

South African 'Freirean' Literacy Projects in the 1970s and 1980s: An Exploration of their Praxis

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Abstract

This thesis explores the nature, practice, and strategic role of five ‘Freirean’ literacy projects that operated in apartheid South Africa between 1970 and 1990. It asks a central question: to what extent were these projects truly Freirean, in that they used Freire’s pedagogy as a tool for political transformation, rather an as a technical literacy teaching method?

To answer this, I undertook archival research at several different archives in South Africa and interviewed 15 people involved in the case study projects and/or radical adult education at the time. Working in a critical paradigm, I analysed the data generated by drawing on an integrated theoretical framework: Gramsci’s concept of hegemony, and war or position versus war of manoeuvre, at the macro level to interrogate the ideological struggle within South Africa at the time; Freire’s notion of Education for Domestication and Education for Liberation, and in particular his ideas of praxis and conscientisation, at the meso level to examine the internal mechanisms and dynamics of the projects; and Lukes’ three dimensions of power at the micro level to further unpack mechanisms of resistance.

The analysis shows that the projects were indeed deliberate, counter-hegemonic political interventions. They pursued a dual strategy of resistance. First, a ‘war of position’ on the ideological front (framed within Lukes’ third dimension of ‘power over’), where the projects focused on building ‘power within’, i.e. agency and dignity. This then laid the foundation for a tactical confrontation, contesting agenda-setting and coercive power, and advancing organised initiatives such as union building and subaltern leadership.

The thesis concludes that whilst these projects faced structural compromises such as the tension of practising liberatory pedagogy within a racial hierarchy, these compromises were necessary strategic adaptations.

A contribution of this thesis is its identification of a power translation mechanism, which demonstrates how ideological liberation within Lukes' third dimension of power was systematically converted into organised confrontation within the first dimension. This translation across the case study projects shows how conscientisation and agency-building in the classroom provided the ideological foundation for collective mobilisation and direct contestation, thereby linking micro-level pedagogical practice to macro-level political struggle.

Keywords: Freirean Pedagogy, Hegemony, Praxis, War of Position, War of Manoeuvre, Three Dimensions of Power, Black Consciousness, Literacy, Apartheid.

Declaration

I, Zamalotshwa Florence Thembisile Thusi, declare that

(i) The research reported in this dissertation, except where otherwise indicated, is my original work.

(ii) This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

(iii) This dissertation does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.

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Signed: 

Signed: Dr Anne Harley (Supervisor)

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PRAISE OF LEARNING

Learn the simplest things. For you
whose time has already come
it is never too late!
Learn your A B C’s, it is enough,
but learn them! Do not let it
discourage you, begin!
You must know everything!
You must take over the leadership!
Learn, man in the asylum!
Learn, man in prison!
Learn, wife in the kitchen!
Learn, man of sixty!
Seek out the school, you who are
homeless!
Sharpen your wits, you who shiver!
Hungry man, reach for the book:
it is a weapon.
You must take over the leadership!
Don't be afraid of asking, brother!
Don't be won over.
See for yourself!
What you don’t know yourself
you don’t know.
Add up the reckoning.
It's you who must pay it.
Put your finger on each item
ask: how did this get here?
You must take over the leadership.

Bertolt Brecht

Abbreviations

ALP	Adult Literacy Project
ANC	African National Congress
BC	Black Consciousness
BLL	Bureau of Literacy and Literature
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
GFWBF	General Factory Workers' Benefit Fund
IAS	Industrial Aid Society
UCM	University Christian Movement
NUSAS	National Union of South African Students
PEM	People's Education Movement
PPPA	People's Participatory Planning
SASO	South African Students' Organisation
TCOE	Trust for Christian Outreach and Education
UDF	United Democratic Front
CUPC	Churches Urban Planning Commission
TUACC	Trade Union Action Coordinating Committee
WPWAB	Western Province Workers' Advice Bureau
WPLP	Western Province Literacy Project

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction: A Personal and Political Genesis

For the longest time, I have been inspired by Paulo Freire's philosophy, an inspiration that ignited the decision to undertake this research. While this study is grounded in historical research and theoretical inquiry, it is also shaped by my lived experience. My interest in Freirean literacy projects did not begin with an academic engagement with Freire's writings. Rather, it emerged from my experiences as a young Black student and activist between 1987 and 1990, during the final and most turbulent years of apartheid. At the time, I did not possess the theoretical language to understand concepts such as conscientisation, praxis, or popular education. Nor was I aware of the extent to which Freire's ideas were informing educational initiatives in South Africa. What I did understand was that educational activities associated with liberation struggles attracted considerable hostility from the apartheid state. During this period, I was involved in literacy work within trade unions affiliated to COSATU, where we used *Learn and Teach* materials, and literacy resources produced through SACHED's (South African Committee for Higher Education) literacy initiatives. Although I did not then recognise these efforts as part of a broader tradition of popular education, they exposed me to educational approaches that linked literacy with critical awareness, organisation, and social change. The tensions, surveillance, and repression that surrounded such initiatives left a lasting impression on me and raised questions that would remain unresolved for many years. It was only later, through academic study and engagement with Freire's work, that I began to revisit those experiences and ask what made these educational practices so significant and, from the perspective of the state, so threatening.

This decision dates as far back as 1987 when I was a student at Khanya College, whose slogan was 'Education for Liberation', a term coined from Freire's banned book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Khanya College was a counter-hegemonic institution, providing education to marginalised Black students excluded from the mainstream apartheid system and fostering critical consciousness, participatory learning, and a deep commitment to social justice.

Our participation in awareness campaigns and worker education with trade unions was not an abstract exercise. We were constantly harassed, detained, and kept under the watchful eye of

the state's security forces. This experience led me to believe that there was something we were doing that disrupted and unsettled the apartheid government to provoke such hostility. This study was therefore necessary, at a personal level, as a cathartic exercise to purge and heal from the traumas of that ordeal. More importantly, it fuelled a scholarly curiosity into the power of the Freirean ideas, which were not overtly proclaimed at the time, but which clearly had underpinned our work.

This curiosity and interest in Freire had decades later led me to find and explore in-depth a project that overtly proclaimed to be Freirean for my Master's research. The findings of that study had revealed some evidence of a Freirean conceptualisation, although there was less evidence that the facilitators had understood this. There was also no evidence that the learners had experienced it as a Freirean intervention, either methodologically or politically.

This personal experience led me to a central, critical debate within education and social movement studies. While Freire's influence globally is widely acknowledged, there is considerable critique about how his ideas are actually implemented. Stanley Aronowitz (2012) argues that while Freire's work has been touted as a 'brilliant methodology of a highly charged political character', it has often been reduced to a simplistic 'teaching methodology as opposed to being used as a philosophy or social theory' (p. 8). Neville Alexander likewise warned, 'I should just say…that Freire's method has been co-opted in thousands of different ways in the pursuit of ruling-class, status quo-preserving projects all over the world' (Alexander, 1990, p. 59). This critique is not merely historical; it is a central concern in contemporary scholarship.

In a recent article, Harley and Manji (2025) directly address this issue, arguing that in much of the renewed interest in Freire, 'there has been a tendency to focus on him as a pedagogue rather than as an emancipatory political thinker; his involvement in and influence on liberation struggles in Africa, in particular, have received little attention' (p. 1). Using Freire's work as a mere technical method, divorced from its political content, risks it being 'captured' by hegemony and stripped of its counter-hegemonic intent. Thus, some projects which consider themselves 'Freirean' are not in fact so.

In 2018, I did research for a dossier for the Tricontinental Institute for Social Research (Tricon) (Sefatsa, 2020[1]). The dossier, entitled *Paulo Freire and Popular Struggle in South*

[1]For clarity, Sefatsa is my marital surname. References to Sefatsa (2020) are thus to earlier research (including interviews) done by myself.

Africa, explored the influence that Freire had on activists who used his philosophy in their praxis. While interviewing them, it was apparent that some of them were involved in the 1970s and 1980s in setting up literacy classes, teaching these classes, and designing learning materials with a Freirean orientation. Seemingly, nobody has interviewed these activists about these classes in any great detail.

A rare exception is the work of Leslie Hadfield (2017). Hadfield relates how a group of Black Consciousness (BC) activists were trained by Anne Hope (who was familiar with Freire's work) in 1972 at Steve Biko's request. In May 1972, four week-long Freire-inspired workshops were run for a group of about fifteen activists from five different regions. These activists included Steve Biko, Bokwe Mafuna, Strini Moodley, Barney Pityana, Bennie Khoapa, Saths Cooper, Johnny Issel, Mthuli ka-Shezi, Jerry Modisane, Dumo Baqwa, Tshepo Mafole and Beyers Naude (Hadfield, 2017; Magaziner, 2010). The activists' idea was to get involved with different kinds of projects, all with a Freirean orientation. Hope introduced them to the idea of themes and generative codes and the need to use this approach to ensure that education started from people's own experiences and that it resonated with their reality (Hadfield, 2017). Nekhweva (2002) had this to say about the activists and their engagement with Freire:

> As in Brazil and Chile, activists in South Africa promoted literacy and the conscientization method not simply to promote reading and writing but to promote mass participation in the political process. South African activists from both the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) and the People's Education Movement (PEM) used the Freirean pedagogy for the politicisation of the oppressed (p.135).

These activists then planned to conduct adult literacy projects based on the Freirean methodology and philosophy in their communities to react to the injustices of the state. It was Freire's work, and this training specifically, according to these activists, which helped shape their praxis and philosophy. They then adapted Freire's instructions to teach literacy in a variety of programmes based in different communities (Hadfield, 2017).

Whilst a lot has been said about the 'subversive and revolutionary nature of these Freirean-inspired literacy projects which were based on Paulo Freire's banned *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and the process of conscientization' (Naidoo, 2012, p. 121), his influence has not really been explored in any great detail; that is, although Freire is acknowledged as having influenced adult literacy work in the anti-apartheid period of the 1970s and 1980s, there does

not seem to have been any consistent attempt to record exactly how this worked. The key concern is whether Freire's political philosophy was evident in the design and execution of these projects - whether the facilitators and learners experienced the process as authentically 'Freirean' - or whether his ideas were reduced to a purely technical method.

1.2 Background and Context

The start of the period under investigation, the 1970s and 1980s, was a time when apartheid was at its height, and the liberation movements were at their weakest internally. As I discuss in more detail in later chapters, it is into this context that Freire's ideas were introduced. According to the literature, this happened primarily through the University Christian Movement (UCM) and the South African Students' Organisation (SASO) around 1969/1970 (Alexander, 1990; Aitchison, 2003; Gush & Walters, 1995; Hadfield, 2017; Luckett et al., 2017). Although *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was officially banned by the apartheid government, according to Alexander (1990) hundreds of photocopied versions were illicitly circulated by the young activists of the Black Consciousness movement, and Freire's ideas quickly gained momentum.

The power of this text for that generation is captured in an interview (for the Tricon Dossier) that I conducted with Barney Pityana, a leading intellectual in the BC movement, in which he said, 'I don't know of any similar text that we could have used in South Africa then as a way of understanding and engaging the South African context' (Sefatsa, 2020, p. 13). Some of the material cited in this thesis comes from my earlier research published under my marital surname Sefatsa. For clarity, Sefatsa and Thusi refer to the same researcher. References to Sefatsa (2020) represent previous work that is included in this thesis in accordance with accepted scholarly practice.

Pityana's reflection highlights the dominant narrative in the literature, that Freire's ideas were profoundly influential. Some writers, such as Nekhwevha (2002), argue that this influence stemmed from the perfect alignment of Freire's politics with the broader radical climate of the time:

> For example, coming on the cusp of a worldwide radical humanist and often anti-imperialist movement... Freire's key work, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, played a

> seminal role in educational thinking within the liberation movement in South Africa (Nekhwevha, 2002, p. 134).

This narrative of profound influence is visible across the ideological spectrum of the struggle. While organisations like SASO overtly used the Freirean term ‘conscientise’, even the African National Congress (ANC) used pedagogical tools like their *Umrabulo* handbooks, which they described as a ‘critical instrument... to deepen the political consciousness amongst the cadres of our movement’ (Mthethwa et al., 2013, p. 2). It is this powerful claim of seminal, political influence, and the critical counter-claim articulated by Aronowitz (2012) and Alexander (1990) (that Freire was often reduced to a mere methodology, or co-opted), that forms the central tension this study seeks to investigate. It therefore moves beyond accepting such claims at face value to explore how this influence manifested in practice within the five chosen case study literacy projects.

1.3 Purpose and Rationale

The purpose of this research is to document and analyse in as much detail as possible the praxis of five South African adult literacy projects that operated between 1970 and 1990 and claimed a Freirean orientation. The rationale for this study is threefold:

Firstly, I wanted to directly engage with the critical debate as hitherto outlined, that is, whether ‘Freirean-inspired’ projects genuinely employ his methodology as the political tool he intended. This question was catalysed by my own experience of a Freirean project in my Masters study.

Secondly, the research sought to address a scholarly gap. While Freire’s influence is acknowledged, there has been no systematic attempt to track the multiple and varied ways his work was used across different sectors of the anti-apartheid movement, or to explore these in any great detail. This research was directly catalysed by interviews conducted for the Tricon dossier, which revealed that a rich, unrecorded history of these 1970s and 1980s projects existed within the living memory of these activists. The study aimed to fill that analytical void.

Finally, I am driven by a sense of urgency and the need for preservation. The activists who founded and ran these projects are ageing, and their detailed stories have not been recorded. This study seeks to unearth and preserve this rich history before it is lost.

1.4 The Selected Case Studies

This study focuses on five specific literacy projects, chosen to provide a cross-section across the key ideological, geographical, and organisational movements engaged in the anti-apartheid struggle during the 1970s and 1980s. I provide a full justification for their selection in Chapter 4, but I introduce them here to provide clarity on the scope of the study.

1.4.1 The Student Movement Projects

The Reiger Park Literacy Classes (run by University Christian Movement (UCM)-aligned students based at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) and the Western Province Literacy Project (WPLP) were among the earliest Freirean literacy projects conducted by student activists in the early 1970s. As I will show, both projects emerged from resolutions by the UCM and the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) to undertake literacy, and after both organisations (which were working on literacy together) became aware of Freire's work, they moved away from using the Bureau of Literacy method. Gush and Walters (1995) state that the UCM was influenced by Freire. Moss (2014) notes that student literacy initiatives at Wits University during the early 1970s were grounded in Freire.

1.4.2 The Worker Movement Project

The Industrial Aid Society (IAS) represents the important student-worker interconnection and the ideological debates over the role of education in union-building in the mid-1970s. The IAS emerged out of the NUSAS Wages Commission on the Wits campus. Some of those involved in the student literacy initiatives became involved in the IAS worker education initiative, which explicitly claimed alignment with 'Freirean principles' (Moss, 2014, p. 260).

1.4.3 The Service Organisation Project

Learn and Teach represents one of the first projects specifically created to provide not only literacy classes per se, but also infrastructural support to the broader anti-apartheid literacy movement. Founded in 1974, it supported literacy work throughout the second half of the 1970s and the 1980s. Numerous writers state that Learn and Teach was Freirean (Aitchison & McKay, 2021; French, 1988; Kerfoot, 2009; Prinsloo, 1999).

1.4.4 The Church-Related Project

Masifundise (an affiliate of the Trust for Christian Outreach and Education (TCOE), which later changed its name to Trust for Community Outreach and Education) represents the fusion of liberation/Black theology, BC, and Freirean practice from the early 1980s onwards. As Hadfield (2017) has shown, the BC movement had been influenced by Freire from its inception, and Masifundise consciously drew on this tradition.

1.4.5 The Black Consciousness Movement Project

As I have discussed, whilst BC-aligned Freirean literacy projects were some of the first to emerge in the early 1970s, because of the work done on them by Hadfield (2017), I have chosen to focus on a much later project, the Umtapo Centre. This BC-aligned project emerged in the highly volatile context of the late 1980s. Hyman (2002) asserts that Umtapo positioned itself firmly within the Freirean tradition.

1.5 Research Objectives and Questions

To guide the inquiry, the study was structured around the following objectives:

Objective 1: To examine the objectives, characteristics, and context of the ‘Freirean’ literacy projects conducted during the 1970s and 1980s.

Objective 2: To investigate and analyse how these projects understood, interpreted, and applied the concept of ‘praxis’.

Objective 3: To analyse the nature of ‘action’ that emerged from these projects to determine the extent to which it constituted a war of position or a war of manoeuvre.

My research questions were thus:

Research Question 1: What was the nature of the Freirean literacy projects in the 1970s and 1980s?

Research Question 2: How did these projects understand and enact the concept of ‘praxis’?

Research Question 3: What was the nature of the ‘action’ that emerged from these projects, and to what extent did it constitute a war of position or a war of manoeuvre?

1.6 Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by an integrated theoretical framework drawing on the work of Antonio Gramsci, Paulo Freire, and Steven Lukes. These three influential thinkers provide a multi-layered lens for analysing literacy projects as sites of political and pedagogical struggle. Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony, along with his notions of the war of position and war of manoeuvre, offers a way to interrogate the dynamics of power, control, and resistance in apartheid South Africa (Gramsci, 1971). Freire's principles of conscientisation and praxis provide the ontological and epistemological foundation for understanding literacy as a tool for empowerment and social transformation (Freire, 1972; Freire & Macedo, 1987). Lukes' (2005) three-dimensional view of power deepens the analysis by highlighting how power operates through decision-making, agenda-setting, and the shaping of consciousness. Together, these perspectives work in a complementary and synergistic way to enable a comprehensive analysis of the projects examined in this study. A detailed exposition of this theoretical framework is provided in Chapter 2.

1.7 Overview of Research Design

This study is a qualitative, collective case study framed within the critical paradigm. The critical paradigm was chosen because it emphasises questioning established power structures and is consistent with the liberatory goals of the projects under investigation and my own worldview. The five specific projects chosen as case studies are all purported to have been influenced by Freire and represent different movements within the broader anti-apartheid movement of the time. Data were generated through two inquiry strategies: archival research at various national and university archives; and in-depth, semi-structured interviews with activists who were in some way involved in these projects. Data were analysed using a combination of inductive and deductive thematic analysis. The full research design and methodology are detailed in Chapter 5.

1.8 Significance of the Study

This study aimed to contribute to our understanding of the anti-apartheid struggle and the role of Freirean philosophy/theory within it. By providing a deep, grounded analysis of these five projects, I hoped to fill a crucial scholarly gap by providing a detailed account of some of the

‘Freirean’ literacy projects active during this period, whilst engaging with the ongoing debate about the extent to which Freirean education remains true to Freire’s political philosophy. Theoretically, by inserting Lukes (2005) into the analysis, I hope to enrich the Gramscian-Freirean analysis in a real-world setting. Ultimately, by unearthing this rich history, I hope to honour the legacy of the activists and learners who waged a quiet but powerful war for liberation on the educational front.

1.9 Overview of the Dissertation

This chapter introduced the study, moving from its personal and political genesis to the central research problem that informed this inquiry. It presented the background, rationale, and the specific research questions that guided the investigation. It also briefly introduced the theoretical framework underpinning the study and the research design. The following chapters are structured to build the argument, moving from theory and context to findings and analysis.

Chapter Two provides a detailed exposition of the theoretical framework that underpins the study. It delves into the key concepts of Antonio Gramsci (hegemony, war of position/manoeuvre), Paulo Freire (dehumanisation, conscientisation, praxis) and introduces Steven Lukes’ three dimensions of power, establishing the critical lens through which the research is conducted. (Note that I acknowledge that positioning this chapter this early in the thesis is possibly unconventional; however, the theoretical framework underpins my literature review because I used a Gramscian framework to structure it. Since the study focuses specifically on Freirean literacy projects, it also made sense for me to provide a detailed understanding of Freire at this early stage.)

Chapter Three, the first part of my literature review, maps the hegemonic landscape of apartheid South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s. It reviews the literature on the apartheid state’s strategies of control, its use of Bantu Education, and the dominant, functionalist approaches to adult literacy that defined the era and operated as tools of hegemony or ‘banking education’.

Chapter Four, the second part of the literature review, examines the literature on the counter-hegemonic response. It traces the emergence of the student, Black Consciousness, and worker movements, analyses their internal debates, and locates the five chosen case

studies within this landscape of resistance. The subsequent chapters turn from this contextual and theoretical foundation to the presentation, analysis, and conclusion of the original empirical research undertaken for this study.

Chapter Five details the research design and methodology employed in the study. It outlines the paradigm within which the study is based, the collective case study design, the methods of data generation (archival research and interviews), the analytical strategies, and the ethical considerations of the research. It also considers the issue of researcher positionality and acknowledges the limitations of the study.

Chapter Six presents the findings from the archival research and participant interviews. It is structured case by case, to provide a rich, descriptive account of each of the five literacy projects' origins and objectives, participants, and pedagogical practices.

Chapter Seven provides an analysis and discussion of these findings. It synthesises the data from Chapter Six and interprets it through the theoretical framework established in Chapter Two, directly addressing the core research questions about the nature, praxis, and strategic function of these projects. The findings are considered in relation to the literature as presented in Chapters Three and Four.

Chapter Eight presents my final thoughts and concludes the study. It summarises the key arguments, discusses the study's contributions to knowledge and its limitations, and reflects on the broader implications of this research for understanding liberatory education and social movements.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I laid the groundwork for a study of South African 'Freirean' literacy projects in the 1970s and 1980s by outlining its background, rationale, and research questions. I briefly explained the theoretical framework underpinning the study, and the research design I used to answer the research questions and provided an overview of the study's structure and a roadmap for navigating the forthcoming chapters.

In this chapter, I present in detail the theoretical framework that underpins this study: the integrated work of three key theorists, namely, Antonio Gramsci, Paulo Freire, and Steven Lukes, who together provide a multi-layered lens for analysing the literacy projects as sites of political and pedagogical struggle. I will show how these theorists work together in a complementary and synergistic way to allow for a comprehensive analysis.

I begin with a discussion of Gramsci (1971), who provides the macro-political and sociological framework, in that his theories of the integral state, civil society, and hegemony describe the large-scale architecture of power that the literacy projects were operating within and against. This framework is particularly important for understanding the structural and ideological underpinnings of apartheid South Africa, offering a powerful lens through which to analyse how racial capitalism was maintained, not just through overt coercion, but also through the cultivation of consent and the normalisation of inequality. Gramsci (1971) gives the language to describe the entire battlefield; one cannot understand the significance of a small literacy class without first understanding the hegemonic system it was trying to disrupt. In this model, Gramsci (1971) describes the problem, which was hegemony, and outlines potential strategies for tackling this – i.e. war of manoeuvre versus war of position.

Once the broad political landscape is established with Gramsci (1971), I then move on to Freire (1970). A thorough understanding of Freire is obviously necessary in order to gauge the extent to which the projects were indeed 'Freirean'. His concept of the banking model of education ('Education for Domestication') helps an understanding of how hegemony is created, and makes it clear that the banking model of education is what the war of position needed to be waged against. Freire's solution is education for liberation, leading to conscientisation and critically reflective praxis with which to wage the war. The discussion

thus offers the specific tools necessary to analyse what was potentially happening ‘inside the classroom’, and how this related to broader social and political change.

After presenting the macro-political context (Gramsci) and the interface between this and the micro-pedagogical method (Freire), I finally turn to Lukes (2005), who provides the synthesising analytical lens of power to connect them. His three dimensions allow for an analysis of exactly how Freire’s pedagogy was a direct challenge to Gramsci’s hegemony. Lukes (2005) therefore provides the analytical glue that holds the entire framework together. Following the individual explorations of the three theorists, I integrate their perspectives to create a multi-faceted lens through which to analyse the South African ‘Freirean’ literacy projects.

I acknowledge that Gramsci, Freire, and Lukes, like any thinkers, emerged from specific historical moments and intellectual traditions. However, the enduring value and analytical power of their frameworks, demonstrated by their capacity to clarify complex power dynamics, expose forms of oppression, and guide liberatory praxis across diverse contexts (including South Africa, particularly in this study), lies in their usability as a robust ‘toolbox’ for critical inquiry rather than a claim to universal, decontextualised truth. This study, therefore, employs these theories not as rigid blueprints, but as critically adapted lenses through which to interpret the historical realities of the South African literacy projects.

2.2 Antonio Gramsci

The first pillar of this study’s theoretical framework is the work of the Italian Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937). He has become one of the most frequently cited political theorists of the twentieth century, renowned for his analysis of cultural and political dominance within capitalist societies (Martin, 2023; Thomas, 2009). To understand Gramsci’s ideas, it is essential to explore his background, as context shapes intellectual perspectives. Critical theory recognises that all perspectives, including our own as researchers, are historically and socially situated, shaped by prevailing power relations and material conditions (Bourdieu, 1990; Foucault, 1980). This presents not a contradiction, but a call for reflexivity, a concept I discuss in detail in Chapter Five.

