampling may be suitable for some less demanding research problems. I adopted convenience sampling as I wanted to select schools that could easily fit to the intents of this study. I deliberately wanted to focus on schools in the North of Durban schools as this is the area in Durban that is generally viewed as more affluent, and thus generally perceived to have schools that offer an education that is solid compared to a lot of other localities in KwaZulu-Natal. I also wanted to select schools that could be easily accessible. I selected three schools in North of Durban that are not far from my work place so that I could easily travel.

The first school is situated in Durban North area and it is a former Model C School. The instructional language is English and it falls under Quintile 5. Most parents who send their children to this school are educated parents and can afford to pay the school fees. The second school is a former House of Delegates (Indian) and it is situated Duffs Road near Avoca Hills. This school is surrounded by informal settlement and its instructional language is English. It falls under Quintile 4. Most of the learners in this school are raised by grandparents and single mothers. The third school is a former Department of Education and Training (African). This school is situated in Lindelani near Ntuzuma Township. The instructional language is Zulu and it falls under Quantile 3. Most learners are raised by grandparents and single mothers.

Purposeful sampling is a method used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan & Hoagwood, 2015). In this study, the Purposeful sampling was used as all the participants are experienced grade 3 teachers.

The criteria for participation had to satisfy the following criteria: teachers had to be FP teachers, teaching in grade three and teachers had to be administering homework to their learners. In many South African schools, there are generally three FP classes in each grade. However, for the three selected schools, there were two grade three classes in each school. All the teachers in the three schools met the criteria for the study, and all agreed to participate in the study. I thus had a total of six participants.

3.5 Research site: Gaining entry

Cohen *et al.* (2013) indicate that it is very important for researchers not only to consider the possibility of the access but how access will be gained from the site. In this regard, I first approached the gatekeepers (principals) telephonically in order to set up the meeting with them. The principals agreed to meet with me. Armed with the vital documents, I visited the schools and formally approached the principals to grant me the permission to conduct my study in their schools. When I met with them, I first introduced myself and explained my study, why I had selected their schools and why I had selected grade three teachers. The details of my study were formally discussed and all concerns regarding my research were addressed. Clarity in terms of the research instruments, documents and participants and time frames were reached. Each of the principals informed me that they only have two grade three classes, not three as I anticipated before. The principals were happy that I have selected their

schools as the sites of my research. The Principals then called the FP Head of Department in order to introduce me to them. Again I introduced myself to them and explained the details of my study.

The whole timeframe within which my research was to be covered was discussed with all participants, because achieving goodwill and cooperation was especially important. The HOD set up another date for me to meet with my potential participants and I had the first informal meeting with my participants whereby I introduced myself and asked them to sign the participant's letters after reading and discussing the table below and I made copies for them to keep in their files. During my first informal meeting, the details of my study were discussed and clarified, including the process to be followed. This meant detailing that I would also like to have some homework documents from them after the formal interviews. Agreement for participation was reached with the participants, including their rights to withdraw from the study at any point in the study. I proposed dates and times for interviews. However, dates and times were open to changes, which may have been due to unforeseen circumstances. Below is a table representing an outline of the individuals who participated in the study.

Participants	Sex	Pseudonym	Teaching experience	Number of years teaching experience
Participant 1	Female	Nelly	Foundation Phase	19
Participant 2	Female	Zodwa	Intermediate and Foundation Phase	28
Participant 3	Female	Nirvashni	Senior Phase and Foundation Phase	7
Participant 4	Male	Rukesh	Intermediate and Foundation Phase	31
Participant 5	Female	Gloria	Intermediate and Foundation Phase	22
Participant 6	Female	Candy	Intermediate and Foundation Phase	17

Table 1 Participants' profile

3.6 Data generation instruments

Merriam and Tisdell (2015) note that the data generation methods that are used to generate data will assist in answering the research questions that drive the study. In qualitative research there are many methods that can be used. The methods that were employed to generate data in this study were semi-structured face to face interviews and document review. Each of these is described below. Additionally, in using a multi-method approach to generate data, the purpose was to produce a convincing and coherent case study (Yin, 2009). Furthermore, a good case study uses as many sources as possible to ensure the accuracy of the findings and conclusions (Yin, 2009).

Discussion of each research instrument follows.

3.6.1 Interviews

Maree (2007) notes that the purpose of qualitative interviews is to see the world through the eyes of the participants by asking questions to generate data and to learn about the beliefs, views, behaviours and opinions of the participants. Interviews are a logical way of talking and listening to people and are another way to generate data from individuals through conversations (Kajornboon, 2005). In this vein, I used one-to-one interviews. According to Kajornboon (2005), the primary data for the study is the interviewee, not the views of the researcher.

Yin (2009) note that using interviews when conducting a research has both strengths and weaknesses. The interview strengths are that interviews are targeted, they focus directly on case study topic and they are insightful, meaning they provide perceived causal inferences (Yin, 2009). However, conducting interviews also have weaknesses. Those weaknesses are possible bias due to poorly constructed questions, inaccuracy due to poor recall and reflexivity, meaning that the interviewee gives what interviewer wants to hear (Yin, 2009).

Interviews allow the participants to report on their understandings and interpretations of the phenomenon and express how they regard circumstances and concerns from their own point of view (Cohen *et al.*, 2013). It is very important for the researcher to be well prepared before the interview. Kajornboon (2005) notes that when conducting the interview, the researcher must make sure that the participants have a clear idea of why *they* have been asked that particular question. Additionally, it is vital for the researcher to have the following skills and

abilities (Kajornboon, 2005); ability to listen, an ability to be non-judgemental, a good memory and ability to think on his or her feet.

Furthermore, there are different types of interviews in qualitative research and each type of interview has strengths and weaknesses. Those are: standardized interviews, in-depth interviews, ethnographic interviews, elite interviews, life history interviews, focus group interviews, semi-structured interviews, group interviews, and open-ended interviews.

According to Mitchell and Jolley (2004), a semi-structured interview is an inquiry by the researcher to stimulate in-depth understanding of the phenomenon from the participants' point of view by having a set of questions which can be put to the interviewee, without necessarily being fixed. The face to face to face interviews may be conducted at the work place as Walliman (2017) suggests. This study was conducted in three North of Durban schools. Six grade three teachers, two from each school, were interviewed. One icebreaking question was asked to each participant in order to encourage naturalness in answering the research questions that were followed.

The advantage of the semi-structured interviews was that I could notice if the participant misunderstood the question and as a researcher I would clarify the uncertainty in the question. It also allowed me to do follow up on responses that were not clear from the participant. Walliman (2017) notes that a researcher should clarify the concepts and issues related to questions for clarification. Therefore, I was also able to clarify some concepts related to the questions when the participants requested clarification. As this study also sought to obtain in-depth information about the homework programme and homework policies in schools, semi-structured interviews put me in a better position to gain more information from the teachers in their natural settings.

Semi-structured interview also permitted me the liberty to adjust the sequence of questions, change the wording, clarify the questions and add questions, in order to probe for richer data (Cohen *et al.*, 2013). Moreover, the focal point of the interview data was to bring to my attention what respondents feel, think, do and what they have to say (Henning, Rensburg & Smit, 2004) about the use of homework in FP. I also was alert to the responses of the respondents in order to detect new lines of inquiry that were directly connected to the phenomenon being studied (the use of homework in the FP).

All the interviews were recorded so as to increase the trustworthiness of the data, thus the verbal aspects of the interview were captured effectively. I used a tape recorder during the

semi-structured interview because it was my personal preference, over other methods, to ensure accurate renderings of the interviews (Yin, 2009). Furthermore, the use of a tape-recording of my interviews allowed me to conduct the interview in a comparatively relaxed way, without fear that the important information would be lost. I began all interviews with an introduction of how the interview was to be conducted. Additionally, at the end of the interviews, all interviewees were given an opportunity to add any comments and participants were thanked for their participation in the study. Each participant was interviewed once, alongside with the informal meeting. The interviews lasted for a minimum of one hour and a maximum of two hours.

3.6.2 Documentary analysis

Yin (2009) notes that documentary information is likely to be relevant to every case study topic. In my study, I used learners' homework as my document review. According to Yin (2009), the strengths of documentary analysis are that documents can be reviewed repeatedly, documents are not created as a result of the case study, documents contain exact names, references, and details of an event and documents cover a long span of time, events and many settings.

Documents can offer other specific details to verify information from other sources (Yin, 2009). Furthermore, Yin (2009) notes that documents can play a clear role in any data collection in doing case studies because of their overall value. Henning *et al.* (2004) suggest that documents are a treasured source of information and if available, should be included in the research design. Any document whether new or old, handwritten or printed and which relates to the research question may be of value (Henning *et al.*, 2004). In this regard, all documents were relevant in exploring the use of homework. In this study, I analysed different homework activities that were assigned to the learners and I made sure that those documents were from all the learning abilities, meaning, the top, middle and bottom groups.

The advantages of homework document reviews as a source of evidence for this study is that they were stable and could be repeatedly reviewed, the documents were not obtrusive and were not made especially for the aim of my study, they were exact because they contained the date on which the work was assigned to the learners and they contained the details of homework assigned to the learners (Yin, 2009). In this regard, learners had one homework book used from the beginning of the year and departmental blue books (Rainbow workbooks) that were used as homework.

The workbooks have been developed for the children of South Africa under the leadership of the Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga, and the Deputy Minister of Education, Mr Enver Surty. The Rainbow workbooks form part of the Department of Basic Education's range of intervention aimed at improving the performance of South African learners. These documents provided information on the homework assigned to learners and the challenges learners experienced when doing homework as well as the challenges teachers experienced when giving feedback to learners. Homework documents were analysed in terms of all groups in the classroom, that is, the top, middle and bottom groups as they were all assigned the same homework by the teachers. A total of 18 homework documents were reviewed.

3.7 Data analysis procedures

Clarke and Brawn (2013) state that once the information has been gathered, a researcher has to interpret and analyse it. In this study, I have adopted a thematic analysis. There are six phases of thematic analysis. Those phases are: familiarisation with the data, coding of the data, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and writing up (Clarke *et al.*, 2013)

Hardy and Bryman (2009) state that data analysis is the process of ordering and organising of data to generate knowledge. Data analysis methods are techniques used to split data into parts or themes as guided by the research questions (Swanborn, 2010). Data analysis was started after all data had been generated. The notes of data sources were consulted now and again when different data had to be verified (Hardy & Bryman, 2009). The coding of data, based on research questions, was done first in order to make sure that themes and categories were formed (Mitchell *et al.*, 2004). Data was then arranged according to those themes and categories.

In the context of this study, I had to make sure that before the data analysis process could commence, the data had to be prepared in such a way that it ready to be subjected to qualitative data analysis. Therefore, the data was transcribed from the digitally recorded voice into a written form. This required a lot of time since it involved transcription from the digital voice recorder to a written text. This was done to ensure that no part of the narratives by the participants was missed. The transcript was used during the coding and construction of themes and sub-themes. Transcripts were also used during the analysis of the findings.

3. 8 Trustworthiness

In any type of research that is done, the quest for quality is pursued. Validity and reliability cannot be addressed in the qualitative research in the same way as quantitative research. Tracy (2010) states that in qualitative research, instead of validity, the concept of trustworthiness, which contains dependability, confirmability and credibility, is used. Tracy (2010) further claims that researchers should always be on the guard that they are actually recording the phenomenon under scrutiny in order to ensure credibility. To do this accordingly, Tracy (2010) suggests that researchers must adopt well recognised and appropriate research methods. In this study, I adopted two different research methods, and those are semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis.

In order to reinforce credibility and trustworthiness, “member checking” was made. “Member checking” is a process whereby the participants will be given an opportunity to check if their views have been represented fairly in the findings and interpretations (Harper & Cole, 2012). The transcripts from all the interviews as well as the findings were taken back to the participants for their inspection in order to assess the accuracy and credibility. In order to ensure the participants’ protection, an opportunity was given to the participants to withdraw information as well as change any of their responses if they wished to do so.

Tracy (2010) maintains that in order to improve dependability in qualitative research, the processes within the study should be reported in detail. Tracy (2010) notes that, to ensure the dependability of the study, details of the processes followed have to be reported in detail. One ought to ensure that there is a description of the research process and there is also an in-depth methodological description that will allow the study to be repeated. Moreover, Tracy (2010) claims that the process of conformability is concerned with whether the findings reflect the experiences and ideas of the participants. Hancock, Mary and Coi (2016) mention that the qualitative “gold standard” for quality research is data saturation. Fusch and Ness (2015) state that data saturation is reached when there is enough information to replicate the study. Failure to reach saturation has an impact on the quality of the research conducted and hampers content validity. Walker (2012) notes that saturation is a tool used for ensuring that adequate and quality data are collected to support the study.

In order to reduce the effect of investigator bias, data saturation was used. Participants were more likely to provide detailed responses and experiences which would ensure the generation

of rich, thick data. Teachers were asked to share their experiences, perceptions and opinions regarding homework programme in the Foundation Phase.

I am confident that race, religion, gender, status and age were not powerful sources of bias. In addition, I did not bring my experiences and beliefs regarding the practice of homework into the interview. Furthermore, I presented the participants' responses in their own words, as required in qualitative research.

3.9 Ethical issues

Clough and Nutbrown (2012) note that ethical issues are moral aspects of the study. Ethical issues concern the effect that the researcher has or might have on the people who are involved in the study process (Walliman, 2017). There are number of steps that the researcher has to take into consideration as part of ethical practice. One of them involves honouring the independence of the participants as well as their rights whether to participate or not; voluntary participation and the right to withdraw from the study at any stage of the study, should they wish to do so, without any harm happening to them. While considering all these issues, I had to make sure that the study was granted ethical clearance, which provides approval that the study complies with all ethical considerations.

In keeping with ethical practice, ethical clearance was granted to me by the University of KwaZulu-Natal, subject to a set of conditions with which I had to comply with before going into the field. In abiding with the ethical considerations, I had to follow the correct procedures for gaining access to the schools. This required that I first submit a letter to the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education to request permission to conduct research in schools. The following procedures were followed in order to ensure that I complied with ethical considerations when conducting the research:

- Informed consent: I made sure that the informed consent of all the participants was received. The signed consent forms were treated with the highest discretion.

- Consequences of the research: In obtaining reasonable, informed consent of the participants, the consequences of the research were made clear to all participants, namely, that the findings based on the information provided by them, as participants, may prove useful in contributing to understanding the practices of homework in FP.

- Confidentiality and anonymity: The participants were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity by informing them fully about the research study in terms of both the interviews and the information from the documents analysed. I assured the participants that their privacy and sensitivity would be protected using pseudonyms with which to identify both the participants and their schools. Additionally, the participants were informed that the recordings and transcripts would be stored and locked for safekeeping.

- Voluntary participation: As the researcher, I assured them that their participation was voluntary and that they were afforded the freedom to withdraw as participants from the study at any time and without any prejudice to them as participants.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter situated the study within a qualitative research paradigm. A qualitative approach was suitable because the study required me to explore the participants' understanding of and experiences on the practice of homework in the FP. In addition, this chapter also covered the details of the research design and methodology for the study. This chapter also showed how purposive sampling was used to identify the participants. The chapter discussed how and why participants of the study were selected. This chapter reveals that my study used both interviews and document reviews. Furthermore, this chapter explained how the data was analysed. I noted that thematic analysis was utilised. Trustworthiness and ethical issues were also discussed in this chapter. The next chapter presents the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the study findings and discussions. In this chapter, I examine the participants' interpretations on the practice of homework as a learning and assessment strategy in the FP. Moreover, this chapter focuses on what the data reveals. The data was generated through the use of semi-structured interviews with six teachers and documentary analysis of homework. This chapter presents the themes that emerged from the data. These are the following main themes to be discussed in this chapter: homework as learning and teaching tool, homework feedback, parental involvement, homework and the prescribed curriculum, projects as assessment strategy and socio-economic background. The subthemes are also discussed in this chapter. These are the following subthemes in this chapter: Remedial/ supplementary work, departmental blue books (Rainbow books) used for homework activities, assigning of homework by teachers and catering for different learning abilities and duration of homework.

4.2 Homework as a teaching and learning tool

Milligan, Koornhof, Sapire and Tikly (2018) indicates that there is significant interest in the role of textbooks and other learning and teaching support material in effective learning systems. UNESCO emphasises the potential that textbooks can have as cost-effective inputs for improving learning outcomes (Milligan et al., 2018). In addressing this theme, I have drawn the data mainly from interviews. Interviews enabled my participants to discuss their understanding about homework. Margolis and McCabe (2004) claim that the use of homework in primary schools as a learning and assessment strategy has a negative impact on learners cognitively. In this theme, the following issues were identified by the participants: remedial/ supplementary work, departmental blue books and assigning of homework.

4.2.1 Remedial/ supplementary work

When homework comes prematurely, it is hard for children, especially FP learners, to cope with homework and projects independently (Vatterott, 2011). Learners need adult help to figure out how to do the work. A study conducted by Trautwein *et al.* (2002) in Germany showed that there is a positive effect when Mathematics homework is frequently given to learners. However, only brighter learners showed a positive effect from the homework, while

cognitively challenged learners showed a negative effect. In that study, the participants highlighted their dislike for homework and they regard it as a negative effect on learners. Some teachers regarded homework as being there for consolidation, while other teachers indicated dislike to homework. In this vein, I asked Candy (P) what is her understanding about homework. In this regard, Candy notes the following:

(Frowning) I don't like homework. Teaching should be done in school. Homework is for revision but not in the Foundation Phase. Learners in the FP need to play not to be overloaded with school work. If you taking playtime out of the child, you are inviting behaviour problem. These kids are expected to sit in the classroom for five hours and when they get home, they are again expected to sit and do homework. It becomes too much for them. Homework should start in grade five. Smaller children from grade R to four need to play. This homework programme for FP is being pushed too early. It should be rather wait till grade five. If a teacher is doing good enough job in the classroom, there is no need for homework.