Scholars like Fonseca (2016) and Green (2011) highlight how Gramsci’s (1971) upbringing in a disadvantaged peasant environment in Sardinia, marked by ill health and limited access

to education, influenced his worldview and led him to focus on the role of intellectuals from the working class. Gramsci began as a socialist activist and radical journalist, and eventually became a prominent leader of the Italian Communist Party. It was his imprisonment by Mussolini's fascist regime from 1926 until he died in 1937 that led to the production of his most well-known and philosophically rich texts, the *Prison Notebooks*. These fragmented but brilliant notes, 'written under the watchful eye of the prison censor' (Jones, 2007, p. 25), contain his reflections on philosophy, politics, culture, and history. It is within these notebooks that he developed the concepts of hegemony and domination that are central to this study. The following sections explore these concepts.

Gramsci's concept of hegemony, which he terms the process by which ruling groups secure consent and maintain power (1971), has generated extensive debate, with variant readings that shape contemporary interpretations. The dominant reading, associated with Anderson (1977), tends to emphasise civil society as distinct from political society, framing hegemony primarily as a cultural phenomenon rooted in civil institutions. This interpretation often positions ideological struggle as separate from the coercive apparatus of the state.

Thomas (2009), however, offers a critical alternative, arguing that such a separation misrepresents Gramsci's (1971) intent. For Thomas, Gramsci's notion of the integral state is central. Civil society and political society are not discrete spheres but interconnected components of a unified state structure through which hegemony operates. This means that consent and coercion are exercised together, and ideological struggle cannot be divorced from material and institutional power. Thomas's reading also reframes the war of position as a strategic contest within the integral state, rather than a purely cultural battle, highlighting the complexity of counter-hegemonic action.

Thomas's interpretation is particularly relevant for this study. Literacy projects under apartheid were not merely cultural interventions but contested spaces within the integral state, where education functioned as a terrain of both ideological and material struggle. In adopting Thomas's perspective, this research situates these projects within broader processes of domination and resistance, allowing for a more nuanced analysis of their political significance. A detailed discussion of these concepts and their application follows in this chapter.

2.2.1 The Integral State

To fully grasp Gramsci's (1971) theory of hegemony, it is essential to explore his understanding of the state. The starting point for Gramsci's thought is his conception of the integral state. He argued that the modern state is more than just the government; it is a combination of 'political society' (the government, police, military, and legal system, which rules through direct domination and coercion) and 'civil society' (the 'private' sphere of cultural, educational, and ideological institutions like churches, schools, media, and trade unions) that shape public consciousness (Gramsci, 1971, p. 12). The state is thus a complex entity operating through both force and consent (Gramsci, 1971). The state's power is a synthesis of the force of political society and the consent generated in civil society. He famously described this relationship in the West (i.e. Western Europe) as a powerful system of 'fortresses and earthworks' in civil society that protects the state's outer ditch (Gramsci, 1971, p. 238). This implies that to challenge the state, one must first wage a battle within these cultural and ideological 'fortresses' of civil society.

Importantly, Gramsci (1971) did not see civil society as a neutral space. While it is the primary terrain through which the dominant class seeks to secure consent and maintain hegemony, it is also a site of ideological struggle and potential resistance. As Thomas (2009) notes, the relationship between civil society and political society is complex: civil society provides the basis for political society, which in turn shapes civil society.

2.2.2 Hegemony, 'Common Sense', and Civil Society as a Site of Struggle

The process by which the dominant/ruling class secures consent within civil society is what Gramsci (1971) calls hegemony. Hegemony is the process through which the dominant class infuses its values, norms, and beliefs, often embedded in the very language people use, into the fabric of society, making its own worldview appear as a natural, inevitable, and universal 'common sense' of all people (Gramsci, 1971). This essentially educational process, is where 'educative pressure [is] applied... turning necessity and coercion into "freedom"' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 242). A common interpretation of Gramsci (1971) suggests that this process is fundamentally manipulative; by presenting the interests of the dominant class, such as private property and individualism, as natural and universal, subordinate groups are encouraged to consent to a social order that perpetuates their subordination. While this captures the logic of

hegemony as ideological leadership, Thomas (2009) offers a more dialectical reading that complicates the relationship between consent and coercion, which I will address later.

Gramsci's concept of hegemony is often understood, following Hall (1986), as an 'unstable equilibrium of compromises,' never fully achieved and always vulnerable to challenge. Because society is riddled with contradictions, hegemony remains incomplete and must be continually renewed, making civil society a contested terrain where ideology functions as a key weapon. When an ideology becomes 'historically organic' to a particular class, it acquires material force, organising social groups and shaping consciousness (Gramsci, 1971, p. 377).

This standard interpretation emphasises ideological leadership and the active consent of subordinate groups. However, Thomas (2009) offers a more dialectical reading. For him, stability refers not simply to hegemony, but to the complex, reciprocal relationship between civil and political society, where consent and coercion are mutually integral rather than separate spheres. My position draws on both perspectives in that I retain the insight that ideological struggle in civil society is central to hegemony, but I adopt Thomas's emphasis on the dynamic interplay between force and consent to avoid reducing hegemony to mere manipulation. This synthesis allows me to conceptualise civil society not only as a site of ideological contestation, but as part of a broader dialectic in which political society and civil society continually shape one another.

Building on this understanding of hegemony as a contested and unstable process, it is important to recognise that ideological struggle operates on two fronts. A hegemonic ideology works to organise the masses in support of the status quo, thereby reinforcing the dominance of the ruling bloc. In contrast, counter-hegemonic ideologies, or what Gramsci (1971) called the development of 'good sense', become 'historically necessary' for the subaltern classes seeking to consolidate their own worldview and challenge existing power relations (Green & Ives, 2009; Ives, 2004).

Central to the creation and maintenance of hegemony and the emergence of counter-hegemony is the role of intellectuals. Gramsci (1971) radically expanded the concept of the intellectual beyond the traditional image of detached thinkers by arguing that all people are philosophers, yet certain individuals and groups perform the social function of organising and directing consciousness. He distinguished between two key intellectual types, traditional and organic.

Gramsci (1971) describes traditional intellectuals as the figures who see themselves, and are seen by society, as independent, autonomous thinkers, existing above the fray of class conflict. In this group, he includes priests, academics, lawyers, and established artists. Gramsci (1971) argues that their perceived neutrality is an illusion. Because they are the inheritors of previous historical traditions and are deeply embedded in the existing institutions of civil society, they almost always, even if unconsciously, function to perpetuate the dominant hegemony. They are the guardians of the established 'common sense'.

Gramsci (1971) states that organic intellectuals, in contrast, do not pre-exist the class they represent; they grow 'organically' from it. Every social class, as it develops, creates its own organic intellectuals. The capitalist/ruling class produces its entrepreneurs, industrial technicians, economists, and legal experts who organise its interests. The ruling class, therefore, uses its organic intellectuals (journalists, media personalities, policy makers) to exercise the 'functions of social hegemony' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 12), presenting bourgeois interests as the national interest and as universal, or as Thomas puts it: 'as valid, or at least capable of providing leadership, for the society as a whole' (Thomas, 2009, p. 190).

For Gramsci (1971), the revolutionary task of the working class is to produce its own organic intellectuals, the trade union organisers, the party leaders, the community activists, and the radical educators, who can perform two vital functions: to a) articulate the lived experiences and unspoken feelings of the subaltern classes, transforming them into a coherent and critical worldview or 'good sense'; and b) organise and educate their class, building the solidarity and consciousness necessary to wage a 'war of position' against 'common sense'/hegemony.

This dynamic highlights the dialectical nature of hegemony: it is not a static imposition, but a continuous struggle between competing intellectual formations within civil society, shaped by and shaping political society. My synthesis, therefore, retains the emphasis on ideological struggle as central to hegemony, while incorporating Thomas's insight that this contest unfolds within a broader interplay of consent and coercion, making intellectuals pivotal actors in a process that is never purely consensual nor purely coercive.

2.2.3 Counter-Hegemony and 'War of Position' versus 'War of Manoeuvre'

Because hegemony is never complete and must constantly be re-won, civil society is also the site where counter-hegemony can be built. Gramsci (1971) uses the term subaltern to refer to

classes marginalised within hegemonic structures. These groups can, through struggle, produce their own organic intellectuals—shop stewards, community activists—who challenge dominant ‘common sense’ and foster a new, critical consciousness or ‘good sense’.

Gramsci (1971) highlighted two primary strategies for struggle against the state: the ‘war of manoeuvre’ and the ‘war of position’. The war of manoeuvre involves a direct, frontal assault on the state, such as a classic revolution. According to dominant readings of Gramsci (1971), he argued that this strategy was most suited to societies with a weak civil society, such as Tsarist Russia. The war of position, in contrast, is a protracted, long-term struggle waged primarily within the ‘fortresses’ of civil society. It is an ideological and cultural war that can also include more specific, direct confrontational actions, such as mass strikes or even road blockades, which aim to physically disrupt the functioning of the state or capital (Harley, 2014). The point of the war of position is to dismantle the dominant common sense and create good sense, build alternative institutions, and create a new ‘historic bloc’, a broad alliance of subaltern classes, before a direct challenge for state power is possible (Gramsci, 1971; Morton, 2007; Femia, 1981). According to the dominant reading by many scholars, this was the strategy he deemed necessary for some complex societies of the West.

2.2.4 The Philosophy of Praxis

While both those strategies define the terrain of political struggle, Gramsci insisted that their success depends on a deeper philosophical principle: praxis (Gramsci, 1971). For Gramsci, this refers to the connection between theory and practice in the fight for social change, and goes beyond simply being active or engaging in abstract theorising. Praxis involves a conscious and organised effort to turn ideas into real-world change through collective action (Gramsci, 1971). He believed that intellectual work and practical activity are deeply intertwined. In this context, organic intellectuals emerge from subaltern groups to express counter-hegemonic ideas and weave them into everyday practices. Gramsci (1971) emphasised the importance of cultural and ideological struggle within civil society, arguing that creating a new historic bloc requires both critical reflection and ongoing organisational efforts.

This conceptual lens is crucial for this study because it frames how literacy projects can be understood as sites of counter-hegemonic struggle and allows for an analysis of whether the literacy projects explored in this study truly embodied praxis in the Gramscian sense.

Exploring this connection can help us better appreciate how these projects aimed to empower individuals and communities to foster a deeper engagement with the social issues of their time. Building on this theoretical foundation, in Chapter Seven I examine whether the literacy projects operationalised praxis in a Gramscian sense and assess the extent to which their forms of action reflected a war of position or a war of manoeuvre.

2.2.5 Contemporary Interpretations and their Relevance

The interpretation of Gramsci's (1971) work is not a settled matter but a vibrant and contested field, leading to divergent and sometimes conflicting readings. To gain a deeper understanding of his framework, this section will briefly review how his work has been interpreted and critiqued by three key figures within the Western Marxist tradition – Perry Anderson, Louis Althusser, and Peter Thomas – before concluding with the contemporary work of Marco Fonseca. Each of these thinkers provides distinct insights that explain different facets of Gramsci's (1971) ideas, particularly concerning hegemony, the state, and the cultural dimensions of politics, that add to or problematise our understanding of his core concepts.

Perry Anderson

Perry Anderson was a British historian and a central figure on the *New Left Review*, a leading intellectual journal founded in 1960 that became a key platform for Marxist theory and critical debates on politics, culture, and society (Anderson, 1977). Anderson's approach is grounded in rigorous historical materialism and focuses on the concepts of hegemony, the state, and the proper application of Marxist theory to historical analysis. As Thomas (2009) notes, Anderson's interpretation has shaped much of the dominant understanding of Gramsci (1971) in Anglophone scholarship, framing hegemony primarily as a superstructural phenomenon tied to civil society and cultural leadership. According to Anderson, Gramsci's concept of hegemony is distinguished by the following features:

1. It denotes a strategy aiming at the production of consent, as opposed to coercion.
2. The terrain of its efficacy is civil society, rather than the state.
3. Its field of operation is 'the West', the proper terrain of war of position, as distinct from 'the East', suited to a war of manoeuvre.

> 4. It can be applied equally to bourgeois and proletarian leadership strategies, because it is *in nuce* a generic and formal theory of social power. (Thomas, 2009, p. 160).

However, Thomas (2009) critiques Anderson for oversimplifying Gramsci's dialectical conception of the state and civil society, arguing that his reading risks reducing Gramsci to a theorist of ideology rather than a thinker of political strategy and historical transformation, a debate which is significant for this study because it highlights the need to move beyond a purely cultural reading and engage Gramsci's (1971) concepts in their full relational and historical complexity.

Anderson (1977) interprets Gramsci (1971) as arguing that hegemony is a crucial tool for understanding the stability of Western capitalist democracies, where the ruling class sustains its dominance not solely through coercion but through the active consent of the governed. However, Anderson's primary and most famous critique is that Gramsci mistakenly overextended the concept of hegemony beyond its legitimate historical and geographical boundaries. In his seminal essay, *The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci*, Anderson (1977) establishes what he sees as a crucial distinction in Gramsci's thought. He argues that Gramsci universalised the strategy of the war of position for Western contexts, which were characterised by a 'robust civil society acting as a dense system of trenches and fortifications for the State' (p. 11). Anderson contends that Gramsci argued that this war of position framework was less applicable to the context of Tsarist Russia, the 'East,' where the civil society was 'primordial and fluid' (weak). In such an autocratic environment, a direct 'war of manoeuvre' was possible and necessary, as the conditions did not allow for the gradual, ideological struggle that Gramsci envisioned for the West.

A second key critique Anderson (1977) makes is of what he saw as a drift towards idealism in Gramsci's thought. He argues that in the *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci increasingly separated the concept of hegemony from its material, class-based foundations, giving too much autonomy to culture and ideology. This, Anderson contends, opened the door for later culturalist interpretations (like those of Stuart Hall) that would further detach hegemony from a strict class analysis.

While Anderson (1977) appreciates Gramsci's (1971) historical materialism and his emphasis on specific historical contexts, particularly in his analysis of the rise of fascism in Italy, he ultimately presents a critical reading of Gramsci. His work can be seen as an attempt to

‘correct’ Gramsci, to pull his concepts back into a more orthodox historical materialist framework and to warn against the ‘Eurocentric’ tendency to universalise the Western European experience. While Anderson’s own interpretation has been criticised for its rigid distinctions and schematic view of history (Thomas, 2009), as I discuss below, his engagement with Gramsci (1971) was influential and set the terms of the debate for a generation of Marxist scholars.

Louis Althusser

Louis Althusser (1918-1990) was a French Marxist philosopher and a prominent figure in 20th-century Marxist thought (Atkinson, 1984). He is best known for his contributions to the understanding of ideology, the state, and the role of intellectuals in society. Althusser offered one of the first and most influential structuralist readings of Gramsci (Thomas, 2009). Althusser (1977) builds upon Gramsci’s foundational concept of hegemony, but he systematises it through his theorisation of ‘Ideological State Apparatuses’ (ISAs), and ‘Repressive State Apparatuses’ (RSAs). For Althusser, ISAs (like schools, churches, and the media) are the key mechanisms for reinforcing the hegemony of the ruling class by disseminating dominant ideologies through institutions like education, religion, and media. While building on Gramsci (1971), Althusser’s (1977) theorisation of ISAs presents a more deterministic and functionalist view of hegemony. While both Gramsci (1971) and Althusser are concerned with the mechanisms of power, they diverge significantly in their perspectives on resistance. A key divergence is Althusser’s assessment of civil society. Whereas Gramsci (1971) sees civil society as a potential site of active counter-hegemonic resistance, Althusser’s framework presents the ISAs as so powerful in reproducing the dominant ideology that it leaves little room for genuine agency or successful resistance, a point for which he was fiercely criticised by humanist Marxists like Thompson (1978) and adapted by cultural theorists like Stuart Hall (1980). This critique often positions Gramsci’s (1971) more dynamic and dialectical approach as a more compelling alternative for those seeking to understand activism and social change.

Peter Thomas

Peter Thomas is a contemporary scholar whose work offers a rigorous re-reading of Gramsci’s (1971) philosophy of praxis in his seminal work, *The Gramscian Moment*, serving as a powerful theoretical corrective to the dominant, often fragmented, interpretations of hegemony. Thomas (2009) builds upon Gramsci’s (1971) foundational concepts, particularly

the notion of hegemony, to explore the ways in which dominant ideologies are constructed and maintained through cultural and political practices. He argues that hegemony is not merely a static condition but a dynamic process that involves the active participation of various social groups. He thus situates Gramsci within the context of current socio-political challenges, arguing that understanding Gramsci requires a return to the 'central, dialectical core' of his thought, the 'philosophy of praxis' itself (2009).

Thomas's (2009) most significant contribution (particularly in relation to this study), is his critique of the structuralist (Althusser) and historicist (Anderson) readings of Gramsci (1971). He argues that both interpretations fail to grasp the unity of Gramsci's (1971)concepts, specifically concerning the relationship between the State/Political Society (coercion) and Civil Society (consent). Thomas rejects the prevalent notion promulgated by Anderson that Gramsci simply equated Political Society with 'coercion' and Civil Society with 'consent' (hegemony), particularly in the context of Western capitalism. Thomas (2009) demonstrates that Gramsci's concept of hegemony is not simply about cultural consensus; it is the necessary unity of political and civil society. For Gramsci (1971), according to Thomas, the state is an 'integral state,' which is the 'fusion of hegemony protected by the armour of coercion.' This concept of the state as a single, unified entity where coercion and consent are inseparable is crucial. Thomas argues that Gramsci (1971), rather than arguing for a dichotomy between hegemony and domination/force, suggests that the ruling group uses hegemony to secure consent amongst allied groups closest to the ruling class, while domination and force are primarily applied to the subaltern groups. By extension, Thomas argues, Anderson and others over-emphasised the role of 'civil society' as the primary site of struggle in the West. He reasserts that for Gramsci (1971), the state remains the fundamental locus of power, with hegemony being exercised through its integral capacity.

This study uses Thomas's critique and his reading of Gramsci. Gramsci's true insight, as articulated by Thomas, is that the ideological and the coercive are inseparable and continuous parts of the state's integral power. This theoretical rigour allows the analysis to move beyond a simple dichotomy, ensuring that the pervasive violence faced by the literacy projects is understood not as a failure of hegemony, but as an integral mechanism of apartheid's own hegemonic project.

Marco Fonseca

The work of contemporary scholar Marco Fonseca (2016) is crucial for understanding the enduring relevance of Gramsci's thought for modern political struggles, particularly in light of challenges like globalisation and neoliberalism. Fonseca's primary contribution is not a critique of Gramsci (1971), but a deepening of his analysis. Drawing on concepts developed since Gramsci's time, Fonseca's work focuses on the complex relationship between hegemony and the formation of political subjectivities in a post-modern landscape.

Fonseca (2016) begins by re-centring Gramsci's (1971) critical perspective on civil society. He argues against the dominant neoliberal view of civil society as a neutral space of freedom, reminding us that for Gramsci, it is fundamentally a 'site of ideological struggle', a battleground where different social forces compete to shape identity and consciousness. Building on this, Fonseca (2016) advances a conceptualisation of hegemony that is particularly relevant to contemporary social movements. Herein lies his key addition to the debate: he moves beyond a purely class-based model to analyse how hegemony operates as a dynamic process of negotiating power relations among diverse and often fragmented social groups. He proposes that in our current context, hegemony is less about a single ruling class imposing a unified ideology and more about the construction of temporary and shifting alliances between different subjectivities within civil society. Fonseca (2016) provides the tool to analyse the strategic necessity of forging a collective will, a 'power with' among ideologically and structurally diverse oppressed groups.

Fonseca's work, therefore, places a strong emphasis on the significance of counter-hegemonic movements in this process. He focuses on how marginalised groups, defined by a plurality of identities (race, gender, sexuality, etc.), can articulate their own interests and values to create alternative narratives. His unique contribution is to show how these groups can contest a hegemonic 'common sense' not just through political action, but through the very act of constructing new, counter-hegemonic subjectivities that challenge prevailing norms. This focus on the 'politics of identity' as a central front in the hegemonic struggle is a powerful update of Gramsci's (1971) original framework.

2.2.6 The Colonial Question: Can Gramsci's Framework Apply to the Global South?

As can be seen, many of the key Gramscian scholars are from Europe, as was Gramsci. A critical and high-stakes debate in postcolonial studies, which has been forged to analyse the European capitalist state, revolves around the applicability of Gramsci's (1971) framework to the experience of colonialism. The core of this critique is the question: Can one really argue that colonial powers remained in power through hegemony? Was colonialism not actually simply about domination and force? These questions are absolutely critical to this study, as they force the secondary question whether there is any point in discussing hegemony in relation to South Africa under apartheid.

Scholars from the Indian Subaltern Studies group, such as Ranajit Guha (1997), have argued that in a colonial context, domination was often exercised 'without hegemony'. They contend that the cultural and ideological chasm between the coloniser and the colonised was too vast to create the kind of 'common sense' and active consent that Gramsci (1971) described in Italy. In this view, colonial rule was primarily maintained through the overt, coercive power of the 'political society' rather than the consent-building mechanisms of a shared civil society. However, other scholars argue that Gramsci's framework, when critically adapted, remains highly relevant. This debate has led some scholars, particularly those analysing global civil society or specific African struggles, to re-examine the dynamics of consent and coercion, testing the utility of a Gramscian framework in contexts far removed from early 20th-century Italy (Katz, 2006; Kendie, 2006).

However, this theoretical tension can be resolved by adopting Thomas's more nuanced Gramscian framework that accounts for the segmented nature of the integral state and its dialectical consent-coercion nature. Thomas furthers an understanding of how colonial powers sought to secure the collusion of some sectors of the colonised society, as Fanon (1963) argued. I use this reading in my discussion in Chapters Three and Four, in which I consider in detail how Gramsci's (1971) theory applies to the South African context of the period I focus on in this study. Some South African scholars, like Devan Pillay (2013), for example, have shown Gramsci's powerful utility in analysing the specific dynamics of the apartheid state, particularly in how hegemony was constructed within the White population and how a 'national-popular' counter-hegemony was built by the resistance. In this study, I was consciously guided by Marzia Maccaferri's (2022) call for a 'historically situated praxis'

which emphasises applying Gramsci's concepts in ways that are sensitive to specific historical and social contexts rather than treating them as universally valid. Accordingly, I do not assume that a Gramscian framework automatically explains South African realities; instead, I use his ideas as analytical tools to interrogate whether they illuminate the dynamics described by my research participants in their own terms. By testing the relevance of concepts such as hegemony, civil society, and organic intellectuals against empirical data, this study sought to determine whether South Africa's lived experience can be meaningfully understood through a hegemonic lens while remaining open to the possibility that these concepts may need adaptation or critique. My analysis therefore works to constantly link the ideological and pedagogical struggles described by the activists back to what the scholarly literature has defined as the material realities of racial capitalism in general.

2.3 Paulo Freire: The Pedagogy of Liberation

Having established Gramsci's framework for understanding the macro-political architecture of power, the concepts of the integral state, hegemony, and the war of position as a struggle within civil society, I now delve into the nature of the specific tools and strategies employed by turning to Freire. The intellectual connection between Gramsci and Freire is profound and direct. If Gramsci provides the theory of political struggle, Freire provides the theory of pedagogical struggle. While this distinction is useful for analytical purposes, it should not be understood too rigidly. Freire's work extends beyond questions of pedagogy and literacy instruction and engages broader concerns relating to oppression, freedom, humanisation, democracy and social transformation. Like Gramsci, Freire was concerned with the relationship between power, consciousness and social change.

Their shared commitment to praxis is particularly significant. Although both Gramsci and Freire understood praxis as the unity of reflection and action, they operationalised the concept in different but complementary ways. For Gramsci, praxis was embedded within broader struggles for hegemony and the transformation of social and political relations. His concern was with how subordinate groups developed the collective consciousness and organisational capacity required to challenge dominant power. Freire similarly viewed praxis as the inseparable relationship between reflection and action but located this process within educational and pedagogical practice. Through dialogue, conscientisation, and collective action, oppressed people developed the capacity to critically understand and transform their

world. In both cases, praxis represented a process through which oppressed groups became active agents in the making of history rather than passive objects of domination. While Gramsci conceptualised praxis as the unity of theory and action within broader struggles for hegemony, Freire applied this principle pedagogically through processes of dialogue, conscientisation and transformative action. Both thinkers therefore understood social transformation as requiring the active participation of oppressed groups in the making of history.

Freire offers a concrete methodology for how the counter-hegemonic war of position can be waged at the most fundamental level, that is. in the consciousness of the oppressed and within the dialogical space of the classroom. This section begins with Freire's biographical context before exploring his core concepts that are central to this study. I should note that whilst Freire published new work until his death in 1997, I have focused on his seminal text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, published in English in 1970. This was the text which would have been most familiar to the literacy projects discussed in this thesis.

2.3.1 Biographical Context

Paulo Freire was born in Brazil, in Recife, in 1921 and is recognised as one of the most influential educational theorists of the twentieth century. He experienced first-hand the extreme injustices of poverty and inequality after his family was affected by the Great Depression. He later stated that this formative experience shaped his educational philosophy (Darder, 2018b) and lifelong political commitment to the oppressed (Gadotti, 1994). His early work in adult literacy with impoverished communities in north-eastern Brazil led to the development of his radical pedagogical method.