Nirvashni (P) also shared her understanding on homework and noted:

In our school, homework is any work that a child did not complete, any assignment and any project given to a child but we basically take classwork and do it as homework.

Nelly (P) gave as her view on homework:

My understanding about homework is that it is a consolidation work done at school. Education is three legged, that is the teacher, parent and a child. Therefore, homework helps especially when it comes to assessments at the end of the term. It makes job easier for a parent because s/he has been helping a learner throughout the term/ year. Moreover, it is the practice of what has been taught in school. My role is to teach, a learner's role is to listen and a parent's role is to help a learner at home.

The participants' response on their understanding regarding homework show that they regard homework as consolidation work. One of the participants does not favour the homework at all.

In the next section, I enquired about the use of departmental blue books as homework.

4.2.2 Departmental blue books (Rainbow books) used for homework activities

A study conducted in South Africa (Gauteng province) by Mathews *et al.* (2014), on the use of Mathematics blue books in grade three, shows that some teachers use blue books as homework. The findings from the study show that the teachers use blue books for different purposes. Mathews *et al.* (2014) claims that the use of workbooks in grade three includes reinforcement, integration, homework, compliance with the demands of the education department. In this study I found that, in one school, the separate homework worksheet is designed by the teachers weekly, while in the other two schools, the departmental blue books are used as homework. Pillay (2018) reports that the meaning of Jikimfundo is ‘to turn education around’. The Jikimfundo programme was implemented in selected teaching districts and focused on increased curriculum coverage as a method of improving learning outcomes (Pillay, 2018). Pillay (2018) states that Jikimfundo focuses on what teachers and learners actually do and sought to develop a central uniformity of action among them.

In this regard, I enquired from the participants about the use of blue books. Nelly explained as follows:

We use departmental blue books as homework because those books are specific that, on this day, a learner must do a certain page for homework. We give homework almost every day. In our school, we have Jikimfundo Curriculum which tells us exactly what to teach every day. If for some reason, you as a teacher never finish that work, you then assign it as homework and it helps to complete the syllabus.

Rukesh (P) also elaborated on the issue of the Rainbow books. He had this to say:

Learners don't have separate homework books but they work from their Rainbow books, meaning I use Rainbow books for homework. We are no-fee paying school, therefore we cannot expect parents to buy extra homework books. We give all the materials including stationery to our learners. They don't even have extra pencils at home. Therefore, it is a big challenge to give them homework.

As generally in the literature Carr (2013) states that when homework is utilised properly, it can be a most important tool for reinforcing learning that takes place in the classroom.

4.2.3 Assigning of homework by teachers and catering for different learning abilities

It is believed that homework has the potential to cover learning beyond the work done in the classroom (Tam & Chan, 2016). This suggests that when designing and implementing homework and projects, teachers play a crucial role. Tam and Chan (2016) further explain that the teachers' views and beliefs are major reasons in determining the type and load of homework. Tam and Chan (2016) indicate that some of the reasons why homework is assigned to learners by teachers are to foster learners' personal development, to practise skills taught in the classroom, to build parent-child communication about school work and to follow prescribed curriculum policy about homework. At lower grades, children are depressed when doing homework (Bempechat, 2004). In this regard, I asked participants how they cater for learners with different learning abilities when assigning homework. Participants had the following to say:

Gloria (P) responded as follows:

I give same homework to every single child because I believe that homework is consolidation work. Something that a child can do without relying on their parents for help. That is why my kids have no excuse of not doing homework. It is work that you have done in the classroom. You don't need your mum to be there. She must only check and sign the homework. Homework for me is pure consolidation, nothing new.

Candy had this to say:

One homework to everybody.

The above quotations suggest that the teachers do not vary the homework allocated in order to cater for different learning needs. Teachers work on a one size fits all basis. This is consistent with what other studies internationally that have found. In this vein, this is what Zodwa (P) had to say:

I give all of them same homework but sometimes I give my top learners extra challenging work as homework, just to challenge them (smiling). Out of 45 learners, I have only ten top learners. My bottom group has about 18 learners. They have learning barriers and we do not have a remedial class in this school. As some of my bottom learners are still functioning at grade one level (Showing me learners' work with learning barriers). It is mostly boys that are struggling. However, they are good

in orals but find written work challenging including homework. They are also struggling in reading especially in English.

No, I give same homework to everyone so that it will be easier to mark, as I have mentioned before. We mark homework as the whole class (Rukesh).

However, I also found there to be some variations among the teachers. Nirvashni for instance noted:

I have four groups in my class and I do not assign challenging homework to the learners with learning difficulties.

Nelly said:

I have four groups in my classroom and I do not group them according to their academic levels. I first give them the opportunity to group one another. At the end, I intervene by trying to balance the numbers, if there is too many or too less in a one group. When I assign homework, I give the whole class the same homework because I always hope that they will get help from home, either from parents or older siblings. The problem that I experience is that, older siblings do not help them instead they write answers for them in order to get rid of them and (laughing) I can make the difference between a learner's handwriting and an adult's handwriting. Sometimes, a parent herself/ himself writes for a learner. Even the learners themselves can make the difference between an adult and a child handwriting and they often report to me that so and so did not do homework, an adult did it for her or him. The culprit then confesses that "my mother wrote for me". I then tell the learner that, please tell your mother that I am not her teacher but your teacher. Therefore, you must write in your own handwriting, she can only help you.

Margolis and McCabe (2004) argue that homework is often too difficult for learners with learning barriers. Furthermore, teachers give the same homework to all the learners forgetting to cater for the learners with disabilities (Margolis & McCabe, 2004). In addition, those learners with the learning barriers avoid tasks like homework because it requires them to work independently (Margolis & McCabe, 2004).

It was clear from the participants that teachers were utilising homework as a teaching tool. However, such usage has its limitations. For instance, the Rainbow books that are meant for classwork activity are now used as homework in order to complete the syllabus. Furthermore, when assigning homework, it was clear that teachers do not cater for all the groups in the classroom. Teachers design and assign the same homework to everyone. Tam and Chan (2016) stress that the value of homework is enriched by teachers who understand the educational benefits of homework by providing homework that appeals to the learners' interest while keeping to solid curricular goals.

4.3 Homework feedback

This is the second theme on the findings of this study. This theme examines the way in which teachers provide feedback to learners. The data is drawn from both interviews and documentary analysis of the homework assigned to learners. Núñez, Suarez, Rosário, Vallejo, Cerezo and Valle (2015) state that typically, teachers' involvement with homework occurs at two moments. Firstly, when they plan the homework and the number and the type of homework tasks to be given to learners. Secondly, when they deliver feedback on homework to learners. In this vein, I examined the learners' homework documents from all six participants. Participants gave me homework documents from all levels, meaning the top, middle and bottom groups. My findings were that learners were exchanging books in order to mark for one another, while the teacher only checked, signed and dated learners' work. According to Brookhart (2017), feedback is an important element of the formative assessment process. Formative assessment provides information to teachers and learners about how learners are doing relative to classroom learning goals (Brookhart, 2017). Feedback can be very powerful if done well (Brookhart, 2017) and is an important source of information for checking answers (Rosário, Núñez, Vallejo, Cunha, Nunes, Suarez, & Moreira, 2015)

In explaining why the homework tasks were not assessed, Nelly noted:

At the beginning of the year (term one) I tried to mark all the homework books, however, I did not give each learner a feedback as I was marking. I don't have enough time to mark all their books because my timetable requires me to start my lesson at exactly 8 'o clock. Sometimes I only mark and give feedback to half of the class. After marking the books, I then identify the common problems and focus on those problems and teach the concept again, if I have to. Learners exchange the books

and mark each other's work but that can only happen from term 2. After they have marked each other's work, we then do revision based on that particular section, if maybe there was a concept they did not understand. It helps me as a teacher to reteach the concept by looking at the answers they have provided. Bottom group does not understand homework assigned to them. Therefore, they are unable to complete it without adult supervision or help. I try by all means to instil positive re-enforcement by voicing out how hurt and sad I become if they do not do homework. That encourages most of the learners to do homework. However, my weak learners just write any answers in order to impress me but my top group always do homework and they enjoy it. Most learners do their homework without adult supervision for various reasons like uneducated parents or parents who arrive late from work.

Zodwa added to this point:

I sometimes take all the homework books and mark when my learners have gone home but it does not happen all the time because of the staff meetings. When I have taken all the books, I get the chance to feed them back individually. Sometimes, I look at the similar problems they have encountered while doing homework and ask my top learners to help the bottom group with those concepts.

Some of the teachers used other strategies to give feedback. This includes marking the work together with the class over a selected day, reading out the correct answers and give feedback as a class. Nirvashni for instance noted:

We mark it as a class exercise on Monday morning. I use Listening and Speaking time to mark homework and give feedback.

Rukesh added:

I called out the answers and the learners mark their own homework books. Marking homework books for each and every learner is time consuming. And if they did not do homework at home, they sit and watch others marking and there is no punishment for incomplete homework. I can't even scold them.

Gloria mentioned the following regarding homework feedback:

I give feedback every day that is the first thing we do in the morning. I do corrections on the board and we mark it as the whole class. Before, I used to check each and every exercise book but then I realised that it was time consuming. When I marking every learner's book, I just do one tick. So basically, I check if they have done the corrections correctly. If I have to mark each and every learner's book, it will take my teaching time. For example, if I have given them ten Multiplication sums for homework, it will mean that I mark 35x10. That will be 350 ticks and it's time consuming. Therefore, when I check the books, I randomly check. I check about four or five books. I cannot mark 350 sums every day for homework.

Candy added:

I feed them back both as individuals and as a class but if I give them feedback individually, it takes a little bit longer because I have 36 learners. First three terms, I did individual feedback but term four, we do it as a class so that they can see their own mistakes but I still go through it and I walk around the class as they are marking, so that I will know exactly where every child is.

The homework tasks given to their children are either too easy or too difficult. In addition, there is insufficient time to prepare effective homework tasks and deliver feedback to learners and parents (Núñez *et al.*, 2015).

4.4 Parental involvement

This is the third theme on the findings of this study. In addressing this theme, I have drawn from interviews and homework documents. The involvement of parents in learners' education and its importance has received huge attention from the media, researchers, parents, teachers and politicians in the past decade (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2009), as already mentioned. Dumont *et al.* (2012), in their study of parental involvement and learner achievement, found that the relationship between student achievement outcomes and parental homework involvement was not strong. In this vein, two participants' responded.

Gloria mentioned the following:

99, 99% of my learners do and complete their homework. If they don't do it, I write to their parents or I punish them but I hardly experience that. The only problem is the parents' signature. Parents do not sign the homework book,

meaning they do no check and help with homework. However, I do not punish my learners for that. I feel that my learners must not get punished for their parent's sins (smiling) but I do warn my learners about it. After warning the learners, the parents sign. However, I am a bit relaxed when it comes to that part. My first priority is my learners to do homework. I don't worry too much about the signature. I take into consideration that most parents come late from work or are furthering their studies, meaning they attend lectures after work. Therefore, they don't get to see the homework book.

Bojuwoye (2009) and Crozier (1999) conclude that some parents feel that homework is time consuming, and its extra responsibility and children's education should be left to the experts of the teachers. Conversely, some teachers feel that no school can successfully educate learners without the inputs from homes and parents. Moroni, Dumont, Trautwein, Niggli and Baeriswyl (2015) state that it is generally believed that parents' involvement in their children's academic school life has positive effects on children's academic achievements. In this regard, Nelly mentioned the following:

Parents do not even look at the homework books. They in general don't care about homework as they believe that teaching and learning must take place in school not at home. Although there is a place for a parent to sign, they do not sign. Instead learners forge their parents' signature even at the lower grades like grade one (laughing).

Zodwa had to add the following:

You hardly get all 45 learners' homework books done. The learners come with different excuses like they would say "I have forgot the book at home", "My homework book is lost", and "I was so busy with house chores". Sometimes we end up doing homework as classwork. Parents do not check and sign the homework books. They give reasons like, "Mam, I am uneducated therefore I cannot sign the homework book".

Candy added:

Sisters and aunties sometimes do write homework for them. Signatures are being forged. When signatures are forged, I explain what forgery is and if they start early, they will continue with the bad habits and they will think its okay to forge somebody's

signature. If we don't sort out the little habit now, they will continue with it (serious face).

Furthermore, Ndebele (2015) argues that the social and economic status of families contribute negatively when it comes to parental involvement and it has more effect on parental participation. Moreover, low-income parents participate less in school activities, including homework, compared to high-income parents. It was clear in this study that poor parents did not get involved much in homework. In this regard, two participants responded as follows:

Nirvashni mentioned the following:

Our parents don't respond to any of the letters sent home. Therefore, signing the homework book is out of the question. Even when a learner has been absent, parents don't write the note to explain why the child was absent. It becomes a challenge if we want to see them regarding the learner's academic progress. We even send the neighbours to convey the message until they respond.

Rukesh responded as follows:

Most of our parents don't understand homework issue at all, they feel school work should be done at school.

Moreover, a working parent who only arrives at home after five in the evening, has to cook and provide a meal for the family, help with the homework and consider the bed time for FP learners which is 19h00. Furthermore, good sleep, family relationships and active playtime are vital for the balance and well-being of a child (Vatterott, 2011).

In this study I found that parents do not involve themselves in their children's schoolwork, especially when it comes to homework. Most parents do not even bother to sign the homework, let alone read and respond to school notices. Limited education of the parents plays a major role in this aspect. Parents feel that schooling should take place at school not at home.

4.4.1 Duration of homework

Jiang *et al.* (2015) indicate that adequate sleep plays a crucial role in the physical, mental and cognitive development of children. Moreover, Bempechat (2004) claims that the teachers should know how to design suitable homework by looking at the age and grade. Too much

homework causes frustration to a learner, parent and teacher (Bempechat, 2004). Dudley-Marling (2003) states that families battle over homework nightly especially if a child has learning difficulties. This implies that difficult homework damages the personal relationships between a learner and a parent. In this regard, Candy mentioned:

It's 30 minutes' homework including reading.

Gloria added:

It should not be more than 30 minutes including reading. I give a separate reader for them to read at home. However, it depends, during assessments, their homework could take longer because of the revision. It's normal homework worksheet that they have every week, reading, spelling, counting plus what I need them to revise for assessment. For their spelling, its different activities every day. Certain type of homework might take longer.

Nelly mentioned the following:

Fifteen minutes because the learners need to eat, play and watch television when they get home. It must not be about homework only when they get home. Three to four sums in Mathematics is enough for a day because even the Rainbow books that we give, only give them less than five sums. Learners have been in the classroom engaged into a school work, I cannot expect them to do the same at home. They are children after all.

Zodwa added:

The homework I give is about 30 minutes. They get bored easily and there are lot of distractions at home.

In this regard, Nirvashni responded as follows:

Mhmmmm... (Thinking). I would think its plus minus an hour. Unless it's cutting of the pictures for the project but the written work is +-one hour because of their age and their ability to concentrate and I only give homework on a weekend.

Rukesh said that:

Normally its 15 minutes of written work.

The findings here show that teachers do not bear in mind the considerable time spent on homework when they design and assign homework. Age should be the first thing to consider when designing homework for FP learners.

4. 5 Homework policy, days on which the teacher assign homework to learners and its effect on teaching time

Rosário *et al.* (2015) imply that teachers have two major tasks in the homework process that is, designing and setting activities and checking or providing homework feedback to learners. In this vein, the participants reveal the following:

Nirvashni mentioned that:

Once a week, in order to consolidate all the work we have been doing throughout the week. I give them at the end of the week (Friday) because they are still too little. They need time to play when they get home. That is the reason why I give them homework only on a Friday.

Rukesh said the following:

I assign homework twice a week. That is Tuesday and Friday. However, I only get 10% back of the homework assigned. On Tuesday, I give them written work and on Fridays, I give them more oral activities like counting and spelling. Most of my learners stay with their grandparents. That is the reason why homework is incomplete because grandparents do not understand the importance of homework.

Gloria responded by mentioning the following:

Four days, from Monday to Thursday. During assessment times, I give homework even on a Friday so that they can do more revision at home especially if we are writing a paper on Monday. I put a reminder plus revision of that paper. So that they can plan and prepare during the weekend.

Candy added:

Four days (Monday to Thursday). However, I give them on a Friday during assessments time so that they can do revision on a weekend.

Bempechat (2004) notes that homework depends on the area in which those learners are located, whether it is urban, suburban and rural. Learners from the urban areas are more likely to complete homework because of the facilities that are available for them in contrast

with the learners from remote areas with limited facilities. In this vein, Nelly responded as follows:

I give homework every day except Friday, we focus mostly on assessments and in some of the days, we do not give homework, for example, last week we experienced the floods. Therefore, most learners were absent from school on the following day. Then we fell behind in terms of homework. Even classwork fell behind on that week because of the floods we had last week. On the first and last week of the term, we do not give homework.

Zodwa added on this regard:

It's not every day because we have a challenge of parents who are working till late. So, there is no one to supervise homework at home. Most of the time, our learners are home alone without adult presence till late. I cannot assign daily because of the above mentioned reasons. Therefore, I select days of assigning homework. Normal I give them on a Tuesday, Thursdays and Fridays. So I would say 3 times a week.

The Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), the South African prescribed curriculum, emphasises that every learner must receive homework every day, including FP learners (Motshekga, 2011). Furthermore, according to Janks (2014), CAPS requires teachers to assign homework to learners in order to consolidate work done in the classroom. In this regard Nelly responded:

Yes, we do have homework policy (she pulled out the policy from the file). We try to follow the policy/ homework timetable provided by the school but we do not always follow the policy. For example, Monday-Mathematics, Tuesday-English, Wednesday-Mathematics and Thursday-English.