Freire's innovative practices were perceived as a threat to the established order, for which he was imprisoned for 70 days following the 1964 military coup in Brazil (Kirkendall, 2010). This imprisonment and subsequent sixteen-year exile forced him to systematise his ideas, which culminated in the writing of his most seminal book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, while in Chile (Freire, 1994). His work transcended geographical boundaries, influencing literacy campaigns and liberation struggles across the globe and making him a foundational figure in the field of critical pedagogy (Darder, 2018b).

A commitment to justice, deeply influenced by Marxist humanism, was the driving force behind his work. Similar to Gramsci, Freire's perspective was greatly shaped by his critique

of social injustices and power dynamics. He saw education as a primary tool used for creating and cementing hegemony, but also as a potential tool for liberation, a way to contest and transform cultural and ideological hegemony (Giroux, 2011). Thus, Freire states: 'literacy was the most important issue… I believed it was profoundly unjust that there were people in my world that could not read or write' (Freire, 1985, p. 176). He argued that the denial of literacy has far-reaching implications for an individual's ability to fully 'participate in the political process' (Freire, 1985, p. 176), highlighting the transformative power of education in enabling individuals to engage meaningfully in their communities and political processes. His concern for the disenfranchisement of the illiterate is a constant theme in his writing; but he also insisted that 'being illiterate does not preclude the common sense to choose what is best for oneself, and to choose the best (or the least evil) leaders' (Freire, 1985, p. 176). This statement suggests that his early exposure to social injustice instilled in him a commitment to education as a means of achieving freedom and liberation. These formative experiences not only shaped Freire's pedagogical ideas, but also reinforced his belief in education as a pathway to liberation and social equity. Freire's life and work serve as a powerful testament to the potential of education to challenge oppressive structures and foster critical consciousness.

2.3.2 The Ontological Foundation: Humanisation as a Vocation

Before one can understand Freire's pedagogy, one must first understand his ontology, his theory of what it means to be human and the nature of existence within an oppressive world. For Freire, the central and overarching problem of history is the conflict between humanisation and dehumanisation. He saw dehumanisation not as a given or natural state, but as a distortion of humanity, a 'historical reality' caused by an unjust order that dehumanises both the oppressed and the oppressor (Freire, 1970, p. 28).

The core of Freire's philosophy is the belief that all people share an 'ontological vocation' to become more fully human. This is not a predetermined essence, but a project to be undertaken. To be human is not a static state, but a constant process of 'becoming,' of acting upon and transforming the world. He wrote that this vocation is to be a 'subject who acts upon and transforms their[2] world, and in so doing moves toward ever new possibilities of fuller and richer life individually and collectively' (Freire, 1970, p. 14). This ontological

[2] After being criticised for his use of the male pronoun, Freire specifically requested that his use of this in his early works be changed to reflect both genders. I have chosen to use the plural as even more gender-inclusive.

position is inherently political. It posits that humans are beings of praxis, defined by their ability to reflect and act to change their reality. Oppression, therefore, is a violent act of 'ontological distortion' precisely because it blocks this vocation. It is a system that actively works to turn active 'Subjects' into passive 'Objects' who are acted upon, managed, and controlled. The oppressed are treated as 'things' alienated from their own power to make decisions and create history. This struggle between humanisation and dehumanisation is, for Freire, the central motor of history.

In these ideas, Freire was influenced by the work of Frantz Fanon (1963; 1967). Writing in the context of colonial domination, Fanon (1963; 1967) argued that oppression operates not only through political and economic control but also through the systematic dehumanisation of the colonised. Colonialism sought to deny the humanity, dignity, and agency of the oppressed, reducing them to objects rather than subjects of history. For Fanon, liberation therefore involved more than political change; it required the recovery of dignity, selfhood, and human agency through struggle. Fanon thus insisted that liberation must be achieved by oppressed people themselves rather than bestowed by others. In this respect, Fanon and Freire share a concern with the process through which oppressed people reclaim their humanity and become active participants in the making of history.

While both the oppressor and the oppressed are caught in this dehumanising spiral, like Fanon, Freire argues that it is only the oppressed who can lead the struggle for liberation for both groups. The oppressors, as beneficiaries of the unjust system, cannot lead a struggle against their own power – this can only ever be 'false charity'. True liberation, therefore, is not about the oppressed becoming the new oppressors; it is a 'pedagogy of all people in the process of permanent liberation' (Freire, 1970, p. 42). The entire purpose of a liberatory education, therefore, is 'ontological'.

Freire's concern with humanisation demonstrates the extent to which his work cannot be reduced to a pedagogical methodology alone. While often associated with literacy and educational practice, Freire's work also provides a broader lens for understanding oppression, freedom, power, dignity, and social transformation. Questions of education were inseparable from these wider social and political concerns. His educational project was therefore also a political project aimed at creating the conditions under which oppressed people could reclaim their humanity and participate fully in the making of history. It is not merely to teach skills, but to create the conditions for people to reclaim their stolen humanity, to move from being

objects to subjects of history, and to reassert their fundamental human right to be the agents of their own destiny. This demonstrates the extent to which Freire's work cannot be reduced to a pedagogical methodology alone. Questions of education were inseparable from broader concerns relating to freedom, power, dignity and liberation. His educational project was therefore also a political project aimed at creating the conditions under which oppressed people could reclaim their humanity and participate fully in the making of history.

2.3.3 The Epistemological Framework: From False to Critical Consciousness

Flowing directly from this ontology is Freire's epistemology, his theory of knowledge and knowing. If dehumanisation is the problem, then the way it is maintained is through the manipulation of consciousness, what Freire calls the 'Banking Model' of education, or 'Education for Domestication' (1970). His critique of traditional education is captured in his metaphor of this model of education. In this model, Freire argues that the teacher is the depositor of knowledge and the students are empty vessels, passive receptacles into which disconnected fragments of information are 'deposited' (Freire, 1970). Freire argues that this model is a tool of oppression. Epistemologically, it presents knowledge as a static, finished product to be consumed, rather than as a dynamic process of inquiry. Politically, it teaches people to be passive and to accept the world as it is given, reinforcing what Gramsci called 'common sense'.

The antidote to this kind of education is conscientisation, which represents the process of developing critical consciousness. This epistemological journey involves moving from a state of unawareness—characterised by false consciousness—to a state of heightened awareness and critical reflection, known as critical consciousness. In this transformative process, individuals become more aware of social, political, and economic contradictions, enabling them to recognise and challenge oppressive structures in their lives and communities.

Freire (1970, 1974) identifies stages in this journey: from 'magical consciousness' (blaming fate), through 'naïve consciousness' (blaming individuals), to 'critical consciousness' (understanding the systemic, structural causes of oppression). This, according to Freire, is the process of learning to 'read the world,' not just the word (Freire, 1970). It is the epistemological shift that makes liberation possible, as it allows the oppressed to move from being objects of history to subjects who can critically understand and shape it. This

progression emphasises Freire's conviction that literacy is never neutral, but is deeply political, as it equips learners to interrogate and transform their social reality (Freire, 1974). However, Freire cautions that reaching critical consciousness is not the end of the journey. Awareness alone does not guarantee transformation, which raises the question of how education can bridge the gap between reflection and action. Moreover, Freire emphasises that conscientisation does not automatically lead to transformative action (1970). Even when individuals recognise their oppression, they may remain passive due to fear, internalised fatalism, or a sense of powerlessness (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994). This tension between knowing and doing highlights a central challenge for emancipatory education: how to cultivate agency alongside awareness.

Giroux (1983) argues that critical pedagogy must move beyond mere critique to foster what he calls 'transformative intellectuals' who see themselves as capable of intervening in social reality. hooks (1994) similarly notes that fear and despair often inhibit action, particularly in contexts of systemic violence, and stresses the importance of creating learning spaces that nurture hope and collective empowerment. These perspectives reinforce Freire's insistence that education for liberation must help learners understand that the social world is historically constructed and therefore changeable (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1983; hooks, 1994). As Freire asserts, 'to exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it' (1970, p. 88), highlighting that education for liberation must foster agency and a belief in the possibility of change. This would involve countering fatalistic attitudes and building collective confidence in the capacity to transform reality—a theme that resonates strongly in contexts marked by oppression and resistance (hooks, 1994; Giroux, 1983).

2.3.4 The Pedagogical Method: Dialogue and Praxis

Freire provides a tangible pedagogical method for facilitating this ontological and epistemological transformation. He calls it 'Problem-Posing' education, or 'Education for Liberation'. Problem-posing education as opposed to the banking model, Freire posits, is a dialogical process where teachers and students are co-investigators of knowledge. The key tools for problem-posing education are 'generative themes' and 'codes'. Generative themes are the core issues and contradictions drawn from the learners' own lived experience: 'The concrete representation of many of these ideas, values, concepts, and hopes, as well as the obstacles which impede the people's full humanisation, constitute the themes of that epoch' (Freire, 2005, p. 101).

These themes are then ‘coded’ into a representation (a picture, a story) that allows the group to objectify and critically analyse their own reality from a distance. Freire explains:

> However, I must re-emphasize that the generative theme cannot be found in people, divorced from reality; nor yet in reality, divorced from people; much less in ‘no man's land.’ It can only be apprehended in the human-world relationship. To investigate the generative theme is to investigate people’s thinking about reality and people’s action upon reality, which is their praxis (Freire, 2005, p. 106).

Freire thus posits that we cannot understand things in isolation. We are all connected to the world around us, and it shapes how we think and act. To really get what is going on, we need to look at the whole picture, seeing how people and their world influence each other. It is about putting thought into action, and vice versa, to change things for the better.

The entire process of engaging with themes is built on dialogue, which Freire (1970) saw not as a mere technique, but as a fundamental human need and the basis of all true learning. This emphasis on dialogue and what has been termed ‘popular communication’ as a tool for praxis is central to Freire’s entire project (Peruzzo, 2020). It is through this dialogic reflection that conscientisation takes place. Conscientisation, however, is not merely an intellectual exercise. The entire pedagogical process must culminate in praxis, which is ‘reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it’ (Freire, 1970, p. 70). Freire argues that true learning occurs when individuals actively engage with their lived realities, reflect on their experiences, and take action to effect change. Moreover, Freire (1970) argues that reflection without action is mere ‘verbalism,’ while action without reflection is mindless ‘activism’ (p. 66). True praxis is a continuous, dialectical cycle where the critical reflection born from the dialogical classroom informs transformative action in the world, and the results of that action lead to new, deeper reflection. This is the pedagogical engine of liberation.

However, developing critical awareness does not always lead to action, as discussed here. Power operates not just through direct coercion, but also by shaping how people perceive what is possible, which can result in compliance, even among those who are critically aware. As I have stated, Freire insists that part of the process of conscientisation is recognising that history is not a fixed, external force, but is made by people, and therefore, people can act to change it. This means the material conditions and lived experience of oppression are not inevitable ‘facts of nature’, but are the result of decisions made and actions taken by human

beings. This then becomes part of the role of the educator: to help learners understand this, and build their agency to act.

2.3.5. The Role and Responsibilities of the Facilitator

In Freire's problem-posing model, the teacher transitions from being an imposer of knowledge to a co-ordinator or facilitator of critical analysis and action (Freire, 1970). This new role comes with specific responsibilities, which Freire outlines as follows:

- The facilitator's primary task is to present codes – representations of generative themes – drawn from the learners' experiences. These codes are not lessons to be taught, but problems to be collectively examined and deconstructed through critical reflection
- The facilitator must refrain from imposing their own views on the learners' analysis. Instead, they should trust the learners' ability to think critically, allowing them to 'name the world' and identify the systemic contradictions behind their oppression.
- The facilitator must ensure that dialogue and conscientisation lead to action. Their role is to connect reflection with concrete steps toward transformation, creating 'a cycle of praxis' (Freire, 1970, p. 66).

This relationship is, according to Freire, inherently political, grounded in a shared commitment to the liberation of the oppressed (Freire, 1970).

2.3.6 The Transformation of the Teacher-Learner Relationship

Freire's revolutionary pedagogy challenges the traditional hierarchical structure of the classroom, which he critiques as part of the 'banking concept of education' (Freire, 1970, p. 72). In this model, the teacher is seen as an authority figure who deposits knowledge into passive students, treating them as empty vessels. This mechanical and authoritarian approach not only stifles student engagement, but also mirrors broader societal power dynamics, leaving students alienated and silencing their voices. To move toward liberation, this relationship must undergo a radical transformation. Freire's dialogical method dismantles the oppressive divide between teacher and student, merging their roles into a single function wherein the teacher becomes the teacher-student, and the student becomes the student-teacher (Freire, 1970, p. 80). In this collaborative environment, both parties engage in a continuous process of learning and teaching, acting as co-investigators of their reality. The concept of dialogue frames what Freire defines as a genuine, horizontal encounter between individuals,

‘mediated by the world they seek to understand and change’ (Freire, 1970, p. 89). For Freire, dialogue requires humility, love, faith in humanity, and hope from the facilitator. Without humility, the teacher’s trust in the learner diminishes, leading to manipulation or the imposition of views, what Freire refers to as ‘cultural invasion’ (Freire, 1970, p. 151).

Freire has been operationalised in diverse ways within educational research. Many studies have employed Freirean concepts such as dialogue, conscientisation, and praxis as pedagogical tools within adult literacy, community education, and popular education initiatives (Mayo, 2013; Darder, 2018b). In the South African context, Thusi (2018), for example, used Freirean philosophy and methodology as an evaluative framework to examine the extent to which the Community Literacy and Numeracy Group (CLING) Project embodied Freirean principles in practice, while Hadfield's (2017) work, as discussed, explored the influence of Freirean ideas within anti-apartheid educational initiatives. Despite the acknowledged influence of Freire on South African educational activism, relatively few studies have systematically examined how Freirean principles were interpreted and operationalised within specific literacy projects. This study contributes to addressing that gap. Unlike studies that operationalise Freire primarily as a pedagogical framework or evaluative tool, this study employs Freire as an analytical lens through which to examine the extent to which the literacy projects under investigation embodied the dialogical, emancipatory, and transformative principles associated with Freirean praxis.

2.3.7 The Freire-Gramsci Connection: A Shared Vision of Liberatory Education

The intellectual connection between Paulo Freire and Antonio Gramsci is foundational to the field of critical pedagogy, and this relationship has been extensively explored by scholars seeking to trace the lineage of liberatory thought. Freire explicitly acknowledged indebtedness to Gramsci in his works and interviews. He stated, ‘I read Gramsci and I discovered that I had been greatly influenced by Gramsci long before I had read him’ (Freire, 1995, p. 63-64). This acknowledgement is significant; Freire viewed Gramsci as a fellow traveller who grappled with the same fundamental issues of power, education, and consciousness.

Scholars such as Mayo (2008a, 2013, 2015 and 2018) have provided a sustained analysis of this relationship, arguing that Freire can be understood as ‘the Gramsci of the Global South’.

Mayo (2005, 2013) contends that while Freire developed his pedagogy from his own praxis in Brazil, Gramsci's concepts offered him a more powerful and sophisticated theoretical framework to articulate his findings. The connection between the two thinkers is not superficial; it is rooted in a shared set of core concepts of hegemony and conscientisation, organic intellectuals and critical pedagogy and praxis.

Gramsci's concept of hegemony serves as the macro-level political theory that underpins Freire's micro-level pedagogical project of conscientisation. Freire's work, as Mayo (2008b) argues, is a direct attempt to disrupt hegemonic 'common sense' and foster a critical 'good sense' among the oppressed. Freire's understanding of education as a 'practice of freedom' is deeply rooted in Gramsci's notion of the 'organic intellectual'. Freire's pedagogy aims to cultivate organic intellectuals of the subaltern classes on a mass scale, enabling individuals from the working class to engage in critical reflection and action to challenge oppressive structures.

Both Freire and Gramsci recognised the dialectical unity of theory and practice as essential for social transformation. Freire's emphasis on praxis, reflection and action upon the world to change it serves as a pedagogical application of Gramsci's broader 'philosophy of praxis'. Additionally, Freire's focus on dialogue and the co-construction of knowledge reflects Gramsci's ideas about the collective intellectual and the role of education in fostering a new, counter-hegemonic culture.

According to Schugurensky (2000) and Allman (1988), both thinkers shared a common understanding of the political nature of education, rooted in their Marxist heritage. They advocated for an education that transcends mere knowledge transmission, promoting a collaborative process that encourages learners to question and challenge the status quo. This deep intellectual alignment, explored and validated by decades of scholarship, confirms that one cannot fully understand Freire's pedagogy without first recognising its Gramscian foundations.

2.3.8 Contemporary Heirs: Darder, Giroux, and McLaren

McLaren and Lankshear (1993) argue that Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* remains a foundational text in critical pedagogy, articulating universal principles of liberatory education. However, it is also important to recognise that there is no singular or fixed interpretation of what constitutes a Freirean educational practice. Freire consistently

cautioned against the mechanical application of his ideas and encouraged educators and activists to reinvent and recontextualise them in response to specific historical, political, and cultural conditions. Consequently, understandings of Freirean pedagogy have been shaped not only by Freire himself, but also by generations of practitioners and scholars who have adapted, extended, and applied his ideas in diverse contexts. A Freirean lens should therefore be understood not as a rigid methodological template, but as a body of principles that has been continually reinterpreted and reconstructed in relation to different struggles and educational settings.

Freire's ideas have been extended and recontextualised by a generation of scholars often regarded as his intellectual heirs, most notably Antonia Darder, Henry Giroux, and Peter McLaren, who have adapted Freirean thought to the complexities of advanced capitalist societies, primarily in the Global North. Darder foregrounds the intersections of culture, identity, and power; Giroux expands Freire's framework into public pedagogy and cultural studies; while McLaren radicalises it through an explicitly Marxist-revolutionary lens. Their work demonstrates both the enduring relevance and the evolving applicability of Freire's legacy across diverse socio-political landscapes.

This section, therefore, draws on the critical insights of prominent scholars who have engaged deeply with Freire's pedagogical framework. Darder (2018b) highlights a

> handful of activists-intellectuals who truly understand the 'daunting task' of living the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, emphasising that this endeavour requires individuals to step into a vulnerable space and embrace a politically and culturally charged sensibility that transcends traditional conceptions of scholarship. (p. xv-xvi)

Among these activists are notable figures such as Henry Giroux, bell hooks, Linda Brodkey, Stanley Aronowitz, Lilia Bartolomé, and Peter McLaren.

From Darder's list, I have chosen to focus on the works of Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren, and Antonia Darder herself to explore their interpretations of Freire's concepts of critical pedagogy, political theory, and conscientisation, and to analyse how these ideas resonate within the South African context. I hope that by investigating their perspectives, this study will deepen the understanding of how Freire's ideas informed strategies of resistance against apartheid, highlighting the transformative potential of education in challenging systemic oppression.

Antonia Darder

Darder's scholarship of Freire focuses on the crucial intersections of culture, identity, and power within education. Drawing on her work with Latino/Latina communities in the United States, Darder (2012, 2018a) takes Freire's class-based analysis and powerfully applies it to the struggles of culturally and linguistically marginalised populations. Her unique contribution is the development of a 'critical bicultural pedagogy'. She argues that for oppressed cultural groups, liberation requires not just a critical consciousness of economic exploitation, but also a process of reclaiming and affirming their own cultural identity and voice in the face of a dominant, often racist, culture. Her work provides a vital bridge between Freire's largely class-based pedagogy and the politics of cultural recognition and anti-racism.

Henry Giroux

Giroux is renowned for expanding Freire's analysis to the realm of public pedagogy and cultural studies. While Freire's focus was often the literacy classroom, Giroux (1988, 2011) argues that in late-capitalist societies, the most powerful 'pedagogy' happens outside of schools in film, television, advertising, and digital media. His unique contribution is to take Freire's tools of critical analysis and apply them to popular culture, showing how these 'cultural apparatuses' function as a powerful form of hegemonic education that shapes our desires and identities. He introduces concepts like 'border pedagogy,' urging educators to create spaces where students can cross cultural borders and challenge dominant narratives.

Peter McLaren

McLaren, on the other hand, is known for pushing Freire's work in a more explicitly 'revolutionary Marxist' direction. While Freire was a Marxist humanist, McLaren (1998) argues that some North American appropriations of Freire have de-fanged his work, turning it into a liberal-progressive 'student-centred' pedagogy while ignoring its revolutionary core. McLaren's key contribution is to re-ground critical pedagogy in a direct critique of capitalism. He argues that the ultimate goal of a Freirean education must not just be 'critical consciousness', but the development of a revolutionary class consciousness aimed at overthrowing the capitalist system. His work insists on linking the pedagogy of the classroom directly to the politics of anti-capitalist struggle.

Therefore, while Darder, Giroux, and McLaren all share Freire's core commitment to the political nature of education, they are not simply repeating him. They are taking his foundational ideas and pushing them in new directions to analyse new problems (the power of media, the nature of neoliberal capitalism, cultural identity). The scholarship of these figures provides a crucial contemporary foundation for analysing the complexities of education as a means of resistance, demonstrating the enduring and adaptable power of Freire's original vision.

2.3.9 Challenges in Applying Freirean Pedagogy across Contexts

While Freire's framework remains highly influential, its application in contexts marked by deep racial, class, and colonial divides has faced much criticism. Scholars like Giroux and McLaren warn against the tendency to apply Freire's methods universally without adaptation. They argue that Freire's model was shaped by the specific socio-political context of 1960s Brazil, and applying it to different cultural, racial, and educational settings can lead to distortion (Giroux & McLaren, 1989). This critique emphasises that conscientisation is culturally mediated and can only be realised when rooted in the unique material conditions of the learners.

A concern for this study is the persistence of power (Ellsworth, 1989; Gore, 1993). Critics argue that no pedagogical setting, including a Freirean one, is truly a 'power-free zone' (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 302). Even well-intentioned facilitators, despite their commitment to non-authoritarian dialogue, hold structural power based on their race, class, and social capital. This authority can unconsciously reinforce the banking model, especially when facilitators come from dominant social groups (e.g., White, educated) while learners belong to oppressed groups (e.g., Black, working-class). Gore (1993) notes that the facilitator's control over the form and direction of dialogue risks reproducing the role of the 'implicit teacher' (p. 93), undermining the ideal of a collaborative teacher-student relationship. This structural power can lead to 'false dialogue'. Critics point out that learners may withhold genuine criticism or simply echo the views they believe the facilitator wants to hear, which undermines the authenticity of conscientisation and transforms the dialogical space into a subtly repressive environment (Ellsworth, 1989).

2.3.10 The South African Reception of Freire's Ideas

In Chapter One, I argued that while the reception of Paulo Freire's work in South Africa is widely acknowledged, the nature and depth of this engagement remain unclear. Whilst there was clearly a mostly positive reception of Freire's work in the country, Mastin Prinsloo's 1987 paper, 'Thinking Strategies in Education: The Political Limits of Paulo Freire's Perspective', offers a critical perspective on Freire's applicability in the South African context during the period under study. One of Prinsloo's main critiques is that Freire's theoretical framework often imposes a 'dichotomous and sociologically empty grid' over human experiences, which, he argues, oversimplifies the complexities of cultural and ideological practices (p. 14). This abstraction is evident in Freire's categories of 'critical consciousness' and 'naive consciousness,' which fail to capture the nuanced realities of learners' lives (p. 14). Moreover, Prinsloo argues that Freire's work lacks a robust theorisation of power dynamics. His concepts of 'oppressor' and 'oppressed' are seen as too abstract, neglecting the specific conflicts and material relationships that shape educational contexts (p. 15). This oversight extends to Freire's treatment of teacher authority in a 'dialogical' framework, where he remains largely silent on the power dynamics between educators and learners (p. 16). Prinsloo further critiques Freire's division between 'banking' and 'problem-posing' education, suggesting that it leads to a limited understanding of what constitutes 'real' learning (p. 18). Prinsloo argues that Freire's prioritising of personal reflection over the transfer of knowledge, risks creating an 'impoverished and self-contradictory' pedagogy that overlooks the importance of systematic knowledge acquisition (p. 18). Finally, Prinsloo highlights the limitations of Freirean programmes, which he posits often operate 'on the edge of the state schooling system' (p. 22). This approach, he states, contrasts with the urgent need for 'People's Education' in South Africa to engage directly with and transform state education (p. 22). For Prinsloo, by promoting 'non-formal' education as a primary strategy, Freirean thought risks vacating the crucial battleground of state education, which remains a powerful site of social contestation (p. 23). Ultimately, according to Prinsloo, while Freire's concepts provide a compelling critique of traditional education, they may fall short in offering practical strategies for transformation in the complex political and social landscape of South Africa (p. 26).

In Chapter One, I argued that existing scholarship suggests that some literacy initiatives and educational efforts often claimed to adopt Freire's pedagogical ideas, and some studies, such

as Hadfield (2017), indicate that his work was integrated into broader struggles against oppression and social injustice. Freire himself reflects on this issue in *Pedagogy of Hope*, recalling conversations he had with South African activists during his exile in Geneva, where they engaged with themes of oppression and liberation, often referencing theorists like Fanon and Memmi alongside *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1994, p. 135). However, these accounts do not provide sufficient detail about the depth or character of this engagement, and whether it was active, critical, and politically transformative. This lack of clarity underscores the need for further investigation, which this study addresses by examining literacy projects within the anti-apartheid movement that claimed explicit influence from Freire. However, in doing so, I also wish to draw on Lukes' (2005) conception of power, which emphasises not only visible decision-making, but also the shaping of preferences and consciousness, an approach that complements Freire's concern with critical awareness and transformative praxis.

2.4 Steven Lukes: A Radical, Multi-Dimensional View of Power

Having detailed Gramsci's (1971) macro-political theory of hegemony and Freire's (1970) micro-pedagogical theory of education for liberation, introducing the value of this multi-faceted framework, I now explain Lukes' (2005) synthesising tool. First, it is important to give context to Lukes' books. In 1974, Lukes published the first edition of *Power: A Radical View*, aiming to contribute to debates about the 'questions of powerlessness and domination and the connection between them' (2005, p. 7). The book arose from the Anglo-American 'community power' debates of the 1960s and 70s. In this work, Lukes offered a conceptual tool for dissecting the specific, often hidden, mechanisms of domination, arguing that the fundamental question he wanted to address in the original edition was 'how is willing compliance to domination secured?' (2005, p. 10). His framework allows us to move from observing the 'outcomes' of hegemony to analysing the specific ways domination is exercised. This, he argued, had only become more relevant and pressing by the time he produced the second edition in 2005 in which he also greatly expanded his discussion.

2.4.1 Lukes' Three Dimensions of 'Power Over'

Lukes' (2005) analysis of the three dimensions of power is an exploration of the relational concept of 'power over' (*Macht* or *potestas*). This conceptualisation focuses on the exercise

of power as a form of domination, where one actor (A) influences or determines the actions, choices, or thoughts of another actor (B) 'to do something that (B) would not otherwise do' (Lukes, 2005, p. 16). This emphasis on relational causality and asymmetric influence is the defining characteristic that unifies all three dimensions.

Lukes (2005) identifies three distinct ways in which 'power over' operates: through decision-making, agenda-setting, and the shaping of beliefs. Each dimension offers a unique lens for analysing how dominance is exercised, both visibly and subtly, within society. Lukes (2005) begins by outlining the one-dimensional view, which he associates with pluralist theorists like Robert Dahl. This, perspective represents the most familiar and observable form of power over, focussing on 'decision-making in situations of observable, overt conflict' (Lukes, 2005, p. 19). In this framework, power is only recognised when there is a clear clash of subjective interests over key issues, which is resolved through a decision. Lukes (2005) argues that while this view of power over and who has it is important, it is 'superficial and restrictive' (p. 15) because it is blind to how the political agenda behind the decision is controlled.

Lukes (2005) considers that the two-dimensional view of power offers a more sophisticated analysis of how it operates, which he associates with critics like Bachrach and Baratz. This dimension recognises that 'power over' is not only exercised through decision-making but also through the prevention of certain decisions being made. This concept is referred to as the power of 'non-decision-making', or the ability to 'set the agenda' and control what gets debated in the first place (Lukes, 2005, p. 20). In this dimension, power over is at work when a group 'creates or reinforces barriers that inhibit the public discussion of policy conflicts' (Lukes, 2005, p. 20). This 'mobilisation of bias' can 'suffocate' demands for change 'before they are even voiced; or kept covert; or killed before they gain access to the relevant decision-making arena' (Lukes, 2005, pp. 22, 32).

Lukes' (2005) most radical and important contribution is his third dimension of power over. He argues that this is the most insidious and effective form: it is the power to prevent conflict from arising at all by shaping people's very perceptions, cognitions, and preferences. It is the power to influence people in such a way that they accept their role in an oppressive system as natural, inevitable, or even for their own good, thereby securing their 'willing compliance' (Lukes, 2005, p. 12). Lukes poses the critical question, 'Is it not the supreme exercise of power to get another or others to have the desires you want them to have, that is, to secure

their compliance by controlling their thoughts and desires?' (Lukes, 2005, p. 27). This is the power of ideology, of socialisation, and of cultural domination.

2.4.2 Power as Agency

Lukes' (2005) entire three-dimensional framework, as presented in his first edition, is a comprehensive attempt to capture the full spectrum of domination and powerlessness. However, in the revised edition, Lukes (2005) recognised that he failed to include an equally important concept of power. In the revised edition, he distinguishes between two modes of power: the more specific, relational form of power characterised by asymmetry, which he associates with Spinoza's ***potestas*** (i.e. the 'power over' he had focused on in the first edition), and the general capacity for action, which he relates to Spinoza's (1958) notion of ***potentia***.

The capacity for action, *potentia*, refers to the broad potential a person or agent has to act within a given context. In contrast, *potestas*, or 'power over', denotes a relational and asymmetrical form of power where one agent exerts control or dominance over another: 'to have power is to have "power over" another or others' (p. 73). 'Power over' is thus a subset or specific expression of the broader notion of power as *potentia*, which is the capacity or ability to act. It is agency. This framing emphasises the distinction between the general capacity for action and the specific relational dynamics of power, illustrating how asymmetrical power operates within the broader landscape of influence and agency.

While Lukes' (2005) remains the authoritative source for his three dimensions of 'power over', the terms 'power to', 'power with', and 'power within' (all forms of *potentia*) were largely developed by later feminist and development scholars (Allen, 1998; Avelino et al., 2021; Gaventa, 2021; Pansardi & Bindi, 2021; Townsend et al., 1999; VeneKlasen & Miller, 2002). These scholars expanded upon Lukes' foundational ideas to create more accessible terminology that captures different aspects of power as *potential*. Townsend et al. (1999) and VeneKlasen and Miller (2002) are particularly influential in feminist and development studies for articulating all four terms: 'power over', 'power to', 'power with', and 'power within', as part of a broader framework for challenging patriarchy and poverty. Pansardi and Bindi (2021) provide a historical and conceptual analysis of these terms, tracing their evolution and theoretical underpinnings.

Nonetheless, Lukes (2005) provides the essential conceptual framework that underpins all these concepts, even if he does not explicitly label them as such. ‘power to’ is a concept that Lukes (2005) discusses mainly to differentiate it from his primary focus, ‘power over’. He associates ‘power to’ with thinkers like Hannah Arendt, referring to a person’s capacity or ability to act, an ability to build, create, or achieve outcomes. Unlike ‘power over’, it is not necessarily conflictual or relational in nature. Lukes points out that a focus on ‘power to’ can tend to ignore the conflictual aspect that ‘power over’ exercises over people because it highlights power as a mere capacity or ability, which makes the relational aspect invisible.

Lukes (2005) discusses ‘power with’ as the power that emerges through collective action. This concept is primarily considered through his engagement with Hannah Arendt. He recognises its existence but notes that it is different from his own emphasis on domination. According to Lukes (2005), ‘power with’ manifests when ‘people come together and act in concert’; it is the power of a group rather than an individual (Lukes, 2005, p. 62). To illustrate, Lukes directly quotes Arendt, noting that:

> Power, she writes, ‘corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together.’ (Arendt, 1970, p. 44, as cited in Lukes, 2005, p. 32)

The most complex concept is ‘power within’. Lukes (2005) does not explicitly use the term himself. Nonetheless, his entire third dimension hinges on the absence of ‘power within’. It refers to an individual’s sense of self-worth, dignity, and consciousness, the ability to recognise their own interests and desires, and a belief in their ability to act to change the world. As Lukes argues, even when individuals become more conscious of social injustices, they may hesitate to act due to a ‘feeling of futility’ (Lukes, 1974, p. 24). The third dimension of ‘power over’ works precisely by undermining this ‘power within’. The process of gaining ‘power within’ is about moving from a state of ‘false consciousness’, where awareness is clouded or manipulated, to a state of genuine self-awareness. This process involves recognising imposed interests that shape people’s perceptions, cognitions, and preferences, interests that serve existing power structures.

However, drawing on my discussion on Freire (1970), ‘power within’ needs to go beyond mere recognition. It requires a fundamental shift in one’s ontological belief about the world

itself. As I have discussed, Freire (1970) insists that part of the process of conscientisation is recognising that history is not a fixed, external force, but is made by people, and therefore, people can act to change it. This means understanding that the material conditions and lived experience of oppression are not inevitable 'facts of nature,' but are the result of decisions made and actions taken by human beings (e.g., perceiving 'the economy' or the Pass Laws, not as forces of nature but as political constructs). According to Freire, even when people become conscious of being oppressed, they often fail to act to change it because they do not believe they possess the capacity to change things (Lukes' (2005) third dimension of power achieving its deepest effect) or they are paralysed by fear. 'Power within' is thus the cultivation of belief in one's own agency, that one can exercise one's 'power to', which is the essential bridge between the theoretical awareness of oppression and the transformative act of political resistance. This internal belief is the non-negotiable precondition for converting 'power to' (capacity) into actual action.

Lukes (2005) recognises the incredible ability of those with 'power over' to undermine 'power within' when he asks, 'Is it not the most insidious exercise of power to prevent people, to whatever degree, from having grievances by shaping their perceptions, cognitions, and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things?' (Lukes, 2005, p. 27). Finally, he suggests that to speak of the third dimension of 'power over' is to speak of interests that are attributed to and unrecognised by actors. Developing 'power within' begins with the capacity to recognise these imputed interests as one's own, or as another's.

In the second edition of his book, whilst acknowledging his failure to understand 'power over' as only one manifestation of power, Lukes (2005) is not offering a general theory of 'power to' (capacity or agency, *potentia*), but rather a detailed critique of the subtle and overt mechanisms through which 'power over' is secured, maintained, and ultimately, made invisible through the process of hegemonic influence.

2.5 Hegemony, Consciousness, and the Multi-Dimensional Struggle

There is thus clear synergy between Lukes (2005) and Gramsci (1971). In the next section, I will explore Lukes' (2005) interpretation of Gramsci's work, specifically focusing on the relationship between Gramsci's (1971) concepts of hegemony and Lukes' third dimension of

power. This exploration will clarify how these frameworks enhance our understanding of contemporary power dynamics, particularly the role of ideology and culture in shaping consent and resistance within social structures. Through this interplay between Lukes and Gramsci, I aim to demonstrate how their theories can help us analyse the complexities of power relations in various contexts, especially in relation to social movements and literacy projects.

2.5.1 Lukes, Gramsci, and the Dimensions of Power

In *Power: A Radical View*, Lukes (2005) specifically discusses Gramsci, citing his influence, particularly regarding the concept of 'egemonia or hegemony' (p. 7). Lukes (2005) asserts that Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony offers crucial insights into the subtler, more pervasive mechanisms through which 'power over' operates, thus serving as a critical theoretical pillar in articulating and defending what he terms the 'third dimension of power.' According to Lukes' interpretation, which is rooted in Anderson's (1976-7) and Althusser's (1971) readings, Gramsci (1971) understood culture and ideology as key components of 'the mode of class rule secured by consent'. Lukes (2005) presents this as a system in which the dominant class, the bourgeoisie, maintains its power not merely through economic or political control, but through a monopoly over the 'ideological apparatuses.' The ruling class shapes the very perceptions, values, and beliefs of the subordinate classes by controlling the cultural and intellectual landscape, thereby securing their consent to a system that may not be in their best interests (p.7).

As I have earlier discussed, this dominant reading of Gramsci's hegemony is a contested terrain within Marxist scholarship. As highlighted by theorists such as Peter Thomas (2009), this interpretation, popularised by Anderson, is often critiqued for over-emphasising the role of 'civil society' (culture/ideology) as the primary site of struggle in the West, at the expense of the unity between political society and civil society in Gramsci's concept of the 'integral state.' Thomas argues that Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony is not simply about cultural consensus, but the necessary fusion of intellectual/moral leadership with political power and coercion. However, Lukes' (2005) focus on hegemony as the theoretical pillar for the third dimension of power aligns with Anderson's reading by prioritising the cultural and ideological mechanisms of consent.

For this study, I adopt a strategic, qualified reading of Gramsci, using the emphasis on culture, ideology, and the construction of ‘common sense’ to articulate the theoretical conditions for Lukes’ third dimension and the methodology for Freire’s conscientisation. This framing allows for an analysis that accounts for the apartheid state’s ideological warfare (war of position) while simultaneously recognising that its power ultimately rested on coercion.

Lukes (2005) establishes a critical theoretical pillar for articulating and defending his third dimension of power. He notes that the questions Gramsci’s analysis sought to address were live issues in the early 1970s, when he conceived of the core ideas for his original edition (2005). Lukes identifies Gramsci’s central question as how consent to capitalist exploitation is secured, especially under democratic conditions (2005, p. 7). He argues that Gramsci’s emphasis on the power of ideology and culture to shape perceptions and values offers a means to understand how a ruling class secures the consent of subordinate groups. This consent is not necessarily secured through conscious manipulation, but is often achieved through the subtle influence of the dominant group’s worldview, which is embedded in culture, education, and social institutions (p. 7). Through this mechanism, the existing power structure is naturalised, becoming viewed as inevitable and even ‘common sense’, a core Gramscian term, as discussed earlier.

This ideological perspective informs Lukes’ (2005) argument that the most effective form of power operates at a deeper, ideological level, bypassing overt coercion or the suppression of conflict. The third dimension of power thus consists in securing compliance by shaping people’s perceptions, cognitions, and preferences ‘in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things’ (p. 7). Lukes (2005) explicitly links this to Gramsci’s (1971) notion that the bias of the system suppresses latent conflicts, locating the political nature of this engagement precisely there. This form of power serves to prevent potential grievances from arising, thereby making resistance less likely, as it transforms how people understand their interests and the possibilities available to them.

This theoretical synthesis allows Lukes (2005) to transition from the observable control of decisions and agendas (Dimensions One and Two) to the non-observable control of consciousness (Dimension Three). In engaging with critiques of ideological control, Lukes (2005) issues an important caution regarding one interpretation of Gramsci—that culture or ideology constitutes the primary mode of class rule secured by consent through the dominant class’s control of ideological apparatuses. Lukes (2005) warns that such an approach risks

relying on the notion of ‘false consciousness,’ which raises a serious methodological problem: As Lukes (2005) asks, ‘false, distorted and reduced as compared to what?’ (p. 121). This question highlights the difficulty of establishing an objective standpoint from which to judge consciousness as ‘false,’ and it underscores the need for careful, historically situated analysis rather than presuming ideological domination as a given. This critical question is essential for establishing the normative standard of the radical view. To argue that a subordinate group’s preferences are shaped by the third dimension requires an either implicit or explicit standard of the ‘real interests’ being suppressed. Lukes’ (2005) ‘radical view,’ by engaging with Gramsci’s (1971) concept of hegemony, thus shows that power operates subtly by influencing thoughts and desires, while simultaneously demanding a rigorous analytical defence of the benchmark for what constitutes authentic freedom and self-determination.

2.5.2 The Elevation of Subjectivity

The internalisation of ‘power over’, which forms the deepest layer of the third dimension, necessitates a conceptual shift from objective structural critique to the analysis of subjectivity. To stress Gramsci’s pivotal role in shifting Marxist analysis toward this realm of individual consciousness, Lukes (2005) cites Femia (1981). Femia highlights how Gramsci ‘seized upon an idea marginal (or, at most, incipient) in earlier Marxist thought, developed its possibilities, and gave it a central place in his own thought’ (2005, p. 8). This intellectual move effectively completed the theoretical apparatus required for the third dimension, as it marked a decisive break toward considering the ‘long-neglected – and hopelessly unscientific territory of ideas, values, and beliefs’ (p. 7).

The focus on subjectivity is crucial because it transforms the analysis of class rule from an external imposition (force) to an internalised mechanism (consent). According to Lukes, Femia’s interpretation positions Gramsci (1971) as a key figure in understanding the ‘process of internalisation of bourgeois relations’ and its impact on ‘revolutionary possibilities,’ setting the stage for analyses of how individuals come to accept and even perpetuate systems of domination. Gramsci (1971) thus offers Lukes (2005) the theoretical machinery to show that power is not only about observable actions (power over) or agenda-setting, but also about shaping what people think and desire. By foregrounding the subjective realm, Lukes (2005) demonstrates that domination achieves its most complete and seemingly immutable form when internalised, when individuals adopt the perspectives and values of the dominant order as their own. This insight resonates strongly with Fonseca’s reading of Gramsci, as already

discussed, which emphasises subjectivity as the terrain where hegemony operates most effectively, and with Thomas's argument that consent-coercion is always a dialectical relationship. Fonseca argues that the struggle for counter-hegemony must therefore engage this subjective dimension, challenging the internalised norms and meanings that sustain domination. Linking Lukes (2005) and Fonseca (2016) in this way highlights why this study pays close attention to how participants articulate their own experiences and consciousness, rather than assuming ideological effects as given.

By highlighting Gramsci's (1971) focus on hegemony, Lukes thus enunciates the importance of exploring subtler, less visible forms of 'power over.' These points outline his understanding of Gramsci's critical place in developing his view of the dimensions of power and the complexity of the relationship between power, ideology, and consent. Lukes thus uses Gramsci's framework to illustrate how hegemony works by shaping perceptions, preventing conflict, and influencing the possibilities of resistance. This state of ideological capture can be further understood in Freirean terms as a condition of submersion or naïve consciousness, where the socio-political reality is perceived as natural and immutable.

The true analytical power of Lukes' framework for this study emerges when it is directly mapped onto the revolutionary praxis articulated by both Gramsci (1971) and Freire (1970). His model provides a precise, micro-sociological language that allows for a granular analysis of how Gramsci's hegemony is both constructed and contested, with Freire's concept of conscientisation providing the critical mechanism for resistance. Intertwining these three thinkers allows us to move from a broad understanding of the 'struggle' to a precise analysis of the power dynamics at play, providing a powerful and nuanced tool for analysing the specific strategies and successes of the 'Freirean' literacy projects.

Gramsci's (1971) strategy for counter-hegemony, the war of position, can be understood as a multi-dimensional assault on the second and third dimensions of power, with the explicit goal of building the counter-power of the oppressed. It is not a single action, but a protracted struggle waged primarily on the terrain of Lukes' (2005) second and third dimensions, driven by the need to transform consciousness before attempting to seize the state. The primary work of the war of position is to break the hold of hegemonic 'common sense.' This involves the creation of 'good sense' or a critical consciousness, through what Freire (1970) would call conscientisation. This is the struggle to cultivate 'power within,' defined as the capacity

for critical thought and self-determination, which dismantles the ideological manipulation of the third dimension.

The transition from the ideological realm to the political realm represents a structural necessity within the Gramscian war of position, and it is here that the second dimension of power becomes the central battleground. As this new consciousness develops through conscientisation, the war of position structurally demands the creation of a counter-hegemonic subaltern movement capable of seizing intellectual and moral leadership.

Using Lukes' framework, the war of position can be understood not as a mere cultural skirmish, but as a strategic struggle within civil society aimed at reshaping consciousness and challenging the deeper dimensions of power—those that shape agendas and preferences. Its goal is to build the conditions for social transformation, which may or may not culminate in a direct confrontation with state power. Rather than assuming an inevitable 'war of manoeuvre,' this interpretation highlights how counter-hegemonic projects seek to erode domination by contesting the very ideas and norms that sustain it.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter introduced the integrated multi-layered theoretical framework I adopted for analysing the complex interplay of power, pedagogy, and resistance in the context of the South African Freirean literacy projects. This chapter, therefore, laid the groundwork for a comprehensive analysis of the extent to which 'Freirean' literacy projects of the 1970s and 1980s were indeed so.

In Chapter Three, I begin my review of the literature that informs this study, focusing specifically on the historical context of apartheid South Africa in the period focused on in this study. This provides the hegemonic context within which the anti-apartheid struggle was waged, and the case study projects were located (both discussed in detail in Chapter Four). In Chapter Three, I also consider different conceptions of literacy, framing them within a Gramscian understanding, and consider some of the key literacy projects which ultimately served to consolidate racial capital whilst positioning themselves as broadly anti-apartheid.

Chapter 3: The Hegemonic Landscape – State Control and Dominant Literacy Provision in Apartheid South Africa

3.1 Introduction

In Chapter Two, I examined the theoretical underpinnings of this study, arguing that it centres on notions of power, hegemony and domination, critical pedagogy, and conscientisation. These concepts, I argued, provide a framework for understanding the power dynamics, agency, and resistance inherent in the South African adult literacy landscape during the 1970s and 1980s. Building on this theoretical foundation, in this chapter and the following one, I will discuss literature that contextualises the complex socio-political landscape of South Africa during the apartheid struggle, and the role of literacy in this.

I begin by outlining the hegemonic context of apartheid South Africa. I then explore the ideological debates surrounding literacy, showing how education and literacy can become central battlegrounds for hegemony. This literature assists with an understanding of how literacy initiatives, potentially rooted in and inspired by Freire, contributed to the resistance against apartheid. The chapter will thus lay the foundation for a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between Freirean pedagogy, social activism, and the historical context of the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa.

This chapter draws on and critically assesses three distinct genres of literature to construct this contextual landscape. In order to understand the overarching political dynamics, the review first draws on the work of scholars who documented the apartheid state's strategies and the broad contours of the liberation struggle (e.g., Beinart, 2001; Bundy, 1988; Dubow, 2014; Legassick, 1974; Seekings & Nattrass, 2005; Wolpe, 1988). Secondly, to specifically analyse the educational terrain, the review engages with the literature on South African educational history, which critically examines policies like Bantu Education and the role of the state in shaping knowledge (e.g., Chisholm, 2004; Kallaway, 2002; Hyslop, 1985a). Finally, I draw on the work of scholars in radical adult education who were often participants themselves (e.g., Aitchison, 2003; Von Kotze, 1994; Walters, 1996). The review thus weaves

these different strands of literature together, aiming to build a multi-layered understanding of the hegemonic landscape of the period under study.

3.2 The Apartheid State's Strategy of Control

The late 1960s to the late 1980s marked a time when the apartheid state sought to refine its hegemonic control amid increasing internal and external pressures. Scholars such as Saul Dubow (2014) contend that apartheid was not a fixed system, but rather a dynamic project of racial engineering. Crucially, the scholarly literature identifies this system not merely as one of racial domination, but as a specific form of racial capitalism. Theorists like Harold Wolpe (1988) and Martin Legassick (1974) argue that the cheap, highly controlled, and disenfranchised Black labour force was not an unfortunate by-product of segregation, but the very engine of South Africa's capitalist development. Understanding this fusion of race and class is essential, as the state's hegemonic strategies were always designed to protect both White supremacy and the underlying capitalist economic order.

The roots of this system were established much earlier in South Africa's economic history. The 'mineral revolution' of the late 19th century, as noted by Pampallis and Bailey (2021), created an economy built on this very foundation of racial exploitation. They argue that 'mining companies maintained attractive profits by keeping black wages very low, a racist system of low-wage migrant labour developed and remained virtually unchanged until the 1970s' (p. 67). This economic imperative – the need for a cheap, controlled, and disenfranchised Black labour force – was the engine that drove the political and social engineering of apartheid. Following the crushing of the liberation movements in the early 1960s, the apartheid state entered a period of supreme confidence, buttressed by this exploitative economy and a powerful security apparatus (Beinart, 2001). However, the re-emergence of resistance from the late 1960s onwards forced the state to adapt its strategy. Under P.W. Botha, this evolved into the 'Total Strategy,' a dual approach of escalating repression and limited reform (Posel, 1991).

On the one hand, the state perfected its machinery of coercion. On the other hand, a central feature of the manufacture of consent was the co-option of the White working class into the nationalist project (Morris & Padayachee, 1989). This was achieved through massive state investment in the White welfare system and the promotion of a shared Afrikaner culture and ideology of racial superiority. This strategic incorporation, discussed in the previous chapter

in Peter Thomas's reading of Gramsci, was identified as necessary for securing the consent of those groups closest to the ruling bloc, ensuring that the interests of White labour were not in competition with the capitalist project, thereby preventing internal fracturing within the dominant power structure.

The state's hegemonic strategies were thus fundamentally segmented: securing the consent of the White bloc through privilege and welfare, while simultaneously perfecting its machinery of coercion against the Black majority. Pampallis and Bailey (2021) highlight how coercion was a long-standing practice, noting that even before the height of apartheid it was 'difficult for trade unions to organise effectively, especially when the government banned over fifty progressive trade union leaders under the 1950 Suppression of Communism Act' (p. 102). Speaking of the 1960s and its aftermath, Beinart (2001) says:

> Opposition movements still had relatively open recruitment policies and security police were able to find spies, Black and White, or extract information from those arrested. Increasingly ruthless methods were used, including torture, which had not been so significant as part of the police repertoire before. The long and sorry saga began with deaths in detention of prisoners alleged to have thrown themselves out of windows or hanged themselves in their cells. Legislatively sanctioned imprisonment without trial and house arrests were accompanied by an increasingly uncontrolled cop-culture—smashed windscreens and windows, dead cats on gate posts, threatening phone calls, and eventually political killings. (p. 229)

This repression intensified in the 1970s and 80s through detentions, bans, and militarisation. This systematic violence was coupled with the ideological suppression of dissent, as exemplified by the banning of literature.

However, it should be noted that throughout the period, the state also attempted to co-opt and manage dissent rather than simply apply force. The creation of the Bantustans was central to this. As Pampallis and Bailey (2021) explain, 'The Bantustans helped the apartheid government to extend its control over the movement and labour of the African population. By assigning all Africans to a particular Bantustan, the government effectively stripped them of their South African citizenship' (p. 202- 203). Bundy (1988) further argues that the Bantustan system simultaneously co-opted sections of the Black African population into positions of authority within the homelands, reinforced ethnic divisions, and weakened broader claims to citizenship and political representation. The Bantustans simultaneously won over a section of

the Black African population (to act as the ‘rulers’ of the Bantustans), divided Black Africans along ethnic lines, and undermined Black African claims to having no rights or representation.