Zodwa mentioned the following regarding homework policy:

Yes, we do have homework policy but it is hard to follow it because of other activities that take place within the school. I have designed my own homework policy for my class by looking at the needs for my learners and I am accountable to that (serious look on her face).

Nirvashni had to say the following regarding homework policy in her school:

Yes, we do have homework policy in our school but it is not in our files (looks uninterested). However, if a teacher needs it s/he can get it from the office but I give homework to suit my learners' needs.

Rukesh added:

Yes, it's a department thing. DoE wants us to do homework. So homework policy comes from the top. However, that policy, you follow it according to your learner's ability and needs. As I have mentioned before that I don't give my learners homework every day. Other teachers do. I don't strictly follow the policy; I give them twice a week due to my personal reasons. You see in the FP their homework is to read every day. That is homework on its own. Spelling, practising daily news and counting.

Gloria mentioned the following regarding homework policy:

Yes, we have an excellent homework policy in our school. New teachers are given homework policy when they come in our school because they have to know the culture of the school and what is expected from them. Teachers must not change the policy to accommodate their learners (serious look). Policies must be followed and if they need to be amended, it should be done so as a staff.

I asked Candy to describe homework policy and she responded like this:

I have never seen a homework policy in this school. Maybe it was given to me when I came in. However, all the grades do homework here.

In all the participants' teaching timetable, there was no homework allocation and this is what they have to say regarding that issue. I asked Gloria how long does it takes to mark the homework and does it affect her teaching time. This was Gloria's response:

Oh, my goodness gracious me (sighs). This homework thing is hectic. You have to squeeze it in, in the morning. Obviously, you steal time from your Listening and Speaking time. To me personally my ideal homework is: revising, consolidation and stuff like that. The parents should check and mark the homework. My role will be to check if the above has done at home. I feel that homework steals my teaching time. I prefer spending more time teaching than spending my teaching time correcting homework. It takes away productive teaching and learning time.

Nelly mentioned the following:

If I have to mark all the 45 homework books every day, it will take me +-30 minutes. Yes, it does affect my teaching time because my first lesson starts at exactly 8 a.m. There is no allocation time for me to mark the homework books.

Nirvashni responded as followed:

About 45 minutes but we do it on the board with the whole class and it does affect my teaching time.

I asked Zodwa about homework effect on her teaching time and she mentioned the following:

About an hour because they need to be extra careful when marking each other's work, as I have mentioned before that I teach them responsibility by allowing them to mark one another's work. I steal time from my teaching time. Homework collection, marking and giving feedback does affect my teaching time. DOE wants us to do homework but there is no allocation time for that.

Rukesh added:

Half an hour and it does affect my teaching time, because in my timetable I don't have time allocated for homework. I use my discussion period to mark. That is Listening and Speaking period.

Candy had the following to say regarding homework and her teaching time:

It does, it takes about an hour to mark because of the large number of learners in the classroom. The attention that you give them when they have made the mistakes takes a lot of time. My timetable starts at 7:30 but I only start teaching at 8:30 because of homework. In my timetable, I don't have time allocated for homework but I think homework should be considered as teaching because you are actually teaching and revising work with your learners for an hour.

Reflecting on this theme, I note that homework takes away valuable teaching time. Teachers spend about an hour on homework, yet the homework is not in their timetable as a subject. Therefore, they end up stealing that hour from the Listening and Speaking period. Furthermore, DoE should implement homework policies to be used in all schools as the guideline. However, the socio-economic status of that particular society should be considered first before implementing it. Regarding the duration of homework, participants feel that learners need to play and watch television at home. Therefore, when they assign homework,

they make sure that it does not exceed 30 minutes. When it comes to the days of assigning homework, although the homework policy stipulates that, homework should be assigned daily. Teachers assign homework to learners according to the need and ability of children.

4. 6 Projects as assessment strategy

According to Edwards (2018), teachers often assign projects and library research. Unfortunately, the research indicates that learners often do not have access to materials and other resources. The findings from this study show that teachers assign projects to learners as an assessment strategy. However, the question is: Who does these projects at home? Is it the learner or parent? In this vein, I asked Candy about projects in grade three class. She revealed the following:

If a learner fails to submit the assignment on time, I give them an extra week (extension) and if they still don't bring it, they get zero because that what happens in Intermediate Phase. So I am training them for the next phase to meet the deadline. They have to realise that grades higher up are not going to tolerate them. They won't be baby sited there. You don't submit, you get zero in high school.

Gloria added on the project issue:

Well... Mhmmm... I haven't experienced that problem but I do accept late submission but to be honest, I am not happy about assigning projects for marks purpose. I feel parents do the projects instead of the learners themselves. I put the reminders to parents that it is for marks. Therefore, they make sure that they submit.

Nelly mentioned the following regarding the projects:

I do not fail the learners for incomplete project but it ends up being done as classwork because of the area our school is situated in. We then take that work as "project done at home" and provide marks because SAMS need it. I gave them a project in term three to build a house using old cardboard but only 12 learners returned the project. The rest of the class did not. I ended up asking them to draw it on a piece of paper so that I can give them the marks. We are not allowed to give them zero.

Zodwa added comments on homework projects and said:

According to our school policy, when it comes to marks and assessment, we are not allowed as teachers to fail them. Therefore, I sometimes give any written work to that learner who has failed to submit the project and use that mark as the project mark.

I asked Nirvashni about grade three projects and she reveals the following:

As I explained before, they do projects in class and I put them in pairs if they are struggling to do it on their own. I encouraged them to help one another so that I can get the project done.

Rukesh added and he mentioned the following:

I don't teach Life Skills but a teacher who teaches Life Skills gives them one project per term. However, they work in class. They don't take it home although they supposed to do it at home. We have to provide all the project material.

4. 7 Homework and socio-economic background

This is the last theme on the findings of this study. This theme focusses on the social and economic background and how the socio-economic background could affect the homework programme in schools. In addressing this theme, I have drawn on data largely from interviews. Edwards (2018) indicates that socioeconomic status refers to the combination of both the family's income, as well as their educational background. Through interviews, my participants were able to discuss their knowledge and views on the socio-economic backgrounds of their schools. Nevertheless, the home set up depends on the family structure (Ndebele, 2015). In this vein, I asked Nelly to explain how the socio-economic background of a learner could be a cause of incomplete homework. She had to say this:

Single parenting is very common in this community. Most mothers are working as domestic workers. They arrive home late and they leave early in the morning, which makes it difficult for them to monitor the homework. So as a teacher, you take homework and use it as classwork in the morning (the first hour of school). Some learners stay with their grandparents who are unable to help with homework. We also have the issue of absent parents; they are alive but untraceable. In this regard, we teach angry and confused children. This situation affects their classwork as well as homework. We have a feeding scheme in our school. The feeding scheme helps a lot because most families are struggling financially.

In response to the same question, Zodwa had this to say:

This neighbourhood (place) where our school is situated, was developed 15 years ago. The houses are free housing project from the government. The houses are small and most parents are not working. The community members even break in just to steal desks for learners in order to use them as furniture in their homes. Even the classroom doors, they steal them. As we speak, my class has no door (pointing at the door). The houses are overcrowded by siblings, aunties and uncles. There is not enough space for learners to do homework. The houses are small, there are lots of distraction inside and outside the houses. There is screaming and shouting and the young ones cannot concentrate in that environment. It's a dusty and dirty environment. We have young parents of which we taught them 15 years ago. Social grant plays a huge role in teenage pregnancy in this community. Other parents are stay in domestic workers, only come back on a weekend. The fathers are absent fathers. About 1% only stay with both parents. There is no routine at home. Feeding scheme helps because at home, there is no food (emotions). Most grandparents are illiterate. Therefore, they cannot help with homework. Most of the poor performance is due to poverty. Sometimes I give the learners my own lunch to eat. They eat no breakfast in the morning and are expected to function well with an empty stomach. Same thing applies at home. The learners are finding it difficult to do homework on an empty stomach (emotions again) as their last meal for the day is served here. There is no food at home.

Nirvarshni commented as follows:

Yes, the background of our learners does affect homework because they don't have access to many things. They don't have facilities like lights and water at home. There is no routine at home and there are lots of other issues to worry about when they get home like food, lights and water. Doing homework is the last thing on their minds. Like how can you do homework on an empty stomach?

Rukesh conceived on the socio-economic background is as follows:

This area has informal settlement and there is Mt Moriah and Mt Royal. Most parents are battling financially and because of poverty, we feed children every day. We have a feeding scheme. We provide children with everything, from the pencil to food. The main reason for incomplete homework is poverty. Most parents are unemployed and some children live with grandparents who cannot communicate in English. So you

call them to school in order to discuss a child's academic progress, they don't come because of the language barrier. In their homes, there is no routine at all and there are lots of distraction inside and outside their homes which is also the cause for incompleteness of homework. Our learners live in fear because of the hostels in this community. It is noisy and there are gunshots daily. Therefore, they can't concentrate. Some of them live in one room and there is no space to do homework. No facilities like water and lights. House chores are also the cause of incomplete homework.