This policy was part of a broader strategy that included the establishment of the Coloured Representative Council in 1961, the South African Indian Council in 968, and ultimately the Tricameral Parliament in 1983. These institutions were a cynical attempt to divide the oppressed and neutralise the threat of mass revolution by creating a façade of political representation for Coloured and Indian populations while excluding the majority Black population from meaningful participation in governance (Seekings & Nattrass, 2005). The Coloured Representative Council and South African Indian Council were intended to provide limited political rights to so-called ‘Coloureds’ and individuals of Indian descent, but ultimately served to reinforce the apartheid system by legitimising the exclusion of Black African South Africans from the political process. Similarly, the Tricameral Parliament aimed to create a semblance of democracy by allowing Coloured and Indian representatives to participate in governance, yet it perpetuated the systemic disenfranchisement of Black South Africans, who remained entirely excluded from this political structure – because, in terms of the logic of the state, they were represented in their separate Bantustans. The apartheid state’s hegemony, therefore, was a complex blend of brute force and calculated attempts at securing consent, all built upon the foundation of racial capitalism. This dual approach not only sought to maintain the status quo but also sought to create divisions among the oppressed, undermining their collective resistance by dividing them by race and ethnicity and ensuring the survival of the apartheid regime.

3.2.1 Unpacking Apartheid through the Lens of Hegemony

A sophisticated analysis of apartheid South Africa necessitates an integrated Gramscian lens to fully comprehend the complexities of its social and political structures, revealing it as a prime example of ‘integral hegemony’, where domination and consent were systematically segmented (Pillay, 2013; Pontarelli, 2024). Thomas’s re-reading is highly valuable for analysing the apartheid system. Apartheid was a classic example of an ‘integral state’, where coercion and consent were explicitly fused in the sense that the White minority maintained ideological hegemony (Third Dimension/Civil Society) while simultaneously relying on pervasive, systematic, and visible force (First Dimension/Political Society). It utilised overt domination and force characteristic of the ‘Political Society’ or Lukes’ first dimension of

power, against subaltern groups (defined as everyone not White, particularly the working class). Simultaneously, it strategically secured hegemony and consent primarily among the White bloc.

This segmentation was central to the apartheid state's underlying class project. While the state deliberately minimised interference in industrialisation and the core capitalist economy, it imposed extreme intervention in labour relations and social control (Morris & Padayachee, 2004). This strategic alignment ensured the continued support of the White bourgeoisie (and White working class) for the apartheid regime, even amidst vocal opposition from some liberal factions. Their backing was often reinforced by financial support from abroad, particularly from countries like the United Kingdom and the United States of America, which maintained economic ties with the apartheid government, viewing it as a bulwark against communism during the Cold War (Boehmer, 2024; Borstelmann, 1993).

Moreover, this integral hegemony was deeply embedded in the fabric of everyday White life through various civil society institutions. Consent was cemented by the Church, notably the Dutch Reformed Church's theological justifications for apartheid, which provided a moral framework for racial segregation (Corrado, 2013). The media also played a significant role, with state-controlled broadcasting and censorship shaping public perception and discourse among Whites (Bird & Garda, n.d.; McDonald, 2009; Zalmanovich, 2025). Additionally, the legal system systematically reinforced apartheid laws, further entrenching the regime's power (Mbakwe & Osuagwu, 2015; Penna, 1990).

At the heart of this process was Christian National Education (CNE) and Bantu Education, which served as a cornerstone of the apartheid strategy. This educational framework aimed to achieve White bourgeois intellectual and moral leadership over the Black subaltern, as a means of fostering compliance and acceptance of the status quo. While some scholars view this as a manifestation of an attempt at complete hegemony, others, like Hyslop (1985b), argue that it functioned primarily as a crude tool of social control (i.e. coercion) designed to uphold racial capitalism, particularly by managing a growing urban unemployed population. This debate highlights the complexities of apartheid's educational policies, which sought to both educate and subjugate, ultimately shaping the identities and aspirations of generations of Black South Africans.

Pillay (2013) confirms this analysis in her application of Gramsci's framework to apartheid South Africa during the 1970s and 1980s. She argues that the regime exemplified a state

heavily reliant on coercion due to its inherent failure to establish widespread hegemony beyond the White minority. The ruling National Party (NP) represented only a minority of the population (White South Africans, particularly Afrikaners), indicating a significant disconnect from the majority Black population, who were systematically marginalised. The NP's hegemony was largely confined to this White population, lacking the 'national-popular' quality necessary for broader legitimacy.

3.3 Forging Hegemony in the Classroom

The introduction of Bantu Education by the National Party in the 1950s marked a profound transformation in South Africa's educational landscape, fundamentally reshaping the educational opportunities that had previously been provided by mission schools (Frost, 1999; Hyslop, 1985a). Mission schools, often established by religious organisations, were perceived by the Nationalist government as a threat to their control, particularly as urban Black populations grew and began to demand greater access to quality education (Kallaway, 2002). The *Bantu Education Act of 1953* introduced a racially discriminatory curriculum designed to support the apartheid agenda by controlling Black identity and labour (Christie, 1990; Kallaway, 2002). This curriculum was meticulously crafted to align with the economic needs of the apartheid state, prioritising vocational training over academic achievement. Such an approach perpetuated harmful stereotypes of inferiority and stunted the intellectual development of Black students, effectively ensuring that they remained subservient to the demands of a White-dominated economy (Hyslop, 1985a; Kallaway, 2002). This educational framework can be understood as a Gramscian strategy, a deliberate attempt to try to establish hegemony by shaping the identities and aspirations of the Black subaltern, creating a compliant workforce that would accept its subordinate position (Pillay, 2013).

In contrast, the ideology of CNE reinforced apartheid hegemony through the formal schooling system for the White population. It was designed to instil a sense of racial superiority and loyalty to Afrikaner Nationalism among White students, promoting a rigid Calvinist worldview that justified racial hierarchy and upheld White minority rule (Christie, 1990; Kallaway, 2002). By embedding these values within the educational framework, CNE served not only to educate White children, but also to solidify the ideological foundations of apartheid, ensuring that the next generation would perpetuate the existing power structures (Seekings & Nattrass, 2005).

However, Hyslop (1985a) argues that the implementation of Bantu Education was not solely about ideological control. Instead, it was a complex and urgent response to the shifting material demands of racial capitalism. Hyslop (1995) contends that Bantu Education was a strategic response to a social crisis rooted in the changing requirements of the economy and the rise of a growing, potentially volatile, urban Black youth population. The policy's emphasis on vocational training was primarily motivated by the need to manage this demographic, channelling them into the semi-skilled labour required by a modernising capitalist economy while simultaneously suppressing the political aspirations of Black South Africans who sought quality education and social mobility (Morris & Padayachee, 2004). This alternative perspective suggests that Bantu Education was a pragmatic, albeit brutal, tool of social engineering aimed at maintaining control over a burgeoning Black urban youth population. It was a crude attempt at capitalist rationalisation that ultimately failed, as it created the very conditions that would lead to the intellectual and political awakening exemplified by the Soweto Uprisings of 1976. The frustrations and aspirations of the youth, stifled by an oppressive educational system, ignited a powerful resistance that would challenge the foundations of apartheid (Bundy, 1988; Hyslop, 1985b).

Mission education, and Bantu education, signally failed to produce a literate Black African population; hence, creating a context within literacy became important. According to a Human Sciences Research Council report, by 1980 (i.e. the middle of the period under discussion), over half (55%) of all Black Africans over the age of 20 had four years or less schooling. Some 36% of those who had received no formal education at all were younger than 35 – most of them in rural areas (Ellis, 1987). The report commented:

> The illiterate black is one of many. He is most probably illiterate because education was never provided for him, or because it was not compulsory for him to go to school. The culture in which he is found is not dependent on literacy for education and the transfer of cultural values and literacy is not demanded as one of the prerequisites for participation in these. (p. 15)

Black literacy, then, was not seen as particularly important in the greater scheme of things; unless it was required for increased productivity in the country's urban industrial areas.

3.4 The Suppression of Independent Adult Education: The Case of the Night Schools

While Bantu Education was the state's primary tool for controlling the minds and bodies of urban African youth, its hegemonic strategy also extended to the sphere of adult education. A crucial, and often overlooked part of this history, according to Kallaway (2002), was the state's systematic suppression of the independent night school movement. This historical context is vital for understanding the vacuum that the counter-hegemonic projects of the 1970s sought to fill.

Historically, night schools had a long tradition in South Africa, often run by churches, community groups, and political organisations like the Communist Party of South Africa in earlier decades (Kallaway, 2002). Despite the *Bantu Education Act of 1953*, which had made it an imprisonable offence to provide any education to black people unless it was in a government-registered school (Aitchison, 2003), by 1955 approximately 10,000 black students were attending these night schools and literacy classes (Prinsloo, 1999; Sibiya, 2006) in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, Pietermaritzburg, Pretoria, Port Elizabeth, and East London. These schools were more than just places for literacy; they were crucial spaces for independent intellectual development, political discussion, and social organising, operating outside the direct control of the state's ideological apparatus (Kallaway, 2002). It was precisely this autonomy that made them a threat to the apartheid regime. The state viewed these independent centres of learning as potential sites of subversion and political mobilisation. Consequently, as part of its broader strategy to crush all forms of independent Black organising in the 1950s and 60s, the state systematically moved to crush the night school movement. Through legislation and police harassment, most independent night schools for Africans were officially banned or forced to close, particularly after the introduction of the *Group Areas Act* and other repressive laws that made their operation untenable (Aitchison, 2003).

By 1962, it was reported that there were only 2 218 students left in night schools and continuation classes (Prinsloo, 1999, p.7). Adrienne Bird (1982) meticulously maps out how the banning of the night schools created an educational void. It eliminated one of the few avenues for adults to pursue education on their own terms. This act of suppression is a clear example of the state's hegemonic strategy in action. It was not just about providing inferior

education (through Bantu Education) but also about actively destroying any alternative spaces for independent and potentially critical thought. This historical act of erasure is the essential backdrop for the emergence of the Freirean literacy projects a decade later. The clandestine classes held in church halls and activists' homes in the 1970s were not a new phenomenon, but a direct continuation of this suppressed tradition. They were a conscious attempt to rebuild, in a new, more overtly political form, the spaces for liberatory adult education that the state had worked so hard to destroy.

3.5 The Concept of Literacy: A Contested Terrain

The ‘Freirean’ literacy classes of the 1970s and 1980s reflected broader struggles around the nature of literacy itself. The concept of literacy is a deeply contested terrain, shaped by social, political, and economic forces that influence how it is understood and implemented. This complexity highlights the dual nature of education, which can either reinforce existing power structures or empower individuals to challenge and ‘transform their realities’ (Freire, 1970, p.15).

As I discussed in detail in the previous chapter, Antonio Gramsci (1971) emphasises the role of education in establishing, securing and cementing hegemony, where dominant cultural narratives are perpetuated through societal institutions, but also allows for education to play a role in a war of position to create counter-hegemony. Freire’s (1970) critical framework similarly positions education as either a tool for liberation or a mechanism for oppression. This is the principle that stresses the inherently political nature of educational practices. These foundational ideas provide a critical lens for understanding the evolution of literacy as a concept, particularly during the 20th century, when it became a site of intense contestation between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic perspectives.

The evolution of the term ‘literacy’ reflects a significant shift in its conceptualisation over time. Stordy (2015) suggests that the term emerged in the late 19th century to denote essential skills related to decoding and encoding text, primarily associated with the basic ability to read and write. UNESCO’s 1958 definition is that ‘A person is literate who can, with understanding, both read and write a short, simple statement on his or her everyday life’. More recently, scholars have expanded literacy to include digital literacy, scientific literacy, health literacy, and various forms of functional competence, reflecting the complexities of modern society (Deboer, 2000; Sørensen et al., 2012). Writers like Cook-Gemperz (1986)

and Barton (2017) thus argue that literacy is not static, but rather a social construct shaped by societal needs and technological advancements. However, this view of literacy continues to frame literacy as a technical, apolitical process, an essential skill set designed to help individuals secure employment, integrate more effectively into society, and achieve success within existing power structures (UNESCO, 1978). It focuses on reading and writing (and other literacies) as mechanical skills, servicing economic and social conformity rather than a means of challenging oppressive systems (Frost, 1999). Often associated with modernisation theories, this approach viewed literacy as a neutral technology capable of promoting economic development, individual advancement, and social progress (Goody, 1986). Within this tradition, the primary concern of literacy programmes was to teach learners to read and write efficiently, with relatively little attention given to questions of power, culture, or social context.

By the mid-20th century, a new understanding emerged, emphasising literacy as encompassing a higher level of cognitive capacity that transcends mere technical skills. During this period, contestations arose as alternative conceptions of literacy emerged. Educational discussions began to move beyond the technical view, embracing literacy as an activity centred around meaning-making and the interpretation of the world (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007). This shift also increasingly recognised literacy's role in social change and served as a counter-hegemonic force (Crowther et al., 2001).

Scholars such as Street (1984, 1995) contended that literacy practices are never neutral but are always embedded within particular social, cultural, and political contexts. From this perspective, there is no single literacy, but rather multiple literacies shaped by the communities and institutions within which they are practised. Literacy, therefore, becomes inseparable from questions of power, identity, and social relations.

The 1970s marked a pivotal moment in this conceptualisation shift, largely influenced by Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy. Freire's work introduced a further dimension to these debates by linking literacy directly to questions of oppression, consciousness, and social transformation. For Freire (1970), literacy was not simply about learning to decode written text but about learning to 'read the world.' Literacy education, therefore, became a site through which learners could critically analyse their circumstances and develop the capacity to act upon them. This approach challenged both narrowly technical and politically neutral conceptions of literacy.

The emergence of popular education in Brazil during the 1960s, set against a backdrop of high illiteracy (Tygel & Kirsch, 2016), saw Freire's principles gain global prominence. His ideas were instrumental in the literacy campaigns of countries like Nicaragua, Cuba, and Guinea-Bissau, influencing movements across diverse socio-political contexts (Darder, 2018; Leonard & McLaren, 2002). The International Symposium for Literacy, meeting in Persepolis in 1975, thus offered a very different definition of literacy from that of the 1958 UNESCO definition. Literacy, it said, was

> ... not just the process of learning the skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic, but a contribution to the liberation of man and to his full development. Thus conceived, literacy creates the conditions for the acquisition of a critical consciousness of the contradictions of the society in which man lives and of its aims; it also stimulates initiative and participation in the creation of projects capable of acting upon the world, of transforming it, and of defining the aims of an authentic human development. It should open the way to a mastery of techniques and human relations. Literacy is not an end in itself. It is a fundamental human right. (p. 2)

This shift also marked the emergence of popular education, a counter-hegemonic approach that sought to democratise knowledge and inspire marginalised communities to participate actively in societal transformation (Boughton & Durnan, 2014). Von Kotze (2005) (citing Crowther et.al., 1999 and Prajuli, 1986) defines popular education as an educational approach that seeks to promote and strengthen organisations that are explicitly political and opposed to the status quo. However, this period was also shaped by the Cold War, as ideological battles between capitalism and communism influenced educational policies and practices, with various factions seeking to leverage literacy as a means of empowerment and resistance against oppressive regimes (Cherewka & Prins, 2022).

As I will discuss in further detail in this chapter, during apartheid, mainstream adult literacy was used as a tool for oppression, with the apartheid regime controlling access to education to maintain power differentials (Kerfoot, 2009). In response, according to the powerful narrative constructed in the literature of radical adult education, anti-apartheid activists consciously used literacy as a means of resistance and emancipation (Aitchison, 2003; Walters, 1996). This literature argues that these activists often had to navigate a complex terrain, sometimes drawing on 'hegemonic' tools (like the English language) for 'counter-hegemonic' ends. As the struggle for literacy evolved, it reflected this broader societal tension between dominant

and resistant forces. Understanding the multifaceted nature of literacy as it is presented in this scholarship is essential for grasping how it has been framed as both a tool of oppression and a means of empowerment, a central tension that this study will investigate in the chapters that follow.

3.6 The State's Approach to Adult Literacy

While the state's primary educational focus was on the formal schooling of children through Bantu Education, it also maintained a distinct and strategic approach to adult literacy. The scholarly literature makes it clear that the state's interest in adult education was driven by the evolving needs of racial capitalism and the political imperative to manage the Black workforce (Collins & Gillespie, 1987). It was, in essence, a pedagogy of domestication designed to produce more efficient cogs for the apartheid machine. The state's approach can be understood as a direct response to the economic shifts of the 1960s and 70s. As South Africa's economy industrialised, there was a growing demand from capital for a semi-skilled, minimally literate Black workforce that could handle more complex tasks than simple manual labour (Lipton, 1985). Adrienne Bird's (1982) research from the period highlights that the state and capital saw a need for a workforce that could follow written instructions, understand safety signs, and be integrated more efficiently into the production process. The interest in literacy was therefore not about developing human potential, but about developing 'human capital' for a segregated economy. This gave rise to an officially sanctioned model of 'functional literacy'. This approach, as documented by scholars like French (1982), focused exclusively on the technical skills of reading, writing, and numeracy as they related to the workplace. The curriculum was deliberately apolitical, decontextualised, and instrumental. It aimed to produce compliant, more productive workers, not critically conscious citizens who might question their exploitation.

From a Gramscian perspective, this functional approach was a tool of hegemony. By providing a tangible skill that appeared to offer individual advancement, the state and its allies in industry could secure a degree of consent from both capital (who benefitted from a more efficient workforce) and some workers (who gained a marketable skill). This served to depoliticise the issue of education, framing it as a technical problem of skills deficit rather than a political problem of systemic oppression. Thus, in the late 1960s to the early 1970s, several organisations advancing adult literacy in South Africa emerged (Aitchison (1999).

This review will focus on the three largest providers of this era: the Bureau of Literacy and Literature (BLL), Operation Upgrade, and Project Literacy. Despite their different origins and approaches, and the fact that they spoke out against apartheid, they ultimately operated within a hegemonic framework that prioritised functional skills over the critical consciousness advocated by Freire (1970).

By outsourcing this ‘safe’ literacy to state-sanctioned organisations such as the Bureau of Literacy and Literature (BLL), Operation Upgrade, and Project Literacy , organisations that were ‘reformist’, in the sense that they opposed apartheid rhetorically but operated within its structural limits, the state could promote a form of adult education that met the needs of the economy without running the risk of fostering dissent. Ultimately, the state’s vision for adult literacy was a direct extension of the philosophy of Bantu Education. Just as Bantu Education was designed to prepare Black children for a life of servitude with limited horizons, state-sanctioned adult literacy was designed to equip Black adults with just enough skill to be useful to the economy, but not enough critical awareness to challenge it. It was another, more subtle, tool for social control and economic integration on the non-negotiable terms of the ruling class.

3.6.1 The Bureau of Literacy and Literature

The state’s financial support for organisations like the BLL perfectly exemplifies the economic functional skills approach. The organisation became the primary provider of literacy services to the mines and industries, developing apolitical primers and materials that were acceptable to both corporate management and the state (Aitchison, 2003). The scholarly literature on the BLL, primarily from adult education historians like Aitchison (2000), Frost (1996), and Prinsloo (1999), is remarkably consistent in its assessment of the organisation. It constructs a narrative of a well-intentioned, but ultimately flawed, liberal institution that, despite its large scale, failed to fundamentally challenge the hegemonic structures it operated within, a critique often substantiated by the BLL’s own internal reports.

The Bureau emerged from the liberal, anti-apartheid ethos of the South African Institute of Race Relations. It was founded in 1964 by a small group of literacy workers led by Maida Whyte, with some financial support from the government (Frost, 1996). This founding by individuals associated with the Institute of Race Relations is noteworthy, as it reflects an early recognition of the need for literacy as a tool for emancipation in a racially stratified society (Prinsloo, 1999). However, it also raises questions about the extent to which the

organisation could genuinely address the needs of marginalised communities, given its origins in a predominantly White institution (Aitchison, 2000).

Towards the end of the 1960s, South Africa's economic growth and the increasing international focus on global literacy movements created a heightened local demand for adult literacy work (Frost, 1996). The BLL responded by developing systematic methods and materials, including primers and basic readers, offering teacher training, and conducting courses on the management of literacy programmes, as well as local writers' workshops (Prinsloo, 1999). In the mid-1970s, the BLL had employed nearly 30 permanent staff members, characterised by a multi-racial composition, but a predominantly White leadership (Aitchison, 2000). This structure positioned the BLL as the main supplier of literacy services to mines and industries, a significant contributor to missionary literacy efforts, and a supporter of official programmes in regions like Lebowa and Gazankulu, ultimately reaching up to 60,000 learners (Frost, 1996).

Despite these achievements, by the 1980s, the BLL's permanent staff had dwindled to just one (Education Research Unit [ERU], 1991). Several factors contributed to this decline, including conservative trustees, a diffusion of focus, and inhibited local innovation due to the dominance of American models for materials and services (Aitchison, 2000; Frost, 1996). Moreover, competition from other providers, political turbulence during the 1980s, and a lack of funding, further exacerbated the organisation's challenges (Frost, 1996). Unsatisfactory management practices in the 1970s also played a role in the loss of momentum for the BLL (ERU, 1991).

While the BLL aimed to inspire learners through literacy, its reliance on textbook-driven instruction often resulted in limited learner engagement and failed to adequately challenge the exploitative structures of the industries it served (ERU, 1991). This highlights a critical tension between the organisation's stated goals and the realities of its operational practices (Aitchison, 2000). The BLL's experience illustrates the complexities of implementing literacy initiatives within a deeply divided society.

3.6.2 Operation Upgrade

The reviewed literature on Operation Upgrade, particularly from critical evaluators like Hutton (1992), presents a largely negative consensus. The narrative is one of an organisation whose initial success was undermined by poor administration, a lack of critical self-

reflection, and a conservative, top-down methodology that ultimately proved ineffective and irrelevant to learners' needs.

Operation Upgrade, commonly known as Op-Up, was established in 1966 in Durban by Sandy and Louise d'Oliveira with the intent of initiating literacy campaigns across South Africa. Initially, Op-Up adopted methodologies aligned with Frank Laubach's literacy techniques (Aitchison, 2000; Prinsloo, 1999; ERU, 1991) with its strong focus on 'Each One Teach One' (peer teaching) methodology and foundational principles of 'volunteerism and evangelism' (Cherewka & Prins, 2022, p. 20)

The historical context of Laubach's influence is critical for a Gramscian analysis of this period, as it links local South African literacy provision directly to the global Cold War ideological struggle, within which (capitalist) South Africa was also located. Laubach's methods were inextricably tied to the foreign policy of the United States of America, particularly the Point Four Program, which was launched to use educational assistance and propaganda to create economic growth, thereby extending the market for free trade and combating communism (Cherewka & Prins, 2022). Laubach himself viewed literacy as an important tool for (West-aligned and supported) national independence movements, equating democracy with the freedom to retain private property and to fight political oppression (Parker, 2016). His projects were a manifestation of modernisation theory, which proposed that developing nations required technical skills and capitalist values to avoid communism (Cherewka & Prins, 2022; Parker 2016).

This ideological foundation is the precise source of Op-Up's conservative reputation, as it directly fed into the apartheid state's own anti-communist rhetoric of 'die Rooi Gevaar', justifying its actions and securing international support. Operation Upgrade emphasised simple and practical methods tailored to learners' everyday lives (Aitchison, 2000; Harley et al., 1996). It integrated religious teachings into its literacy education framework, which not only facilitated its acquisition of 'government legitimacy' (Gush & Walters, 1995, p. 20) but also contributed to its conservative reputation within the broader socio-political landscape (Aitchison, 2000; ERU, 1991). Op-Up sought to disseminate its literacy message through the personal influence of its literacy teachers, strategically recruiting collaboration from cabinet ministers, education authorities, homeland leaders, and prominent business figures (French, 2002). This form of literacy provision reflected a model deliberately designed to reinforce

dominant capitalist power structures while offering marginalised communities a technical skill to cope better within the existing, non-negotiable (capitalist) social order.

As extensively documented by Hutton (1992), Op-Up experienced a promising start, but encountered severe setbacks by the 1980s, primarily due to administrative inefficiencies. The organisation narrowly avoided collapse, following a change in leadership which allowed it to continue operating. However, Hutton (1992) highlights several persistent issues, including the absence of systematic evaluation processes, which led to concerns about the quality and relevance of instructional materials. Many participants reportedly found the reading texts uninspiring and disconnected from their lived experiences, contributing to high dropout rates (Hutton, 1992). Hutton also criticises the organisation's lack of transparency and limited space for internal debate and assessment, which often resulted in superficial judgments about its effectiveness. These reflections underscore the broader need for literacy initiatives to remain adaptable, community-driven, and subject to continuous evaluation, an argument further supported by French (2002), who emphasises the importance of aligning educational practices to empower marginalised communities.