Amin and Vithal (2015) suggest that teachers should know their learners by knowing and understanding learners' home background. Furthermore, in SA, some learners come from the middle-class families with working parents who cannot supervise homework at all times (Amin & Vithal, 2015). This indicates that teachers need to have a good relationship with the learners in order to understand the issue of incompleteness of homework. In this vein, I asked Gloria about the socio-economic background in her school and she stated the following:

Most of my learners are coming from average to above average socio-economic background. I have less than a handful of children who come from poor homes. However, most of them are living with aunts, uncles and grannies not biological parents. Most parents are well off but they don't have time and are not at home most of the time. They are busy making money in their businesses or furthering their studies and that has an impact on things like parents' signatures and reply slips.

Candy added by saying the following:

I have learners who are raised by single parents and young parents who are still in high school. Very few learners are staying with both parents. And the above affects their behaviour and academic progress including homework. In conclusion, things that happen at home do affect the learners include incomplete homework.

Reflecting on this theme, socio-economic background does affect learners' academic progress. From the data I drew from the participants, most of the learners are struggling financially and they don't complete homework. In contrast with those from average homes, parents don't supervise homework. However, the homework is always complete. According to Kingston (2001), Bourdieu's framework states that there are two separate but related issues to consider: the cultural capital related to achievement and to what extent endowments of cultural capital statistically account for social privilege (Kingston, 2001). This implies that

children with well-resourced parents are highly likely to be advantaged and perform well in school including the completion of homework activities. Thus, the teachers' job becomes much easier as they do not have to put pressure on learners for incomplete homework.

4. 8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented and discussed the data that was generated from the three research sites where this study was conducted. It was shown that different themes emerged from the data that was generated. This chapter presented a descriptive analysis and discussion according to six themes. The first theme presented and discussed homework as a teaching and learning tool that teachers use as one of the teaching methods. From these theme, three sub-themes emerged. Those were: consolidation work, the use of Rainbow books and assigning of homework. In this regard, I inquired about participants understanding and knowledge about homework. The findings were that teachers perceive homework as a consolidation work that learners do at home and they expect parents to be involved by helping and supervising homework. The second sub-theme was about Rainbow books. Four participants are using these books for homework. Only two participants design a homework worksheet for the learners. They use Rainbow books as homework in order to complete the syllabus. The last sub-theme from this theme was assigning homework according to different levels in the classroom. The findings were that teachers assign the same homework to everyone regardless of their academic ability. What drives this is that they give feedback to learners since they mark the homework as a whole class.

The second theme discussed was homework feedback. The data reveals that participants cannot give feedback to each child regarding homework. Most participants mentioned the large numbers they have in their classrooms, which makes it difficult for them to provide feedback to each and every learner in the classroom. The third theme was parental involvement. The findings of this data were that parents do not want to involve themselves in homework. The learners are doing homework without adults' help. Parents do not even sign the homework books. Some learners do not do homework at all and parents are not aware of that because they do not supervise and monitor homework. A sub-theme unfolds from this theme. That concerned the duration of homework and the days on which teachers assign homework. Regarding the duration of homework, participants feel that grade three learners are still young. Therefore, the homework assigned must not be too lengthy, only 15-30 minutes. Children need to play, watch television and enjoy their afternoon and evening at

home. Furthermore, with regard to the days of assigning homework, participants use different days to assign homework for their personal reasons even though the CAPS document specifies that homework should be assigned daily to learners.

The fourth theme described homework policy on the days on which the teachers assign homework and its effect on teaching time. The data reveals that homework policies are there in schools but do not come from the DoE. However, teachers do not follow those policies. The data also reveals that there is no time allocated in the timetables for teachers to mark the homework for each learner and, in most cases, the Listening and Speaking period is being used in order to mark homework. Participants shared their views about homework that is not allocated in their timetables as a subject, yet they spend 1 hour on homework every day. The days on which a teacher assigns homework to learners depends on individuals.

The fifth theme is projects as assessment strategy. Participants mentioned that the grade three curriculum requires grade three learners to do one project per term, but in two schools, the projects are done in school, not at home, due to lack of parental support. Participants from one school report that the learners do projects at home but they feel that the parents do those projects, not the learners.

The sixth theme presented and discussed the socio-economic background of children and how it affects homework. The findings reveal that there is no routine at home, no working space for a learner to do homework and there are a lot of distractions at home. In addition, most families are living in poverty. They lack basic needs like lights and water. There is no food at home. Therefore, homework is the last thing they worry about. In my discussion, it is shown that different methods were used to generate data. Those methods were semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis. The next chapter presents the findings and based on the findings, it makes recommendations and implications of the study.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the findings of the analysed data. This chapter will demonstrate how this study has responded to the three critical question that were posed in an attempt to explore the use of homework as teaching and assessment strategy in the FP, in three different contextual primary schools in North of Durban.

The main purpose of schools is to promote students' learning. Coleman, Graham-Jolly and Middlewood (2003) state that there are three central aspects that constitute effective learning. These are knowledge and understanding about the content of teaching, knowledge, understanding how students learn, and knowledge and understanding on how to manage the process of learning and teaching. These central aspects involve subject knowledge, the need for teachers to know how to help learners develop skills as learners and recognition on the part of teachers that every learner has different learning styles. Therefore, the consolidation work assigned to learners must be meaningful. It is vital for the teachers and school management to consider the above points when planning work for the learners and when assigning homework to the learners.

Against this setting, this study explored the utilisation of homework as teaching and assessment strategy in the FP. The study revolved around three critical questions:

1. Why do teachers use homework as a teaching and assessment strategy in the FP?
2. How does homework get used as teaching and assessment strategy by teachers in the FP?
3. What are the underlying reasons for the ways in which homework gets used by teachers in the FP?

This section below presents a summary of study findings, including on how this study has responded to the three critical questions asked.

5.2 Summary of the findings

Research question 1: Why do teachers use homework as a teaching and assessment strategy in Foundation Phase?

Most participants understand homework as consolidation and supplementary work that is done at home. It is seen as the practice of what has been taught in class, meaning that homework is for revision, revision that in turn prepares a learner for assessment. They also feel that if a learner did not complete work in the class, it should be taken and done at home as homework activity. However, participants feel that FP learners should not be overloaded with homework. Participants also mentioned that homework in FP should not exceed 30 minutes, including reading. However, during periods of assessment, homework takes longer because learners are given revision work to practise at home. Some participants understand that homework as consolidation but are not sure what work must they assign as homework.

Milligan *et al.* (2018) emphasis that there is significant interest in the role of textbooks. The findings reveal that the teachers were utilising homework as a teaching tool. However, such usage has its limitation. For instance, the Rainbow books that are meant for classwork activity are now used as homework in order to complete the syllabus. In addition, teachers assign projects to learners as an assessment strategy because, according to the CAPS curriculum, the projects and assignments are to be assigned to learners as homework. However, in two schools the assigned projects are done at school as a class activity, due to the lack of support at home.

According to Motshekga (2011), the CAPS curriculum states that homework must be assigned to learners every day. However, there is no written policy from DoE that clearly defines homework policy in terms of the homework duration and homework activities to be assigned to learners. However, those schools that are in the Jikimfundo programme are given homework activities from the programme. Participants did reveal that they are only assign homework because they are told that it is the school policy, even though some of the participants have never seen that policy, they were just told verbally. Therefore, they are using own discretion as to when and what to assign as homework. In this case, some of the participants have designed their own homework policy to suit their learners' needs.

Research question 2: How does homework get used as teaching and assessment strategy by teachers in the Foundation Phase?

When teachers assign homework in terms of the days within a week, they assign homework on different days. Tam and Chan (2016) state that it is believed that homework has the potential to cover learning beyond the work done in the classroom. This implies that, when designing and implementing homework and projects, teachers play a crucial role. It depends on their learners' needs and abilities. The homework policy stipulates that homework should be assigned to learners daily. However, some participants assign homework daily from Monday to Thursday. Other teachers assign only twice a week and two participants mentioned that they assign homework on Friday only. When it comes to the planning and assigning of homework, four of the participants use Rainbow books as homework while two participants design the homework worksheet for the learners. Moreover, learners are given extra reading books to read at home while teachers do not have enough reading books to give to learners and they experience a challenge when learners lose books at home.

In addition, homework is the culture of most public schools in S. A. Participants mentioned that the reason why they use homework as teaching and assessment strategy, they follow the school homework policy. CAPS documents require them to assign one project per term for mark purposes; however, the administration of homework depends on the individual. Each participant administers homework programme according to their understanding. In the township school and a former House of Delegates (ex-Indian) school, learners do not complete the projects at home. Therefore, teachers do not bother to assign projects to be completed at home; instead the projects are done in the classroom as pair work. The main reason why the projects are done in the classroom is because learners do not have necessary materials required for the project. Therefore, teachers provide the materials for the learners. In the former Model C School, learners do their project at home but teachers feel that parents do it instead of learners themselves.

Bojuwoye (2009) indicates that some parents felt that homework is time consuming and an extra responsibility, and that children's education should be left to the experts of the teachers. Three participants mentioned that they do what would normally be homework in the classroom, due to lack of parental support and socio-economic background of the learners. Most parents come late from work and they are in no position to monitor and supervise homework. Some learners are staying with grandparents who are unable to help with

homework. Furthermore, learners are expected to do the house chores when they get home, which leads to incomplete homework. The environment from which learners are coming is another factor why homework is done in class instead of home. Moreover, the lack of basic needs in their homes, like lights and water, also contributes to the lack of completion of homework. For that reason, teachers allow learners to do homework in class.

Research question 3: What are the underlying reasons for the ways in which homework is being used as a teaching and assessment strategy in the FP?

Margolis and McCabe (2004) argue that homework is often too difficult for learners with learning barriers. Furthermore, teachers give the same homework to all the learners, forgetting to cater for the learners with disabilities (Margolis & McCabe, 2004). In addition, those learners with learning barriers avoid tasks like homework because it requires them to work independently (Margolis & McCabe, 2004). In seeking to learn how to cater for different learning abilities when assigning homework, participants reveal that they assign the same homework to every single child because they feel that homework is consolidation work. Most participants have about 45 learners in the classroom.

Núñez *et al.* (2015) state that, typically, teachers' involvement with homework occurs at two moments. Firstly, when they plan the homework and the number and the type of homework tasks to be given to learners. Secondly, when they deliver feedback on homework to learners. Participants reveal that, because of the big numbers in their classroom, they experience a challenge in monitoring every learner's homework books daily. Therefore, learners mark for one another. The other underlying reason for the ways in which homework gets used by teachers in FP is because homework is not part of the prescribed curriculum. There is no time allocation in their timetables. Therefore, they steal from the Listening and Speaking time to assign and give homework feedback. Moreover, the findings reveal that homework takes away valuable teaching time. Teachers spend about an hour marking and giving feedback on homework yet the homework is not in their timetable as a subject.

5.3 Recommendations

Coleman *et al.* (2003) state that the effectiveness of teaching will also be enriched by an ethos and culture supportive of the learning and teaching process that is encouraged by and through the leadership and management of the school. Therefore, the school management

should have the homework policy in place for all the teachers to follow and should also be available for the parents and government officials. In addition, the expectations of the school from the parents regarding homework should be clear. The homework programme should be discussed with the parents and learners at the beginning of each year. In addition, effective learning is related to factors at three different levels, that is: the teacher in the classroom; whole school issues; and learners' own background, including the socio-economic status of the learner. All of these factors operate within a specific local context which in turn influences the way in which an individual will learn (Coleman *et al.*, 2003).

5.4 Limitations of the study

When conducting research, limitations do exist. In qualitative research, one of the limitations is that the results obtained from the study may not be generalizable to other people or contexts. The findings in this study are therefore limited and cannot be generalised beyond the six grade three teachers within the research setting.

The entire study shone a light on the teachers' perspectives regarding the phenomenon on the use of homework as assessment and teaching strategy in the FP, yet parental involvement plays a crucial role in the effective homework programme. Had there been parents as participants, different perspectives of the phenomenon could perhaps have been unveiled. Furthermore, at the beginning of the study, my aim was to interview nine teachers, three from each school, only to find that each school had only two grade three teachers. Additionally, more data would have been generated if my participants were the whole FP team from grade one to grade three teachers. Due to time constraints, participants had to be interviewed for not more than two hours because they are teachers and they have administration work to do after contact teaching time.

Regardless of these limitation of my research, there were also some strengths highlighted in this study. The semi-structured interviews adopted in my study allowed the participants to speak freely and provide rich descriptive details about their understanding of homework. This provided in-depth information in relation to the research questions. This also allowed the teachers to express their frustration regarding the large number of learners in their classrooms, unclear homework policy, lack of parental support as well as their frustration when it comes to marking of the homework books.

5.5 Conclusion

My research study sought to explore the use of homework as a teaching and assessment strategy in the FP. I explored the possibility that teachers are assigning homework because the school policy states that teachers need to design and assign homework to learners. In some of the schools there are no written policies pertaining to homework. Teachers are told verbally by their heads of departments that they need to assign homework. Some of the teachers are not in favour of homework. They feel that learners need to play and spend quality time with their parents and siblings at home instead of spending another two hours engaging in homework. Moreover, only half of the class do homework. Therefore, teachers spend the first one hour of every day doing homework instead of doing Listening and Speaking, which is in their timetable.

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APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



07 September 2017

Ms Melody Nkosingiphile Mtshali (216069218)
School of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear Ms Mtshali,

Protocol reference number: **HSS/0786/017M**
Project title: Homework as a teaching and assessment strategy in the Foundation Phase: A case study of three contextually different schools in Durban

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

In response to your application received on 14 June 2017, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

/ms

Cc Supervisor: Professor Thabo Msibi
Cc Academic Leader Research: Dr SB Khoza
Cc School Administrator: Ms Tyzer Khumalo

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000

Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 3587/8360/4557 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 4609 Email: zimbani@ukzn.ac.za / snymann@ukzn.ac.za / mohun@ukzn.ac.za

Website: www.ukzn.ac.za

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education

Department:
Education
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Enquiries: Phindile Duma

Tel: 033 392 1041

Ref.:2/4/8/1352

Miss MN Mtshali
8 Avocado grove
Avoca Hills
4051

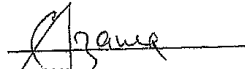
Dear Miss Mtshali

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: "HOMEWORK AS A TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT STRATEGY IN THE FOUNDATION PHASE: A CASE STUDY OF THREE CONTEXTUALLY DIFFERENT SCHOOLS IN DURBAN", in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the Intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 09 October 2017 to 09 July 2020.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Connie Kehologile at the contact numbers below
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

North Crest Primary School
Duffs Road Primary School
Sandasonke Primary School


Dr. EV Nzama
Head of Department: Education
Date: 11 October 2017

...Championing Quality Education • Creating and Securing a Brighter Future

KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Postal Address: Private Bag X9137 • Pietermaritzburg • 3200 • Republic of South Africa
Physical Address: 247 Burger Street • Anton Lembede Building • Pietermaritzburg • 3201
Tel.: +27 33 392 1004/41 • Fax: +27 033 392 1203 • Email: Phindile.Duma@kzndoe.gov.za • Web: www.kzndoe.gov.za
Facebook: KZNDOE... Twitter: @DBE_KZN... Instagram: kzn_education... Youtube: kzndoe

APPENDIX B: LETTER TO GATEKEEPER

University of KwaZulu-Natal
Edgewood Campus
Private Bag X03
Ashwood
3605

The Department of Education
Research Unit
Resource Planning
KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education

Dear Sir / Madam

Re: REQUEST THE PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THREE SCHOOLS IN NORTH OF DURBAN.

I hereby request the permission to conduct research project with nine grade three teachers from three contextually different schools in North of Durban. My name is Melody Nkosingiphile Mtshali and my student number is 216069218. I am studying for Masters in Education (Med) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood Campus. The topic of my study is: Homework as a teaching and assessment strategy in the Foundation Phase: A case study of three contextually different schools in Durban. The purpose of this study is to understand how homework is utilized as a teaching and assessment strategy in Foundation Phase.

The objectives of this study are:

1. To identify the practice of homework by primary school teachers as a teaching and assessment strategy.
2. To understand why teachers use homework as teaching and assessment strategy in primary schools.
3. To explore the use of homework as teaching and assessment strategy by primary school teachers.

The methods that I will use to collect data will be the semi-structured interviews with the teachers and learner's homework related document analysis. I assure that there will be no teaching and learning disturbance during the project. I intend to conduct the interviews after school. Research will take place in June and July 2017 but will communicate the exact dates with the schools.

The findings of the study will be used for education purposes, which in this case it will be for Master's degree. The information generated in this research will be kept confidential and the participant's identities will not be revealed, even during my analysis of the data. When I need to refer, I will only use pseudonyms to identify participants. Their voice recordings will also be kept anonymous.

I hope my request will reach your favourable consideration.