3.6.3 Project Literacy

The literature reviewed on Project Literacy, drawing from both scholarly accounts (Frost, 1996) and its own internal histories (Project Literacy, 2001; van Zweel, 1994), presents a more complex and ambivalent narrative. It is consistently portrayed as a well-meaning grassroots initiative, but one that struggled with the tension between its transformative goals and the operational realities of becoming a large-scale, hierarchical service provider, inadvertently reinforcing some of the power dynamics it sought to challenge.

Project Literacy, often referred to as ProLit, was established in 1973 as a community-based initiative spearheaded by Jenny Neser (Frost, 1996). This organisation emerged in response to the educational needs of live-in domestic workers and gardeners in the Brooklyn area of Pretoria, who sought a space for literacy learning and social interaction during their limited free time (Ibid.). Neser, recognising this need, convened a meeting to gauge interest in literacy classes and discovered that participants were willing to pay a small tuition fee. This grassroots approach highlighted the community's desire for education, despite the systemic barriers they faced. Their 2024 Annual Report reiterates this origin story, noting that volunteer tutors initially offered literacy and sewing classes to domestic workers and gardeners, reflecting a strong commitment to empowerment through education (Project

Literacy, 2024). The organisation emphasised literacy as a fundamental right, aiming to rectify historical inequities and empower marginalised communities (van Zweel, 1994). The focus was on providing accessible programmes tailored to the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of South Africa's population. Current reports show that this principle remains central, with programmes designed to address multilingual contexts and socio-economic disparities (Project Literacy, 2024).

Despite its extensive network and commitment to transformative goals, Project Literacy's reliance on structured hierarchies inadvertently reinforced existing power dynamics within the educational framework. This was reflective of the ongoing tension between its aspirational objectives and the operational realities faced in a deeply stratified society (Frost, 1996; van Zweel, 1994). The organisation's experience illustrates not only the inherent difficulties in implementing educational initiatives aimed at rectifying historical inequities and empowering marginalised communities, but also of understanding literacy as inherently 'neutral'. Annual Reports repeatedly cite funding constraints and compliance requirements as factors that shape organisational structure and decision-making (Project Literacy, 2001; 2024).

3.7 Church and NGO Provision: A Dual Legacy

While state-led and non-governmental organisations (NGO) efforts to control and deliver literacy in apartheid South Africa often reinforced the regime's oppressive ideologies, religious organisations played an important and complex role in shaping educational opportunities during this period. Churches were players in the landscape of non-formal education. They provided literacy and vocational training for marginalised communities, often in contexts where formal education was inaccessible or complicit with oppressive regimes (Chisholm, 2004). However, this dual legacy was complex. Some religious initiatives aligned with conservative or even regressive ideologies promoted obedience and submission that could undermine the critical consciousness needed for liberation (Nkomo, 1990). Consequently, church-sponsored education supported communities in adversity, but inadvertently reinforced certain conservative values that conflicted with broader liberation goals (Soudien, 2007).

Building on the recognition that religious and state actors could both reinforce and challenge oppression (i.e. could play a role in creating and cementing hegemony; or be part of a

counter-hegemonic war of position), it is also crucial to consider the role of NGOs – notably called ‘service organisations’ in this period. While many aimed to promote education and address immediate socio-economic needs, they operated within a complex landscape where their efforts could also inadvertently sustain existing social structures. Despite their positive contributions, NGOs faced criticism for, at times, perpetuating colonial perspectives and failing to challenge the deeper structural roots of inequality and capitalism (Christie, 1990). Many programmes prioritised externally set objectives, such as improving literacy, health, or economic participation, often without sufficient engagement with local contexts or grassroots voices. As a result, some initiatives risked reinforcing existing power dynamics rather than empowering communities to challenge them (Ibid.). These organisations thus need to be seen as located within civil society as a site of struggle.

Upon reflecting on the landscape of dominant and reformist literacy provision, a consistent theme emerges. The failure of these organisations to effectively dismantle entrenched power structures was not simply a matter of pedagogical limitations or resource constraints. Rather, their efforts were often constrained by a reformist ideology that did not seek to fundamentally challenge the system of racial capitalism itself. As established earlier in this chapter, the hegemonic fear of the ruling class, and of many liberal reformers, was that the anti-apartheid struggle might also become an anti-capitalist struggle (Wolpe, 1988; Legassick, 1974). From this perspective, the work of many dominant providers can be understood as an attempt to manage this threat. Their goal was to produce a more stable and moderately skilled workforce that could allow a non-racial capitalism to continue, thereby preventing a more radical, socialist transformation (Morrow & Torres, 1995). They reinforced hegemony because they ultimately believed in a society in which a capitalist class, albeit a deracialised one, would remain dominant.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the historical, political, and ideological foundations that shaped literacy initiatives during South Africa’s anti-apartheid struggle. It has illustrated how systemic policies, such as Bantu Education and a state-sanctioned ‘functional’ approach to adult literacy, were designed to reinforce hegemonic control. It has explored organisations that, willingly or unwillingly, operated within this dominant or reformist paradigm, ultimately aiming to reform capitalism rather than dismantle it. Understanding this fundamental tension

between reform and revolution is crucial for recognising literacy as both a tool of oppression and a means of resistance. It is against this backdrop of a struggle that was as much about class as it was about race that counter-hegemonic literacy projects emerged.

Having mapped the terrain of hegemonic control, the next chapter turns to a critical review of the literature on the anti-apartheid response, and the extent to which this was indeed counter-hegemonic. It examines the ideological currents, key actors, and internal debates that defined the struggle to create a post-apartheid South Africa, and which shaped the case study literacy projects. The chapter will focus in particular on the key movements within the broader anti-apartheid struggle, namely, the radical student movements, the burgeoning independent trade unions, and the vibrant landscape of church-based and grassroots community organisations. This ecosystem of resistance will help us begin to understand and locate the specific 'Freirean' projects of this study and analyse their unique contribution to this historical fight.

Chapter 4: The Counter-Hegemonic Response - Grassroots Movements and Education for Liberation

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I reviewed literature that examined the hegemonic landscape of apartheid South Africa, highlighting how literacy and education functioned as instruments of state control. This chapter now turns from the literature on the apartheid state, and adult literacy which largely served to maintain its hegemony, to the literature that critically reviews the emergence of the counter-hegemonic response to the dominant narratives and structures of power that historically marginalised certain groups. It will explore how these counter-hegemonic movements challenged prevailing ideologies and sought to create alternative frameworks for understanding and addressing social injustices, but were themselves located within broader ideological debates. As part of this discussion, I identify five case study projects, showing how they were inserted into this context, and consider the literature specifically related to them.

It is important to recognise that activists in the 1970s did not commonly articulate their struggles in Gramscian terms, such as ‘counter-hegemony’ or ‘war of position.’ Instead, their philosophical motivation was mainly influenced by anti-colonial thinkers, like Frantz Fanon. This chapter, therefore, uses Gramsci’s concepts as an external analytical tool to interpret the strategic actions of the period, while acknowledging Fanon and the BC language that historically drove them.

As with the previous chapter, to construct this analysis, this review engages with distinct genres of literature. It thus draws on scholarly histories of the liberation movements, but it places particular emphasis on a body of literature that can be described as the ‘activist-practitioner narrative’. This literature includes contemporary accounts from activists (e.g., Biko, 1978), post-1990 interviews and memoirs, and the work of scholars in radical adult education who were often participants themselves (e.g., Aitchison, 2003; Von Kotze, 1994; Walters, 1996).

It should be noted that the radical adult education genre is marked by a distinctive epistemological challenge. It is overwhelmingly self-referential and frequently unsupported by scholarly references, or creating a closed loop of validation. To use claims regarding the influence of Freire as an example, Gush and Walters (1995) say that in 1970, the UCM started receiving and circulating summaries of Freire's work, and that some students were trained in Freire's methodology and subsequently used it in their community education and literacy classes. No reference is provided (it is possible they were speaking from personal experience, but they do not say this). Aitchison (2003) states that the UCM started circulating mimeographed summaries from the USA of the works of Freire; he provides no reference. He then repeats what Gush and Walters say about students being trained, using wording very close to Gush and Walters, but does not reference the wording. Later in his article, Aitchsion again talks about the importance of Freire to adult literacy in this period, but provides no reference. In another written piece, 'A review of adult basic education in SA' (n.d.), he states that UCM and the BC movement were influenced by Freire in the early 1970s, but again, no reference is provided.

A much later piece by Luckett, Walters and von Kotze (2017), states that in 1970 the UCM started receiving and circulating works of Freire, notably *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Students were trained in Freire, and used him in their community education and literacy. Whilst this is very close to Gush and Walters (1995) in its claim (apart from specifically referencing *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*), they are not cited, and indeed no reference is provided. Aitchison and McKay (2021) argue that by the mid-1970s, a small number of literacy organisations had been set up, and adopted Freire. Again, no reference is given.

This pattern of uncited assertions, or recycling of assertions, means the claim of Freirean influence on many of the literacy projects of the period exist as a matter of collective, undisputed historical memory, rather than a demonstrable, supported fact. As I discussed in Chapter One, this was one rationale behind this study. While the radical adult education narrative is invaluable for its insider perspective, it often presents a unified and sometimes romanticised account of the projects' intent and impact. Within this review of the literature, I will therefore juxtapose these claims with more distanced scholarly analyses, such as the work done by Hadfield (2017), who, as stated in Chapter One, specifically researched the connection between BC and Paulo Freire. In doing so, I aim to build a nuanced understanding of how these counter-hegemonic educational initiatives were both practised and documented.

4.2 The Rise of the Counter-Hegemonic Movements

Aitchison (2003) argues that the 1970s 'began with signs of a slow (and often educational) process of building up the strength to struggle again' (p.137) after what was the lowest point of resistance to the apartheid of the sixties due to the banning of political organisations (Hadfield, 2010). There were three defining moments that characterised this decade: the black student riots following the expulsion of Onkgopotse Tiro from the University of the North in 1972 (Heffernan, 2015; Tiro, 2019), the emergence of Advice Centres which could be attributed to the series of short but widespread industrial strikes (the 'Durban moment') by an estimated 100 000 workers (mainly in the Natal region) in 1973 (Bonnin, 2023; Vally 1994), and the 1976 Soweto Uprisings in which South Africa was rocked to its foundations by the revolt by school children protesting against apartheid education (Aitchison, 2003).

The 1980s began with indications of reform, or to put a more negative cast upon it, the modernisation of apartheid (Aitchison, 2003). This was a period of violent resistance and escalating insurgency from all borders (Douek, 2020), the declarations of a State of Emergency, one on 20 July 1985 and another in June 1986 which lasted for five years (Stemmet, 2015; Vally, 1994), and the emergence of the non-racial trade union movement as the single most important organised force of internal political resistance (Cooper, 2007):

> By the mid-1980s, South Africa was in flames, with violent resistance and escalating insurgency from all borders, including the ones inside the country. Rural uprisings in the desiccated countryside of South Africa's Bantustan homelands were met by violent demonstrations within the sprawls of South Africa's peri-urban townships (South African History Online, n.d.-a).

The decade was also defined by competing and sometimes overlapping conceptions of adult education (Kerfoot, 2009). The two major educational players, according to Kerfoot, were the state and organised labour, each with opposing but equally 'monolithic' conceptions of adult education. It is in this broader context that we need to view the variety of counter-hegemonic movements which arose, each striving to challenge the pervasive and oppressive structures that defined South African society. In the next two sections, I focus specifically on two broad trends that characterised the 1970s and 1980s – the BC movement and People's Education.

4.2.1 The Black Consciousness Movement

The BC movement emerged in the late 1960s as a response to the perceived inadequacies of the existing anti-apartheid movements (Gqola, 2001; Biko, 2017). The South African Students' Organisation (SASO), established in 1968, became the primary vehicle for articulating the BC ideology (Hadfield, 2017). Under the leadership of figures like Steve Biko, BC emphasised Black self-identity, self-reliance, and critical reflection (Biko, 1978). This philosophical project drew heavily on anti-colonial theorists like Frantz Fanon, and foregrounded psychological liberation as a prerequisite for political struggle. Literacy and education were recognised as essential tools for fostering critical awareness with the Freirean concept of conscientisation becoming central to BC philosophy (Hadfield, 2017).

As established in Chapter One, Hadfield (2017) outlines the most detailed account of this direct connection, documenting the Freire-inspired workshops run by Anne Hope in 1972 at the request of Steve Biko. These workshops introduced BC leaders such as Biko, Barney Pityana, and Strini Moodley to Freire's methods of the concepts of generative themes and visual codes. Hadfield's (2017) findings show that Hope introduced this leadership cadre to these core Freirean concepts to stimulate dialogue. Hadfield argues that what the BC movement found in Freire was not a new political philosophy, as they already had a sophisticated one, but rather a practical and powerful pedagogical method that could translate their abstract principles of psychological liberation into a concrete, replicable community programme. She concludes that this training was a critical moment, providing the BC movement with the tools to launch their community development and literacy initiatives, which were central to their strategy of building a self-reliant Black populace. This scholarly account is corroborated by the testimony of key participants. In an interview I conducted with Barney Pityana, a prominent figure in the BC movement, he confirmed the profound impact of Freire's work while also stressing the need for local adaptation: 'Paulo Freire was the key theoretician, if you like. But we needed to bring Paulo Freire back from Brazil to the South African context' (Sefatsa[3], 2020, p. 13).

Pityana's reflection highlights both the centrality of Freire's text and the BC movement's agency in actively reinterpreting it for their own struggle. As Nekhwevha (2002) argues, this was a conscious and active engagement. Steve Biko himself defined the term

[3]As explained earlier, Sefatsa (2020) refers to earlier research done by me, and published under my married surname. The interviews cited from that study were conducted by me.

‘conscientisation’ in a way that directly echoes Freirean thought. He defined it as ‘a process whereby individuals or groups living within a given social and political setting are made aware of their situation’ (as cited in Nekhwevha, 2002, p. 137). Slogans such as ‘Black man, you are on your own’ exemplified the movement’s focus on Black pride and agency, and was, in practical terms, a foundational war of position against the third dimension of ‘power over’, aiming to shatter the ideological hegemony of White supremacy. BC-inspired literacy initiatives, as documented by Hadfield (2017) and confirmed by Pityana, sought to embolden individuals to critically navigate oppressive realities by first freeing their minds.

However, a more critical and nuanced analysis of this relationship is provided by scholar-activist Leigh-Ann Naidoo (2015). Naidoo argues that ‘radical pedagogical ideals and practices were at the heart of SASO and the BCM from their inception’ (p. 112). She confirms the movement’s engagement with Freirean concepts, such as dialectics and praxis, to counter the ‘false consciousness’ imposed by apartheid (Naidoo, 2015, p. 113). Crucially, however, Naidoo’s central argument identifies a profound tension within the BC movement’s educational work. She argues that there was a fundamental conflict ‘between the critical educational project of transforming consciousness and the political education project of directing black people's energies against the white state’ (Naidoo, 2015, p. 112).

While BC began with a deep commitment to the slow, rigorous, Freirean process of individual transformation, Naidoo’s (2015) archival research suggests that the escalating political crisis of the 1970s forced a strategic shift. She concludes that as the struggle intensified, the urgent need for mass mobilisation and ‘quick community action’ meant that the ‘political project... trumped the educational project’ (Naidoo, 2015, p. 128). This resulted in a move towards more ‘predetermined content’ and tightly planned leadership programmes, a rhythm that is different from the open, problem-posing ideal of Freirean pedagogy. Naidoo’s critical analysis is relevant to this thesis, as it directly engages with the central question of whether Freire’s work was applied as a deep philosophical praxis or as a more instrumental tool for immediate political ends. This scholarly debate provides the essential context for my own investigation into the literacy projects that operated within and alongside the BC movement.

Within this broader BC–Freire nexus, I have chosen two case study projects, Masifundise and the Umtapo Centre. Masifundise, established in the early 1980s under the TCOE, exemplifies the fusion of BC, liberation theology, and Freirean pedagogy. Its affiliation with the Federal

Theological Seminary of Southern Africa (FedSem), a hub of liberation theology, provided ideological grounding and protection against repression (De Gruchy, 1995b; Villa-Vicencio, 1988). Scholars note that church-based organisations like TCOE created safe spaces for conscientisation and grassroots empowerment (Hadfield, 2010; Maluleke, 1997).

The Umtapo Centre, founded in KwaZulu-Natal in the late 1980s, represents a mature and unapologetic application of BC-infused philosophy within a literacy project. With strong links to BC figures such as Strini Moodley, Umtapo explicitly claimed a Freirean orientation, situating literacy within a broader Popular Education Network and aligning with the 'African Decade on Literacy for All' (Hyman, 2002). Scholars highlight BC-aligned organisations' role in embedding conscientisation within community education, while also reflecting the tensions Naidoo identifies between deep pedagogical praxis and the demands of political mobilisation.

The BC movement's adoption and adaptation of the concept of 'conscientisation' is thus presented in the literature as a conscious and deliberate act. To examine the praxis of a project explicitly rooted in this ideology, this study investigates the Umtapo Centre, located in KwaZulu-Natal. Although founded later in the study period (late 1980s), I chose Umtapo because it represents a mature and unapologetic application of BC-infused philosophy within a literacy project. Its strong, documented links to BC figures like Strini Moodley (one of those trained by Anne Hope in 1972) and its explicit claims of a Freirean approach (Hyman, 2002) make it an essential case study.

4.2.2 The People's Education and Popular Education Movements: A Call for Revolutionary Pedagogy

While BC defined the ideological terrain of the early 1970s, People's Education and broader popular education movements became the defining educational philosophies of the mass democratic struggle in the 1980s. A review of the literature on these movements is crucial, as it represents the most widespread and explicit attempt to create a mass-based, counter-hegemonic educational praxis in South Africa. The popular education movement, which had been developing since the 1970s, provided the fertile ground for these ideas. The literature credits the UCM with playing a pivotal role in promoting Freire's (1970) ideas within this framework, fostering conscientisation and collective action (Aitchison, 2000).

According to Shirley Walters (1989), a popular education practitioner of the period, popular education was fundamentally a political-pedagogical approach rooted in the lived experiences of the oppressed. It was explicitly linked to the process of building democratic social movements and was practised in a variety of non-formal settings, including trade unions, NGOs, and church-based organisations (Von Kotze et al., 2016; Walters, 1989). This approach culminated in the People's Education movement, which gained traction after being formally launched at the Soweto Parents' Crisis Committee conference in 1985 (Nkomo, 1990; Waghid, 2004). This movement was a radical grassroots response to the deliberate inequalities of Bantu Education. Its famous slogan, 'People's Education for People's Power', explicitly linked the classroom to the revolutionary goal of overthrowing the apartheid state. As poignantly pointed out by Luckett et al. (2017), activists and communities sought to create an alternative that was democratic, non-racial, non-sexist, and relevant to their lived experiences; an education radically different from the oppressive social realities they endured under apartheid.

The literature, particularly the work of Nekhwevha (2002), argues that Freire's pedagogy, with its emphasis on 'critical consciousness', resonated deeply with the movement's aims. Freirean principles provided the theoretical language for a pedagogy that could enable communities to critically analyse their social realities and actively participate in their own liberation. The literature thus presents the People's Education movement not as a reformist project, but as a revolutionary one. Its aim, as scholars from Walters (1989) to Nkomo (1990) contend, was not to fix Bantu Education, but to replace it entirely with a system that would produce the conscious and organised cadres needed to build a new, democratic South Africa. Mathe (2012), in his detailed analysis of the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC), argues that 'a central and sophisticated strategy of the movement was the creation and mass distribution of relevant, easy-to-read materials designed to bypass the state's control of information and foster a shared political language' (pp. 45-68). The work of Neville Alexander (1990), a key theoretician of the struggle, provides a critical lens for evaluating such initiatives. Alexander emphasises the importance of large-scale initiatives in fostering a common culture of resistance. However, he also warned of the risk of depoliticisation if they became overly 'technicist' and disconnected from grassroots political organisation.

As discussed in Section 3.5, literacy was a highly contested concept during the 1970s and 1980s, with competing traditions variously framing literacy as a technical skill, a

developmental resource, or a means of fostering critical consciousness and social transformation. These debates were not merely theoretical but were actively taken up by South African university-based literacy scholars, adult educators, and popular education practitioners involved in literacy work during the period. Questions concerning the relationship between literacy, development, empowerment, and political mobilisation shaped literacy initiatives across the country. Some programmes emphasised functional and workplace literacy, while others drew more explicitly on Freirean and popular education traditions that viewed literacy as part of broader struggles for social justice and democratic participation (Aitchison, 2003; Walters, 1989).

The literacy projects examined in this study were located within these debates and frequently reflected tensions between technical, developmental, and emancipatory conceptions of literacy. We also have to be aware that, as French (1988, p. 29) points out in relation to literacy work in South Africa in the 1980s, ‘one may find “liberating” qualities in lessons in state and industrial centres, one may find oppressive and domineering approaches being enacted in supposedly liberating programmes’.

Understanding these competing traditions is important because the central concern of this study is not simply whether literacy instruction occurred, but how literacy was conceptualised and mobilised within broader struggles against apartheid. The extent to which the projects embodied Freirean praxis can only be understood in relation to the wider literacy debates within which they operated.

To examine the function of a major service organisation of the broader counter-hegemonic education movement, this study focuses on Learn and Teach. Founded in 1974, it was operating nationally by the early 1980s. Scholars like Frost (1996) and Aitchison and McKay (2021) portray it as a vital service organisation that functioned as a key piece of the counter-hegemonic infrastructure. *Learn and Teach* magazine is documented as a successful and innovative tool for nurturing social activism, providing literacy support while simultaneously fostering political conscientisation. I chose Learn and Teach for several key reasons. Firstly, its unique dual role makes it a compelling case. It not only conducted its own literacy classes, but also produced and distributed the widely read *Learn and Teach* magazine, which served as a primary pedagogical tool for countless other groups. Secondly, the strong claims within the literature regarding its Freirean influence and political impact (Aitchison & McKay, 2021; French, 1988; Kerfoot, 2009; Prinsloo, 1999), make it an essential site for this

investigation. Aitchison and McKay (2021) affirm the organisation's unique role as a disseminator of the Freirean method, while Prinsloo (1999) confirms that the project was a vital service organisation that functioned as a key piece of the counter-hegemonic infrastructure. The consensus across the scholarly literature, therefore, establishes Learn and Teach as the example of Freirean principles successfully scaled up from the small classroom to mass communication.

Finally, its selection is informed by my own experience, which serves as a direct, lived testament to the state's perception of the magazine. In 1989-1990, years after its first publication, I used Learn and Teach as a resource to teach English to matric students because I believed it would effectively support my efforts to teach English as a second language while using materials that offered practical and relevant content that resonated with my students' lived experiences. I used my own archived copies of *Learn and Teach* magazine, which I had kept from my time at Khanya College. This act attracted the direct attention of the South African Police, who subsequently confiscated all my copies. This incident provides my personal confirmation of the literature's central claim that the apartheid state did not view *Learn and Teach* as a simple magazine, but as a potent and subversive political tool that remained a threat long after its initial publication. This lived experience highlights the impact and solidifies its importance as a case study for this thesis.

4.2.3 Competing Traditions of Literacy

The literacy projects discussed in this study emerged within a field characterised by competing understandings of literacy and its purpose, as discussed in Section 3.5. These debates also found expression within South African literacy scholarship and practice during the 1970s and 1980s, particularly among university-based literacy scholar-practitioners, adult educators, and popular education activists who were engaged directly in literacy work. University-based literacy scholars, adult educators, and popular education practitioners grappled with questions concerning the relationship between literacy, development, empowerment, and political mobilisation. Some initiatives emphasised functional and workplace literacy, while others drew more explicitly on Freirean and popular education traditions that viewed literacy as part of broader struggles for social justice and democratic participation (Aitchison, 2003; Walters, 1989). The literacy projects examined in this study were located within these debates and frequently reflected tensions between technical, developmental, and emancipatory conceptions of literacy.

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4.3 Arenas of Struggle: Where Ideology Meets Practice

The ideological frameworks of BC and People's Education did not exist in a vacuum; they were championed, challenged, debated, and put into practice by specific social actors within a multi-layered ecosystem of resistance. This entire ecosystem was engaged in a Gramscian struggle over the 'integral state,' challenging the dual control of ideological consensus and state coercion. The literature of this period consistently identifies three primary arenas where this counter-hegemonic, 'Freirean'-inspired educational praxis took root and flourished:

- First, the university campuses and student movements served as the intellectual incubators for a new, radical politics.
- Second, the factory floors and advice offices of the burgeoning independent trade union movement, were sites where liberatory theory was translated into direct confrontation with capital.
- Thirdly, the community halls and church basements were where grassroots NGOs/service organisations and faith-based organisations waged an ideological war for the hearts and minds of ordinary people.

The following sections reviews the literature pertaining to each of these arenas of struggle, examining how the key actors within them applied and adapted these liberatory philosophies.

4.3.1 The Student Movement

The literature on the anti-apartheid struggle consistently identifies the student movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s as the primary incubators for a new, radical politics. This period saw the revival of the mass movement against apartheid after years of severe repression. According to historians Pampallis and Bailey (2021), this revival was driven by a combination of economic and political factors. On the one hand, growing industries required more skilled Black workers, creating new tensions in the apartheid labour market and increasing pressure on urban areas. On the other hand, the Bantustan system was failing to

sustain its populations, leading to increased pressure and desperation in rural areas. As discussed in Chapter Three, they also emphasise that Bantu Education itself, with its stretched finances and aim to limit the growth of a Black intellectual class, created the very conditions for the 1976 student revolt.

Within this intellectual crucible of the student movement were the UCM, SASO and NUSAS organisations. The UCM, established in 1967 (Houston, 1997), was an organisation of critical importance. Drawing on Black and liberation theology, its ideological alignment made it a natural institutional vehicle for the entry and early circulation of Freire's (1970) ideas and pioneering of conscientisation as a tool for resistance (Aitchison & McKay, 2021; Gush & Walters, 1995).

The SASO, founded in 1969, became the primary vehicle for the BC ideology that would define the era. The scholarly literature confirms that the decision to form a blacks-only organisation was a direct result of the experiences of leaders like Steve Biko within the White-led NUSAS. Naidoo (2015) confirms, in her archival study of SASO, 'that black students experienced firsthand the inability within NUSAS to influence the agenda, discussions and decisions of the organisation' (p. 116). Thus, SASO emerged as a model for resistance, directly challenging both the state's notion that 'separate meant equal' and the liberal establishment's control of the anti-apartheid student narrative (Pampallis & Bailey, 2021, p. 122).

The White-led NUSAS, founded in 1924, also played a complex role (McKay, 2015) in the period under study. It is clear that NUSAS significantly shaped the intellectual and organisational context for radical pedagogy. Traditionally a liberal anti-apartheid body, its relevance declined in the late 1960s with the rise of BC and SASO (Lodge, 1983; SAHO, n.d.b). This triggered an existential crisis, forcing NUSAS to confront its own 'elitism, academism, and pessimism' (Kline, 1985, pp. 139–140) and acknowledge its limited role in the Black-led struggle (Bunting, 1975; Lodge, 1983).

Following SASO's disengagement, it debated disbanding altogether before restructuring into three separate components, NUSED (its educational wing), NUSWEL (its social welfare wing), and Aquarius (its cultural wing) (McKay, 2015). Scholars highlight that this restructuring reflected both ideological contestation and the search for legitimacy in a context

where NUSAS was increasingly recognised as a White organisation (Gerhart, 1978; Moss, 2014). As one of those involved in NUSAS in this period, Dan O'Meara recounts,

> We weren't running away from Black Consciousness; we couldn't have… But the point is that we couldn't run *towards* Black Consciousness. Biko and his compatriots had not an ounce of racism in them, but they were just not interested in working with whites… 'Change your own damn community, we're going to change ours.' That was the message. (quoted in Keniston, 2013).

In response, NUSAS shifted from liberal protest to a structural critique of racial capitalism, redefining the university as a 'site of struggle' (O'Malley Archives, n.d.). White students were reframed as political agents with a responsibility to engage meaningfully in liberation efforts. This ideological turn materialised in initiatives such as the Student Wages Commission (1971), which investigated wages of Black university staff and supported unionisation (O'Malley Archives, n.d.). These developments created the conceptual and political space for adopting transformative pedagogies rooted in Freirean principles. While SASO advanced Black autonomy, NUSAS turned toward worker and community-based activism, prioritising Wages Commissions and literacy projects. This shift illustrates the contested politics of the student movement: NUSAS sought relevance through community and worker engagement, but remained constrained by its racial identity and by state repression.

Before Freire's influence, UCM, SASO, and NUSAS had already initiated literacy projects, often using the conservative Bureau of Literacy and Literature (BLL) method. As UCM absorbed Freire's pedagogy, these ideas spread to SASO and NUSAS, reshaping their educational strategies. Moss (2014) notes that student groups at Wits University, often under the NUSAS banner, 'were involved in literacy training based on the conscientisation model of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire' (pp. 86–87), identifying literacy coordinators like Barbara Hogan and Susan Brown as key actors.

This shift built on NUSAS's earlier role as a platform for white student activism. According to Friedman (1987), 'white students at English language universities had protested against government policies—the political vacuum of the sixties meant that this was often the only organised anti-apartheid activity. The protests were led by NUSAS since it provided the platform for white student leaders to meet and work with their black counterparts and so provided them with exposure to black views which most whites were denied' (p. 41).

Yet, as Moss and others emphasise, these initiatives unfolded within a fraught political terrain marked by ideological conflict between NUSAS's non-racialism and SASO's BC, a dynamic that shaped all subsequent collaborations.

In mid-1971, UCM co-ordinated a workshop facilitated by Anne Hope, which ran at Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre, an event that participants frame as a transformative moment where Freire's theories were translated into a concrete, participatory pedagogy (Horn, Interview, 30 May 2019). The literature presents a narrative of direct lineage from this event in that activists trained at Wilgespruit, inspired by Freire, immediately sought to put their new knowledge into practice. The Western Province Literacy Project (WPLP), co-founded by Wilgespruit trainees Judy Favish and Pat Horn in 1974, is described by scholar Seftel (1984) as an initiative explicitly designed to address adult illiteracy through a Freirean lens, creating spaces for critical dialogue where individuals could develop the agency to challenge oppressive structures. Gush and Walters (1995) point out that it was founded simultaneously with the Institute of Industrial Education in Durban, and the Industrial Aid Society in Johannesburg, showing the growing overlap between NUSAS and worker organisation and education.

Thus, the student movement of the early 1970s functioned simultaneously as an intellectual crucible and a political battleground. The interplay of Freirean pedagogy, BC ideology, and NUSAS's contested identity produced a number of small-scale, experimental literacy projects. To explore this foundational moment, this study focuses on two key examples initiated by those trained at Wilgespruit in the early 1970s: the Reiger Park Literacy Classes and the subsequent Western Cape Literacy Project. I chose to explore these projects because they represent some of the most direct and immediate applications of the new Freirean pedagogy as it emerged from the student movement nexus, illustrating how literacy became both a pedagogical experiment and a political strategy in the struggle against apartheid. They are good examples of the student-led initiatives of the period, and the available literature and participant testimony make strong claims about their Freirean orientation.

4.3.2 The Worker Movement: The Student-Worker Nexus in Action

The literature on worker education in the 1970s and 1980s presents a narrative of a movement gaining traction, largely catalysed by the 1973 Durban strikes. This period, often described as the 'Durban Moment', created a fertile intellectual and political environment in

which student activists, some of them influenced by BC, such as Steve Biko, were in direct dialogue with radical thinkers focused on the labour movement, notably Rick Turner (Macqueen, 2014). Scholars argue that dialogue produced the unique conditions for the emergence of a more sophisticated political consciousness and the new, independent trade unions (Vally, 1994; Vally et al., 2013). They also sparked a growing commitment of the student movements, such as SASO and NUSAS to engage directly with Black workers. Out of this emerged a number of student-worker initiatives, most of which had a strong worker education component.

Worker education in this period was not understood as a neutral skill transfer, but as part of a broader struggle against exploitation. Cooper et al. (2002) further elaborate on this, defining worker education under apartheid as a 'contested terrain' that encompassed the fight for access to knowledge, the affirmation of experiential learning, and the building of organisations to advance working-class rights. The literature from activists like Seftel (1984) and Moss (2014) highlights the prefigurative role of organisations that emerged from this nexus, such as the Western Province Workers' Advice Bureau (WPWAB), the General Factory Workers' Benefit Fund (GFWBF), and the Industrial Aid Society (IAS), in laying the groundwork for the major union federations of the 1980s.

To explore the emerging worker education movement, and its intersection with the student movements, I have chosen to focus on the IAS, established in Johannesburg in late 1973, and a key product of this nexus. The work of Moss (2014) and scholar-activist Salim Vally (1994) recounts the IAS as an initiative emerging directly from the NUSAS Wages Commission at Wits University. This perspective is reinforced by Cooper et al. (2002), who identify the IAS as one of the 'first organisations of black workers to emerge after the 1973 strikes' and note its wide variety of educational initiatives, including 'literacy programmes, and education media such as newsletters, pamphlets, and workers' calendars' (p. 115). Importantly, the IAS explicitly claimed to adopt Freirean pedagogy. Cooper et al. (2002) note that facilitators trained at Wilgespruit brought Freire's conscientisation model into IAS's literacy programmes, embedding dialogical methods into worker education. This, as mentioned earlier, is corroborated by Moss (2014), who highlights the role of Wits student activists, such as Barbara Hogan and Susan Brown, in applying their Freirean training to the specific context of worker education. More recent scholarship also confirms that Freire's ideas were

consciously taken up in worker education initiatives, including IAS, as part of a broader effort to link literacy with political empowerment (Aitchison & McKay, 2021).

The literature further emphasises that these organisations were sites of intense ideological debate. Cooper et al. (2002) describe ‘deep differences and sometimes-bitter debates’ over whether education should primarily serve a class struggle for socialism or a national struggle against apartheid. This tension manifested in conflicts between bodies such as the Institute for Industrial Education (IIE) and the Trade Union Action Coordinating Committee (TUACC), reflecting broader disputes over control of educational content. Baskin (1991) highlights that these debates had direct consequences for pedagogy, determining whether programmes focused on broad political conscientisation or functional skills training demanded by unions.

4.3.3 Community Arenas: NGOs and Faith-Based Organisations

The literature on the community arena suggests that these programmes addressed immediate local needs where formal education was either unavailable or deliberately shaped to reinforce racial oppression (Christie, 1985/2006; Chisholm, 2004). Critics argued that many such initiatives risked perpetuating colonial mindsets and insufficiently challenging capitalism, thereby limiting their transformative impact (Christie, 1985/2006).

French (1982) categorised literacy work within this sector into three types: non-aligned literacy organisations, industry-serving training agencies, and non-profit progressive literacy groups committed to liberation politics. On the ground, NGOs, church collectives, worker bodies, and advice offices offered literacy classes, community study circles, leadership training, and rights-focused education (Aitchison, 2003; Chisholm, 2004). These efforts frequently acted as bridges between local needs and broader anti-apartheid movements, organising workshops, discussion platforms, and paralegal services that supported collective mobilisation (Luckett et al., 2017; von Kotze et al., 2016).

Religious organisations also played an important role in this arena. Churches delivered literacy, vocational, and civic education aimed at improving participants’ socio-economic status and enabling more meaningful engagement in political dialogue (Chisholm, 2004; Nkomo, 1990). However, some church-led initiatives emphasised conformity and obedience, which could inadvertently uphold conservative ideologies and undermine critical, liberation-oriented education (Nkomo, 1990; Loubser, 1987). This dual legacy of empowerment and

containment reflects the complex socio-political positioning of faith-based education (Soudien, 2007; Chisholm, 2004).

The case studies selected for this thesis were chosen because they operated within the framework of progressive organisations that viewed education as a political tool rather than a depoliticised service model (French, 1982; Aitchison, 2003). This progressive methodology aligns with the more participatory approach to development, which stresses 'the empowerment of communities to act in their own interest, to be recognised as legitimate "knowers", to extend their understanding of power relations and determine their ideas of development' (Nelson & Wright, 1995; TCOE, 1996; Williams et al., 2003 as cited in Kerfoot, 1999, *Locating participatory development*, para. 3). These projects combined educational facilitation with community mobilisation, transforming literacy classrooms and church halls into hubs of anti-apartheid resistance (Walters, 1989; Nkomo, 1990). TCOE/Masifundise and Umtapo exemplified NGOs and faith-based organisations that challenged apartheid's knowledge hierarchies, nurtured local leadership, and linked learning to activism such as union drives (von Kotze et al., 2016). Learn and Teach (parent organisation) integrated literacy with political education through *Learn and Teach* magazine.

4.4 Key Debates and Tensions within the Counter-Hegemonic Field

The literature makes it clear that the counter-hegemonic response to apartheid was not a single, unified front, but a complex arena, shaped by fierce ideological and strategic debates over the very nature of the struggle and the vision for a liberated South Africa. These were not abstract academic arguments; they were high-stakes struggles that defined alliances, shaped strategies, and had profound implications for the educational projects on the ground.

The following sections will review the literature on the three most significant of these debates: the foundational conflict over identity between non-racialism, Africanism, and BC, the strategic battle within the labour movement between 'workerism' and 'populism', and the overarching tactical question of armed struggle versus non-violent mass action.

4.4.1 The Foundational Divides: Identity, Class, and the Nature of the Revolution

The most fundamental ideological divisions within the counter-hegemonic field concerned two deeply intertwined questions, namely, the politics of identity (and in particular racial identity) and the role of class struggle in the vision for a liberated South Africa. First was the question of identity and representation. At the forefront was the African National Congress (ANC), whose Charterist tradition championed a non-racial approach. The ANC sought to build a broad-based, multi-class coalition of all democratic forces, emphasising a vision of an inclusive society where all citizens would enjoy equal rights, as articulated in the Freedom Charter (Lodge, 1999). In contrast, the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), which broke away from the ANC, emerged with a more nationalist, Africanist perspective, prioritising the political and economic interests of the indigenous African majority over a broader multiracial coalition (Molema, 1998).

Black Consciousness, on the other hand, introduced a third, critical discourse on psychological liberation. Leaders like Steve Biko argued that true liberation could only be achieved when Black people (a term that specifically consciously included Coloured and Indian people) rejected the internalised oppression imposed by apartheid and reclaimed their self-identity and agency (Biko, 1978; Macqueen, 2018). This strategic unification of all oppressed so-called ‘non-White’ groups was itself a fundamental counter-hegemonic move; it aimed to unite subaltern groups that would otherwise see themselves as having different interests and who were specifically divided by the state through its Bantustan and racial classification policies. The BC movement was therefore explicitly positioned against the Bantustan policy, recognising it as a state-driven attempt to fragment the subaltern along tribal and cultural lines. This focus on mental emancipation was a direct challenge to what they saw as the paternalism of White liberals within the non-racial (or multi-racial) movement. From a Freirean perspective, this rejection was essential, since, as Freire argued, the oppressor can never liberate the oppressed, and liberation must be achieved through the autonomous praxis of the oppressed themselves. However, this was not a monolithic or insular ideology; as shown by Macqueen (2014), BC leaders were engaged in a vibrant ‘dialogue’ with other radical traditions, including the White left and the emerging labour movement during the Durban Moment of the early 1970s.

However, this debate over identity was inseparable from a second, profound conflict over class and capitalism. The ANC's non-racial, multi-class alliance was strategically underpinned by a 'two-stage theory' of revolution. The first stage would be to achieve national liberation and a democratic state. The second, later stage would be the struggle for socialism. According to Magaziner (2010), the BC movement mounted a powerful critique of this position. While their focus on the 'humanness of everyone' was drawn from a Freirean ontology, it was tied to a deep-seated anti-capitalist analysis profoundly influenced by the political economy critique of Frantz Fanon. The BC movement and other radical groups were deeply suspicious of the Freedom Charter's clauses that seemed to condone private property. They viewed the Charterist alliance with liberal and middle-class elements, and its 'two-stage theory', as a potential 'cop-out'. They feared a future where racial apartheid would be dismantled, only to be replaced by a neo-colonial, non-racial capitalism where a small Black elite would simply join the White bourgeoisie in exploiting the Black masses (Magaziner, 2010). For the BC movement, the struggle against racial oppression and the struggle against capitalist exploitation were one and the same. This dynamic interplay of the ideologies of non-racialism, Africanism, BC, and the ever-present class question created a complex and often tense political landscape.

4.4.2 The Strategic Impasse: 'Workerism' versus 'Populism' in the Labour Movement

As the independent trade union movement began to gain power following the 1973 Durban strikes, a second critical and often bitter debate emerged that would define the strategic direction of the struggle. This was the conflict between 'workerism' and 'populism'. Eddie Webster (1985), a leading labour sociologist, argues that this was not simply a debate over skills versus politics; it was a fundamental struggle over whether the workers were engaged primarily in a class struggle or a national struggle, a tension born from the unions' unique position at the intersection of shop-floor battles and the broader liberation movement.

Literature on workerism (the class struggle position) from scholars such as Baskin (1991), Cooper et al. (2002), Webster (1985), and Legassick (2007) details the workerist position as being deeply influenced by a more orthodox Marxist analysis. Its proponents argued that the urban, industrial working class was the proletariat, the primary and leading agent of a (ultimately international) socialist revolution. The strategic priority, therefore, was to build strong, independent, and democratically controlled trade unions focused on shop-floor

struggles against capitalism. Workerists were deeply suspicious of alliances with multi-class ‘populist’ formations like the United Democratic Front (UDF), fearing that the specific class struggle would be subordinated to a nationalist, middle-class agenda.

On the other hand, populism (the National Struggle position) refers to the Charterist-aligned view that the primary struggle was a ‘national democratic’ one against the apartheid state. Proponents of the National Democratic alignment argued that the unions should be a powerful and integral component of a broader, popular front led by the national liberation movement. They saw the workerist focus on factory issues as ‘economism’, a narrow approach that failed to address the totalising nature of national oppression and risked isolating the most organised sector of the oppressed from broader community struggles (Webster, 1998; Macqueen, 2018).

This debate was central to the difficult unity talks that led to the formation of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) in 1985. The eventual decision by COSATU to formally ally with the UDF and adopt the Freedom Charter was a significant victory for the National Struggle position, though workerist ‘class struggle’ tendencies remained a powerful force within the federation (Baskin, 1991).

The literacy programmes within the worker movement were a key site where these tensions played out, potentially shaping the curriculum and pedagogy of a project like the IAS. The conflict over the purpose of education was acute, and that was whether education was aimed at open-ended liberation or focused organisational training. This educational schism is exemplified by the foundational debate between Rick Turner and union organisers like Johnny Copelyn over the role of the Institute for Industrial Education (IIE). Turner advocated for broad, transformative education to foster critical thought, rejecting the subordination of learning to immediate organisational demands (Keniston, 2013). Copelyn, however, insisted on intensive, focused training of shop stewards as a necessity for union survival, viewing Turner’s vision as a dangerous drift from urgent worker leadership requirements (Copelyn, 2016). This debate then spilled over into other worker education structures. The question was whether the goal aimed to create a disciplined shop steward focused on the class struggle on the factory floor (a workerist aim), or to create a politically conscious community leader who could link workplace grievances to the national struggle against apartheid (a National Democratic alignment aim). Activist-scholars like Moss (2014), himself heavily involved in the IAS, provide crucial insight into the impact of this debate, describing the organisations of

the time as operating on the political and economic fringes, subject to constant internal battles over purpose and alliances. The literature shows that this was a bitter struggle for the strategic soul of worker education.

4.4.3 The Tactical Question: Armed Struggle versus Non-Violent Mass Action

Finally, the entire landscape of internal resistance was defined by the tactical question of the role of violence. This was not merely a choice between methods, but reflected deeper philosophical and strategic differences. After the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960, and their subsequent banning, the ANC and PAC both abandoned their commitment to principled non-violence and established armed wings, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) and Poqo, respectively (Molema, 1998). The literature produced by the liberation movements themselves, such as the writings of Nelson Mandela (1990) in *The Struggle is My Life*, frames this turn to armed struggle as a reluctant but necessary last resort, a response to the state's inflexibility and escalating brutality. The armed struggle, while largely conducted from exile, thus provided a powerful symbolic and political backdrop for all internal activity.

However, the organisations operating legally inside South Africa were largely engaged in non-violent resistance. This internal front included mass mobilisation, consumer boycotts, strikes, and civil disobedience, strategies that were central to the mass democratic movement and would be famously championed by the UDF in the 1980s (Seekings, 2000; Lodge, 1999). The strategic thinking behind this approach is articulated in the work of key theorists and activists of the period. Rick Turner (1972), in *The Eye of the Needle*, for instance, while not a pacifist, argued for the power of building a counter-hegemonic, democratic culture from below as the primary engine for change. This vision resonated deeply with the non-violent mass democratic movement.

The work of Raymond Suttner (2008), reflecting on the period, emphasises the dynamic interplay and 'symbiotic relationship' between the internal mass movement and the armed struggle being waged from the outside. This created a complex dynamic. While armed resistance garnered international attention and demonstrated the resolve of the liberation movements, it also risked alienating potential allies and provided the regime with justification for its repressive measures. Conversely, non-violent resistance, while often seen as holding

the moral high ground, faced immense challenges in sustaining mass support in the face of brutal state repression.

The strategic tension between the war of position and the war of manoeuvre defined the tactical landscape. The turn to armed struggle (war of manoeuvre) by the exiled ANC/PAC provided a powerful symbolic backdrop for all internal activity, but it risked alienation. Conversely, the internal non-violent resistance was fundamentally a Gramscian war of position, focusing on building a counter-hegemonic, democratic civil society from below, a strategy evidenced by Advice Centres, civic education initiatives, and trade-union formation. Scholars such as Pillay (2013) and Cawthra (2015) explicitly apply Gramsci's framework to South Africa, arguing that consent was challenged through ideological work within civil society. Pillay (2013) describes how community organisations and church groups laid intellectual and moral groundwork against the apartheid state, while Cawthra (2015) highlights anti-conscription campaigns as examples of subaltern hegemony-breaking.

The central factor shaping this dynamic was the state's accelerating reliance on domination and force. The apartheid system serves as a clear example of Lukes' second and third dimensions of power, particularly through its systematic exclusion of Black political participation and its manipulation of perceptions around rights. Legislation such as the Pass Laws, the Group Areas Act, and the Bantu Education Act enforced racial segregation in housing, education, and mobility, effectively controlling opportunities for collective resistance (Chisholm, 1989; Kallaway, 1984). Instruments like the Coloured Persons Representative Council and the Bantustan policy were crafted to create an illusion of representation, undermining Black grievances while upholding White supremacy (Kallaway, 2002). These measures illustrate how the state combined coercion with ideological manipulation to maintain its grip on power.

As resistance grew stronger, the state increasingly resorted to overt domination and force. This included banning individuals and organisations, mass detentions without trial, and employing interrogation and torture to stifle dissent. Deaths in detention and targeted killings became part of the state's machinery of violence, fostering a climate of fear and silencing opposition (African National Congress, 1996). These practices highlight how coercion escalated alongside consent, showcasing Lukes' third dimension of power in its most brutal form. To a large extent, this was because of the apartheid state's analysis of a growing 'total

onslaught' against the country. In 1977, then Minister of Defence (later Prime Minister) P.W. Botha summarised this analysis as follows:

> The resolution of the conflict in the times in which we now live demands inter-dependent and coordinated action in all fields: military, psychological, economic, political, sociological, technological, diplomatic, ideological, cultural, etcetera. We are today involved in a war whether we like it or not. It is therefore essential that a total national strategy (is) formulated at the highest level. (quoted in African National Congress, 1996)

This 'total strategy' included the ongoing banning of people and organisations, mass detentions without trial, institutionalised torture, and the assassination of key activists. This systematic use of first dimension power (Lukes) was designed to shatter the psychological foundation of resistance, directly undermining the 'power within' of the oppressed (Lukes) and enforcing political passivity.

The dual strategy of coercion and consent not only structured the social order of apartheid but also significantly influenced the environment in which literacy projects operated. Understanding these mechanisms is necessary to analyse how educational initiatives positioned themselves within this system—whether they served as tools of compliance or as sites of resistance. This important issue will be explored further in Chapter Seven. The literacy projects occupied a crucial space within this dynamic. While non-violent, they were not 'peaceful' in the eyes of the state. The state did not distinguish between the 'educational' work of a literacy group and the 'terrorist' aims of the armed struggle, a point often made by figures like Steve Biko (1978), who argued that any act of Black self-assertion was seen as a threat by the state. Importantly, the state's response was often one of targeted restriction rather than outright prohibition. While eighteen key BC organisations and their activities were ultimately banned (in October 1977), most of the education and literacy projects were not. Instead, they were subjected to systemic pressures designed to undermine their operational effectiveness, such as banning key individuals, confiscating documents, and restricting funding. This use of restriction and harassment was a form of second dimension power (Lukes), a strategic attempt to limit the projects' capacity to set a counter-agenda without resorting to the drastic first dimension power of full prohibition. Therefore, these projects operated in a high-risk grey area, engaging in a war of position that was possibly

understood by both themselves and the state as being fundamentally linked to the broader revolutionary project.

4.5 The Role of the Churches: A Crucible of Liberation Theology

According to scholars on theology and politics in South Africa, the Christian churches in South Africa were a complex and vital arena of struggle under apartheid. While some institutions remained conservative or complicit with the state, the emergence of Black and liberation theology and the prophetic stance of bodies like the South African Council of Churches (SACC) created a powerful moral and spiritual front against apartheid (Villa-Vicencio, 1988; De Gruchy, 1995a). Church communities often provided both the physical 'safe spaces' and the ethical framework for counter-hegemonic work, enabling activists to link faith with political resistance. Hadfield (2010) highlights that church-based organisations became important sites for fostering conscientisation and social justice, particularly where BC ideology intersected with Freirean pedagogy.