For more information, you are free to contact me, my supervisor or UKZN Ethics offices on the contact details listed below:

RESEARCHER:

NAME: Melody Nkosingiphile Mtshali

QUALIFICATION: B Ed Honours

CELL NUMBER: 0731998995

Email: mtshalimelody@gmail.com

SUPERVISOR:

NAME: Prof. Thabo Msibi

QUALIFICATIONS: PhD

CELL NUMBER: 0724227261

Email: Msibi@ukzn.ac.za

RESEARCH ETHICS OFFICES:

TELEPHONE NUMBER: 031-2604557

FAX NUMBER: 031-2604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Kind regards

Melody Nkosingiphile Mtshali

APPENDIX C: GATEKEEPER'S LETTER

University of KwaZulu-Natal
Edgewood Campus
Private Bag x03
Ashwood
3605

..... / / 2017

Dear Sir

RE: REQUEST TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

I hereby request permission to conduct a research study in the Foundation Phase department with three grade 3 teachers at your school. My name is Melody Nkosingiphile Mtshali and my student number is 216069218. I am studying for Masters in Education (Med) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood Campus. The topic of my study is: Homework as a teaching and assessment strategy in the Foundation Phase: A case study of three contextually different schools in Durban.

The objectives of this study are:

1. To identify the practise of homework by primary school teachers as a teaching and assessment strategy.
2. To understand why teachers use homework as teaching and assessment strategy in primary schools.
3. To explore the use of homework as teaching and assessment strategy by primary school teachers.

The methods that I will be using to collect data will be the semi-structured interviews with your teachers which will take place after school and learners homework related document analysis. I assure that there will be no teaching and learning disturbance during the project. I intend to conduct interviews in one day.

For more information, you are free to contact me, my supervisor or UKZN Ethics offices on the contact details listed below:

RESEARCHER:

NAME: Melody Nkosingiphile Mtshali

QUALIFICATION: B Ed Honours

CELL NUMBER: 0731998995

Email: mtshalimelody@gmail.com

SUPERVISOR: Prof. Thabo Msibi

QUALIFICATIONS: PhD

CELL NUMBER: 0724227261

Email: Msibi@ukzn.ac.za

RESEARCH ETHICS OFFICES:

TELEPHONE NUMBER:031-2604557

FAX NUMBER: 031-2604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Yours faithfully

Melody Nkosingiphile Mtshali

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM (PRINCIPALS)

University of KwaZulu-Natal
Edgewood Campus
Private Bag x03
Ashwood
3605

..... / / 2017

Dear Sir

RE: REQUEST TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

I hereby request permission to conduct a research study in the Foundation Phase department with three grade three teachers at your school. My name is Melody Nkosingiphile Mtshali and my student number is 216069218. I am studying for Masters in Education (Med) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood Campus. The topic of my study is: Homework as a teaching and assessment strategy in the Foundation Phase: A case study of three contextually different schools in Durban.

The objectives of this study are:

1. To identify the practice of homework by primary school teachers as a teaching and assessment strategy.
2. To understand why teachers use homework as teaching and assessment strategy in primary schools.
3. To explore the use of homework as teaching and assessment strategy by primary school teachers.

The methods that I will be using to collect data will be the semi-structured interviews with your teachers which will take place after school and learners homework related document analysis. I assure that there will be no teaching and learning disturbance during the project. I intend to conduct interviews in one day.

For more information, you are free to contact me, my supervisor or UKZN Ethics offices on the contact details listed below:

RESEARCHER:

NAME: Melody Nkosingiphile Mtshali

QUALIFICATION: B Ed Honours

CELL NUMBER: 0731998995

Email: mtshalimelody@gmail.com

SUPERVISOR: Prof. Thabo Msibi

QUALIFICATIONS: PhD

CELL NUMBER: 0724227261

Email: Msibi@ukzn.ac.za

RESEARCH ETHICS OFFICES:

TELEPHONE NUMBER:031-2604557

FAX NUMBER: 031-2604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Yours faithfully

Melody Nkosingiphile Mtshali

APPENDIX E: CONSENT FORM (PRINCIPALS)

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Edgewood campus

Permission/Consent form (principal)

I hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project. I consent to participate and I consent to the teachers at the school participating in the above research project. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time should I desire. I consent to the interviews being audio-recorded and documents to be analysed of the use of homework as teaching and assessment activity.

Principal: (Print name): _____

Signature: _____

Researcher: Ms. Melody Mtshali

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Address: 8 Avocado Grove

Avoca Hills

4051

Telephone: Cell: 0731998995 (H) 031-5651786 (W) 031-5643533

Supervisor (Print name): Professor Thabo Msibi

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Faculty of Education, Edgewood Campus

Private bag x03

Ashwood

3605

031-2603686

Ms. M.N Mtshali

Student no. 216069218

APPENDIX F: INFORMATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

University of KwaZulu-Natal
Edgewood Campus
Private Bag x03
Ashwood
3605

12 / 06 / 2017

Dear Sir/ Madam

RE: REQUEST TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

I hereby request permission to conduct a research study with Foundation Phase grade three teachers. My name is Melody Nkosingiphile Mtshali and my student number is 216069218. I am studying for Masters in Education (Med) at the university of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood campus. The topic of my study is: Homework as teaching and assessment strategy in the Foundation Phase: A case study of three contextually different schools in Durban.

The objectives of this study are:

1. To identify the practice of homework by primary school teachers as teaching and assessment strategy.
2. To understand why teachers use homework as teaching and assessment strategy in primary school.
3. To explore the use of homework as teaching and assessment strategy by primary school teachers.

The methods that I will use to collect the data will be semi-structured interviews with you that will take place after school and I will also collect learner's documents which are homework related for document analysis. I assure you that there will be no teaching and learning disturbance during the project.

For more information, you are free to contact me, my supervisor or UKZN Ethics offices on the contact details listed below:

RESEARCHER:

NAME: Melody Nkosingiphile Mtshali

QUALIFICATIONS: Bed Honours

CELL NUMBER: 0731998995

Email address: mtshalimelody@gmail.com

SUPERVISOR: Prof. Thabo Msibi

QUALIFICATION: PhD

CELL NUMBER: 0724227261

Email address: Msibi@ukzn.ac.za

RESEARCH ETHICS OFFICES:

TELEPHONE NUMBER: 031-2604557

FAX NUMBER: 031-2604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Kindly take note of the following:

- The semi-structured interviews will last for approximately one hour.
- Learners documents will be collected for document analysis.
- I will ensure that your identity remains anonymous and confidential by using pseudonyms (not using your real name).
- You will be free to use the language of your choice; with which you are comfortable.
- There are no financial benefits involved when participating in this study, contribution will be used for educational purposes.
- All your response will be kept strictly confidential.
- You will respond to each questions in a manner that will reflect you true personal feeling about the study, there are no right and wrong answers.
- You will not be forced to disclose any information if you feel not to disclose.
- Data collected will be kept in a safe place for the period of five years thereafter it will be completely destroyed.
- There are no obligations, participation in this study is voluntary and you have a choice to participate and not to participate or even withdraw from participating during data collection. There will be no negative and undesired impact for the above actions.
- If you consent to participate and be interviewed, please indicate whether you will or not allow the interview to be recorded in the boxes below (Please tick):

EQUIPMENT

CONSENT

DO NOT CONSENT

Audio equipment

Photographic equipment

Video equipment

Thanking you in advance.

I look forward to your kind reply and thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours faithfully

Melody Nkosingiphile Mtshali

APPENDIX G: SAMPLE OF CONSENT FORM (PARTICIPANTS)

University of KwaZulu-Natal
Edgewood College
Private Bag x03
Ashwood
3605

I _____ have been informed about the study entitled (Homework as a teaching and assessment strategy in the Foundation Phase: A Case study of three contextually different schools in Durban) by Melody Nkosingiphile Mtshali student number 216069218.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study (The aim of this study is to understand how homework is utilized as a teaching and assessment strategy in Foundation Phase).

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

I have been informed about any available compensation or medical treatment if injury occurs to me as a result of study-related procedures.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher at 0731998995 or mtshalimelody@gmail.com.

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Researcher Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 31 2604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview YES/ NO

Video-record my interview YES/ NO

Use of my photographs for research purposes YES/ NO

Signature of Participant **Date**

Signature of Witness **Date**
(Where applicable)

Signature of Translator **Date**
(Where applicable)

APPENDIX H: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Research topic: The use of homework as teaching and assessment strategy in Foundation Phase.

1. What is your understanding about homework?
2. How often do you assign homework to your learners?
3. How do you give feedback to learners regarding homework?
4. How do you cater for learners with different learning abilities when assigning homework?
5. Do you sometimes give challenging homework to learners including the new concepts? If yes, why?
6. What is the duration of homework, including reading that you assign to learners?
7. How long does it take you to mark the homework and does it affect your teaching time?
8. Explain to what extent you use homework as assessment strategy?
9. What challenges do you face when collecting homework and when giving feedback to learners?
10. If a learner fails to submit the assignment for marks purposes, what measures do you take?
11. Describe the contents of homework policy in your school?
12. Explain how the socio-economic background of a learner could be a cause of incomplete homework?

APPENDIX I: DOCUMENTARY ANALYSIS

Documentary analysis (homework books)

Research title: **Homework as a teaching and assessment strategy in the Foundation Phase: A case study of three contextually different schools in Durban.**

1. Frequency
2. Completion of homework
3. Coping: Understanding of concept given (right and wrong answers)
4. Parental involvement (parent's signature and comments)
5. Teacher feedback