Within this broader landscape, the TCOE and its flagship project, Masifundise (which, as I have already discussed with reference to the BC movement, I have chosen as a case study), stand out as significant examples. Although relatively little scholarly literature exists on the TCOE itself, practitioner accounts, and organisational documents frame it as an explicitly BC-aligned entity, with figures such as Mamphela Ramphele involved in its early development. Its formal affiliation with FedSem, a hub of liberation theology, is presented as both a source of ideological grounding and a pragmatic 'protective measure' against state repression. Scholars such as Denis (2009), Maluleke (1997), and West (2016) have argued that FedSem was central to the articulation of liberation theology in South Africa and its connection to TCOE. In my view, this connection situates Masifundise firmly within this intellectual and political tradition.

Masifundise is presented in practitioner literature as a community-based NGO dedicated to promoting empowerment and self-reliance through literacy. This vision aligns closely with both BC principles and Freirean pedagogy, which emphasise dialogical learning and the linking of education to transformative action (Kerfoot, 2009; Aitchison, 2003). The project's ideological lineage from Biko and its institutional ties to FedSem illustrate how church-based initiatives fused faith and political action, creating spaces where literacy was not merely

technical training but a vehicle for conscientisation. Scholars caution, however, that such narratives must be read critically. As Villa-Vicencio (1988) notes, church-based organisations often constructed coherent ideological fronts that reflected their self-perception as agents of liberation. While this self-representation is a vital part of the historical record, it also highlights the need to situate projects like Masifundise within the contested terrain of church politics, where liberation theology clashed with more conservative currents and where state repression sought to curtail radical initiatives.

Masifundise thus provides a rich case of a faith-based literacy project that explicitly claimed a Freirean orientation. As discussed earlier, its significance lies not only in its pedagogical methods, but also in its positioning at the intersection of BC, liberation theology, and church-based resistance. In this way, it exemplifies how Christian institutions became conduits for Freire's philosophy and for grassroots empowerment in the struggle against apartheid.

4.6 Identifying the Research Gap

As the discussion on the literature related to the case study projects shows, it is uneven in terms of how much literature actually exists, and the genre of literature involved. In addition, while the practitioner and scholarly literature are invaluable for understanding the stated aims and strategic positioning of these projects, it also reveals a crucial and consistent gap. The accounts are often broad, ideological, and focused on the organisers, their publications, and their relationship to the high-level politics of the liberation movements. The work of scholars suggests that, while the ideological intent and strategic positioning are well-documented, there remains a distinct lack of detailed, on-the-ground investigation into the specific day-to-day pedagogical praxis within these projects. The literature tells us that the case study projects used 'Freirean' methods, but rarely explains how they actually used Freire in the classroom. It tells us of their successes and failures in relation to the broader political struggle, but it provides little insight into the challenges of teaching, the experiences of the learners, and how the pedagogy was adapted, compromised, or transformed in the face of reality. It is precisely this gap, between the well-documented ideological mission and the under-documented lived reality of its practice, that this study aims to investigate.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the literature on the counter-hegemonic movements of apartheid South Africa, mapping the ideological foundations, key actors, and internal debates that shaped the struggle. The review of the literature on the five case studies has confirmed their significance within this ecosystem. However, it has also highlighted a critical research gap. The existing literature, while rich in ideological intent, is thin on detail regarding the day-to-day praxis of these projects, and tends to be poorly supported and/or self-referential. Therefore, this study is justified by the need to move beyond the broad, self-referencing narratives to conduct a deep, in-depth investigation into the actual pedagogical, political, and social realities of these five initiatives. The following chapters turn to presenting and analysing the data gathered to answer the three research questions:

RQ 1: What was the nature of the Freirean literacy projects in the 1970s and 1980s?
RQ 2: How did these projects understand and enact the concept of praxis?
RQ 3: What was the nature of the ‘action’ that emerged from these projects, and to what extent did it constitute a war of position or a war of manoeuvre?

In the next chapter, I present the research design and methodology, outlining the framework and approaches I used to conduct this study. I detail data generation methods and analytical techniques employed to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. Additionally, I discuss the rationale behind the chosen methodologies and how they align with the objectives of the research, providing a clear roadmap for the subsequent findings and discussions.

Chapter 5: Research Design and Methodology

5.1 Introduction

In Chapters Three and Four, I explored the historical context that gave rise to the anti-apartheid movements from which the 'Freirean' case study projects emerged, using Gramsci and Lukes as a frame. I also discussed literacy, highlighting that it was never a neutral concept, but one that serves as either hegemonic or counter-hegemonic. I considered the ideological debates within the anti-apartheid movement and introduced the five case study projects. After laying this foundation, I now delve into the research design created to answer the three research questions.

In Chapter One, I stated that my encounter with Freire's 'Education for Liberation' as a student at Khanya College, coupled with my subsequent scholarly awareness of the limitations of 'Freirean-inspired' literacy projects, influenced my research approach. In this chapter, I outline the research methodology that underpins this study. The chapter aims to provide a clear understanding of the methodological choices I made and their implications for the study's outcomes.

I begin by situating the research within the critical paradigm and explaining the rationale for adopting a qualitative case study approach. Next, I describe the two-phased data generation strategy, highlighting the responsive and reflexive process of participant selection that was adapted to the real-world challenges encountered during the research. This is followed by a discussion of the strategies I employed for data analysis, along with the measures I implemented to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, and a discussion on the study's limitations. Through this structured approach, I aimed to honour the complexities of the historical context while remaining true to the critical framework that guided this study. Finally, I address the ethical considerations that guided each stage of the research process, emphasising the importance of ethical integrity and considerations in conducting research within sensitive historical contexts.

5.2 Research Paradigm: Critical

A research paradigm is the philosophical model or ‘frame of reference’ a researcher uses to organise their observations and reasoning (Babbie, 2005). It represents a fundamental worldview, grounded in shared beliefs, values, and techniques (Johnson, 2015), that guides the researcher’s entire methodological process. This framework is crucial because it shapes not only the research questions posed, but also the methods employed for data generation and analysis, influencing how findings are interpreted and understood. A paradigm is defined by its position on two key philosophical concepts, which are ontology and epistemology. Ontology, or the nature of reality, addresses the question of ‘what is reality?’. It determines whether reality is viewed as objective and singular, as in positivism, or as socially constructed and multiple, as in interpretivism and the critical paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

In positivism, reality is often seen as an external entity that can be measured and quantified, leading researchers to seek objective truths through empirical observation and statistical analysis (Creswell, 2014). This approach assumes that there is a single, observable reality that can be understood through rigorous scientific methods. In contrast, interpretivism posits that reality is subjective and constructed through social interactions and cultural contexts. This perspective emphasises the importance of understanding the meanings and interpretations that individuals assign to their experiences, recognising that multiple realities coexist based on different social and cultural backgrounds (Mertens, 2014). The critical paradigm further expands on the interpretivist understanding by not only acknowledging the socially constructed nature of reality, but also by emphasising the role of power dynamics and social injustices in shaping knowledge. It seeks to uncover and challenge the underlying structures that perpetuate inequality, advocating for research that aims to empower marginalised voices and promote social change (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By qualifying these concepts, we can see that the choice of a research paradigm significantly influences the research process. Researchers must be aware of their own ontological and epistemological assumptions, as these will shape their approach to inquiry, the types of questions they ask, and the interpretations they make. Understanding these foundational beliefs is essential for conducting rigorous and meaningful research that aligns with the intended goals and ethical considerations of the study.

On the other hand, epistemology, or the nature of knowledge, addresses the question of ‘how do we know what we know?’. It explores the relationship between the researcher and the reality being studied, guiding the procedures necessary to generate valid knowledge (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Epistemology shapes how researchers conceptualise knowledge, the methods they employ to acquire it, and the criteria they use to evaluate its validity and reliability.

In the context of a study concerned with fundamental social change, such as the analysis of liberatory education, the choice of epistemological stance is not arbitrary; it must align with the philosophical and political nature of the subject matter. For instance, a positivist epistemology, which emphasises objectivity and quantifiable data, may not adequately capture the complexities of human experiences and social interactions that are central to liberatory education. This approach could overlook the subjective meanings and interpretations that individuals assign to their educational experiences, which are essential for understanding the transformative potential of such initiatives (Creswell, 2014). Conversely, an interpretivist or critical epistemology recognises that knowledge is socially constructed and context-dependent. This perspective values the voices and experiences of participants, emphasising the importance of understanding their lived realities and the socio-political contexts in which they operate (Mertens, 2014). By adopting an epistemological stance that aligns with the goals of liberatory education, researchers can better engage with the complexities of power, identity, and resistance that shape educational practices and outcomes. Furthermore, a critical epistemology encourages researchers to reflect on their positionality and the power dynamics inherent in the research process. It calls for a collaborative approach that seeks to allow participants to co-create knowledge rather than being passive subjects of study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This alignment between epistemology and the subject matter is essential for producing knowledge that is not only valid, but also relevant and transformative, ultimately contributing to the broader goals of social justice and equity in education.

The choice of epistemological framework is a foundational aspect of research design, particularly in studies focused on social change. It shapes the researcher’s approach to knowledge generation and influences the potential impact of the research on the communities and issues being studied. By carefully considering the epistemological implications of their work, researchers can ensure that their studies contribute meaningfully to the discourse on liberatory education and its role in fostering social transformation.

5.2.1 The Ontological and Epistemological Base of the Critical Paradigm

This study is firmly framed within the critical paradigm. At its core, the critical frame is ‘directed at interrogating values and assumptions, exposing hegemony and injustice, challenging conventional social structures, and engaging in social action’ (Crotty, 1998, p. 157). This emphasis on social action and justice is essential, as it positions the researcher not merely as an observer, but as an active participant in the quest for social change. The critical paradigm seeks to understand and transform the underlying social structures that perpetuate inequality and oppression. It therefore rejects the positivist notion of a single, objective reality. Instead, it assumes that there are ‘socially constructed multiple and subjective realities’ (Thomas, 2021, p. 300). This perspective acknowledges that individuals experience and interpret the world differently based on their social contexts, backgrounds, and identities. The recognition of multiple realities allows for a more nuanced understanding of social phenomena, particularly those related to power and oppression. Importantly, the critical ontology recognises that these realities are hierarchical and structured by power (Asghar, 2013; Vine, 2009). This means that the experiences and perspectives of marginalised groups are often suppressed or invalidated by dominant narratives. The reality of the oppressed, which is shaped by factors such as race, class, and gender, is fundamentally different from the reality of the oppressor. As such, the critical paradigm necessitates an approach that can expose these power dynamics and highlight the experiences of those who have been historically marginalised.

Therefore, the critical paradigm insists that knowledge generation cannot be neutral. The researcher must consciously acknowledge their relationship to the researched context, treating research as a political act aimed at social change (Bohman, 2005). However, reflexivity is crucial, as it encourages researchers to critically examine their own biases, assumptions, and positions of privilege, which can influence the research process and outcomes. By recognising their role within the power dynamics of the research context, researchers can strive to produce knowledge that is more equitable and representative.

Bohman (2005) argues that a critical theory must fulfil three actions to:

i) Explain what is wrong with the current social reality through an analysis of the structures and systems that contribute to injustice and inequality, providing a clear understanding of the problems at hand.

ii) Identify the action required, to change it, not only by diagnosing the issues, but also by proposing concrete steps or strategies for social transformation. This step emphasises the importance of actionable knowledge that can empower individuals and communities to effect change.
iii) Provide clear norms for criticism and transformation by establishing criteria for evaluating social practices and structures, guiding efforts toward a more just and equitable society.

The generation of knowledge is therefore inextricably linked to the goal of emancipation. This connection underscores the critical paradigm's commitment to not only understanding the world, but also actively working to change it. By prioritising social justice and empowerment, research conducted within the critical paradigm aims to contribute to the broader struggle against oppression and inequality, ultimately fostering a more just and equitable society.

5.2.2 The Necessity of the Critical Lens for this Study

The critical paradigm is not merely a choice, but a necessity, when investigating Freirean pedagogy, which is itself a cornerstone of critical theory and social action (Lather, 1986). As I discussed in Chapter Two, Freirean pedagogy emphasises the importance of dialogue, critical consciousness, and the role of education in fostering social change. This approach inherently challenges traditional power dynamics and seeks to empower marginalised voices, making it essential to adopt a critical lens that interrogates the underlying structures of oppression. Any research framework that does not centre on an analysis of power, hegemony, and emancipation would fail to understand the fundamental political nature of literacy projects. Literacy, in the context of Freirean pedagogy, is not just about reading and writing; it is about developing critical awareness and the ability to challenge oppressive systems (Freire, 1970). Therefore, a critical paradigm was essential for examining how these projects operate within and against existing power structures, as it allows researchers to uncover the ways in which literacy can serve as a tool for liberation.

The critical paradigm, therefore, provided the essential lens to analyse not just what happened in these projects, but why it mattered in the fight against an oppressive state. This rationale aligns directly with Freire's goal of humanisation, which emphasises the need for individuals to reclaim their agency and engage in the struggle for their own liberation (Freire, 1994).

Additionally, it resonates with Gramsci's analysis of counter-hegemonic struggle, which highlights the importance of challenging dominant ideologies and creating alternative narratives (Cohen et al., 2018). By employing a critical lens, I could better understand the complexities of these struggles and the significance of educational initiatives in fostering social change.

5.3 Research Approach: Qualitative

Research methods are broadly categorised into three main approaches: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods (Cohen et al., 2018). Each of these approaches offers distinct advantages and limitations, which are necessary to consider when selecting an appropriate methodology.

A **quantitative approach** is frequently rooted in the positivist paradigm and aims to establish objective measurement and statistical analysis of social phenomena. This approach is concerned with quantifiable data, generalisability, and testing formal hypotheses (Creswell & Poth, 2016). While quantitative methods are effective for measuring scale, impact, and correlation, they are ill-suited for exploring the nuanced 'why' and 'how' of human experience (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This limitation is particularly relevant in contexts where understanding the complexities of human behaviour and social interaction is essential.

In contrast, a **qualitative approach** is grounded in interpretive and critical paradigms seeking to understand the social world through detailed study of human experience, interpretation, and meaning-making (Cohen et al., 2018). Researchers work in natural settings, interpreting phenomena based on the meanings people assign to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). It focuses on generating rich, deep, and contextual knowledge from non-numerical data such as interviews, documents, and observations. Qualitative research is essential for developing theory and exploring complex phenomena that are culturally or politically embedded (Cohen et al., 2018). This method allows researchers to capture the intricacies of human experience and the meanings individuals ascribe to their lives, making it particularly valuable in studies of social justice and education (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

The **mixed-methods approach** involves the combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods to gain a broader and deeper understanding of the research problem. By leveraging the strengths of both approaches, researchers can triangulate data and provide a more

comprehensive analysis of research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2016). However, the choice of a mixed-methods approach requires careful consideration of how to integrate the two methodologies effectively (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Given the philosophical stance of this study, a qualitative research approach was deemed necessary. A quantitative approach, with its focus on numerical measurement, would be inadequate for capturing the nuances of ideological struggle or the transformative power of dialogical education (Freire, 1994). Furthermore, it would not accurately reflect the subjective nature of the historical memories being examined in this study. Its core concepts of praxis, conscientisation, hegemony, and the strategic dynamics of a war of position are not quantifiable phenomena. These concepts are deeply embedded in ideological struggles, lived experiences, motivations, and the evolving political consciousness of the participants (Freire, 1970; Gramsci, 1971). Therefore, I employed qualitative methods to generate the rich, thick descriptions required to understand the 'how' and 'why' of this form of resistance (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The qualitative approach aligns with the critical paradigm's goal of exploring hierarchical structures by prioritising depth over breadth and acknowledging the multiple and subjective realities (Morrow, 2007), such as those created by the apartheid system.

While recognising the inherent subjectivity in qualitative research, I managed this goal through reflexivity and triangulation, as detailed later in this chapter. Reflexivity involves a critical self-examination of the researcher's biases, assumptions, and influence on the research process, ensuring that the findings are as objective as possible despite the subjective nature of qualitative inquiry (Finlay, 2002). Triangulation, on the other hand, involves using multiple data sources or methods to cross-verify findings, thereby enhancing the credibility and validity of the research outcomes (Denzin, 2013).

A qualitative approach was not only appropriate, but essential for this study, as it allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the complex social dynamics at play in the context of Freirean pedagogy and the broader struggle against oppression. This approach provided valuable insights into the transformative potential of education to challenge systemic injustices by focusing on the lived experiences of participants (Cohen et al., 2018).

5.4 Research Style: A Collective Case Study

The adoption of the critical paradigm and a qualitative approach necessitates a research design capable of generating in-depth, contextual knowledge about a complex social phenomenon. Thus, a case study style was chosen – and in particular, a collective, exploratory, instrumental case study. This approach allowed for the intensive investigation of multiple distinct sites of practice, providing a nuanced understanding of a broader, external phenomenon.

A case study is defined as an intensive, in-depth investigation of a specific contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2018). The case study approach prioritises a detailed understanding of process, context, and meaning, making it a natural fit for the critical qualitative paradigm. The implications of this approach include the generation of thick descriptions and analytical power (Stake, 1995). This research strategy is particularly suited to the ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions that underpin this study, as it provides the necessary depth to unpack complex social processes such as praxis and hegemony.

As Rule and John (2011) argue, any case study has boundaries. This study is interested in the phenomenon of ‘Freirean’ literacy classes in the anti-apartheid struggle, and thus excludes other kinds of classes; it is bounded by the timeframe from 1970 to 1990; and it is geographically bounded in that it is interested only in South Africa.

5.4.1 Framing the Case Study: Scope, Intent, and Context

Case studies can be categorised by both their scope and their intent (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). In terms of scope, a single case study provides maximal depth, while a multiple or collective case study investigates several cases simultaneously. The collective approach enhances the robustness and transferability of findings through cross-case comparisons, identifying patterns that transcend individual sites (Yin, 2018). Choosing multiple cases can also allow for breadth rather than simply depth of focus and multiple cases are amenable to study within a common theoretical framework (Rule & John, 2011). The research design for this study is a multi-case study investigating five distinct Freirean literacy projects rather than just one. This design was deliberately chosen to allow for comparison across cases, thus strengthening the analytical transferability and validity of the findings regarding the broader ‘Freirean’ literacy

movement. However, there are potential limitations of a multiple case-study. For instance, a researcher might be preoccupied with similarities and neglect differences between cases, and the quest for generalities might mean that the specific context of each case might be glossed over (Rule & John, 2011). As I will discuss, I have been very mindful of these potential pitfalls.

In terms of intent, case studies can be classified as either intrinsic or instrumental (Stake, 1995). Instrumental case studies are selected to illuminate broader issues or phenomena rather than for their inherent interest, whereas intrinsic case studies focus on the case itself as a unique instance worthy of in-depth understanding. This study is an instrumental case study, since my interest and focus is on the broader phenomenon of 'Freirean' literacy classes in the anti-apartheid movement, rather than in a specific project.

Case studies have also been categorised as exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive (Yin, 2018):

> A descriptive case study presents a complete description of a phenomenon within its context. An exploratory case study often examines a phenomenon that has not been investigated before and can lay the basis for further studies. An explanatory case study attempts to explain what happens in a particular case or why it happens. This kind of study often tests existing theory or generates new theory. (Rule & John, 2011, p. 8).

An exploratory case study design is appropriate when a phenomenon is not yet well understood and requires preliminary investigation to generate insights and identify emerging patterns (Yin, 2018). Unlike descriptive case studies, which aim to provide a detailed account, exploratory studies probe underlying dynamics and relationships. They also differ from explanatory case studies, which seek to establish causal links and answer 'why' or 'how' questions within a defined theoretical framework (Yin, 2018). Given the limited scholarly attention on these projects, an exploratory case study was chosen as appropriate for this study, considering that my aim was to identify their nature. This study thus extends beyond simply being a descriptive case study.

Context remains central to any type of case study research, as cases cannot be divorced from their spatial and temporal settings (Rule & John, 2011). The South African 'Freirean' literacy projects exemplify this contextual embeddedness as a microcosm reflecting the broader

struggles for social justice and educational equity during apartheid, as discussed in Chapter Four.

5.4.2 Identifying the Cases

Rule and John (2011) emphasise the importance of identifying the criteria for choosing cases in a multiple-case design. The criteria must reflect the purpose of the study and must take into account the need for typical cases or diverse cases. The criteria for selecting the five cases were chosen to ensure a rich and representative sample for this exploration:

a) They had to be adult literacy projects.
b) They had to specifically claim to be Freirean, or have been identified as such by the broader literature.
c) They had to have operated at some point between 1970 and 1990.
d) The name of at least one living person involved had to be identifiable through available information.

In addition, across the set of case studies, I ensured the following criteria:

e) They collectively span a range of organisational types and/or movements within the anti-apartheid struggle (i.e. church-based, student movement-related, student/worker movement-related, NGO/service organisation-related, BC-related – but not overlapping with Hadfield's (2017) research).
f) They collectively represent a wide geographic range across South Africa.
g) They collectively span the targeted period (1970-1990), rather than clustered together within a limited time period.

Beyond meeting these formal criteria, a crucial dimension of the case selection was the recognition of the deep, synergistic links between these projects. As is clear from the literature, the movements within which they arose did not operate in a vacuum, but formed an interconnected ecosystem of resistance, often responding to the same crises and sharing similar ideological roots. This synergy validates the treatment of these projects as a 'collective' case. This interconnectedness demonstrates that these were not isolated initiatives. They were nodes in a larger counter-hegemonic field. Selecting them as a collective, therefore, allowed for an analysis not just of individual projects, but of the very nature and texture of the organised 'underground' itself.

5.5 Participant Selection: A Responsive and Reflexive Strategy

Rule and John (2011) argue that in case study research, sampling is purposeful rather than random, involving the deliberate selection of participants or cases that are most relevant to the research question and context. Purposive sampling plays a critical role in ensuring that the cases selected provide deep insight into the phenomenon under study. The selection of participants was a thoughtful and dynamic process, guided by the study's critical framework and shaped by the unique challenges of conducting historical research with an ageing population. This approach aimed to honour the experiences and voices of individuals whose contributions are vital to understanding this important history. To identify the 15 participants for this study, I employed a combination of purposive and snowball sampling:

5.5.1 Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling is the 'intentional selection of participants who can provide rich, relevant information for the study' (Palinkas et al., 2013, p. 534). This phase entailed intentionally seeking out key individuals whose involvement in the projects was documented in the archival record. I focused on those who were founders, project coordinators, or materials developers for the five case study projects. This approach ensured the selection of information-rich cases directly relevant to the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

5.5.2 Snowball Sampling

After identifying initial participants, I utilised snowball sampling, in which these individuals referred me to other former colleagues and collaborators. This combined strategy was essential for accessing a 'hidden population' of aging activists who were not easily identifiable through public means. The inclusion and exclusion criteria for the final sample were as follows:

- They had to have been involved in 'Freirean' adult literacy-related projects that were overtly anti-apartheid.
- They had to have been involved in helping to set up and manage the literacy projects, and/or develop literacy materials, and/or teach in them, or they had to have been learners in these projects.

- They should preferably have belonged to or have been involved in a worker organisation/trade union, student movement/organisation, or other civil society group (e.g. women's groups, youth groups, etc.)
- They could not be so frail or of such ill-health as to be unable to participate without some risk to their health.

The initial plan to strictly limit the interviews to the five chosen case study projects encountered a significant obstacle: the passage of time. Despite extensive efforts, tracing a sufficient number of individuals from the five original projects proved futile. In response to these difficulties, a crucial methodological pivot was made. Instead of limiting the interviews, I strategically broadened the scope to include activists and educators from other 'Freirean-inspired' literacy initiatives operating in South Africa during the same period. Although this adaptation was a compromise, it enhanced the research design. Inadvertently, it ensured a comprehensive exploration of the interconnectedness of various projects, demonstrating that they were part of a shared ideological movement against apartheid.

5.6 Data Generation Methods

Rule and John (2011) state that in case study research, data generation focuses on generating rich, detailed descriptions through multiple methods such as interviews, observations, and document analysis. Given this complexity, I employed two qualitative inquiry strategies for data generation (Creswell, 2014) to ensure the generation of rich, thick data that could answer my research questions, and that would enhance the reliability and credibility of the findings through triangulation (Bowen, 2009; Denzin, 2013). These strategies were implemented in a phased approach: archival research followed by semi-structured interviews.

5.6.1 Phase One: Documentary Analysis and Archival Research

Document analysis is a qualitative research method that involves analysing various types of documents, such as books, newspaper articles, academic journal articles, and institutional reports (Morgan, 2022, p. 64). Archival methods specifically focus on the study of historical documents that provide access to the organisations, individuals, and events of that earlier time (Ventresca & Mohr, 2017).

A critical issue in documentary analysis is recognising that documents are socially constructed texts, not neutral artefacts. They are produced by particular actors, for particular

purposes, and within specific institutional or political contexts. As Scott (1990) argues, documents must be interrogated for their authorship, audience, and intent, since these factors shape both their content and their silences. For example, official reports may reflect the priorities of the state or an organisation's leadership, while activist pamphlets may emphasise mobilisation and ideology over administrative detail. Understanding *why* a document was produced is therefore as important as analysing *what* it contains.

We should not use documentary sources as surrogates for other kinds of data. We cannot, for instance, learn through records alone how an organisation actually operates day-by-day. Equally, we cannot treat records, however 'official' as firm evidence of what they report. As Atkinson and Coffey (1997, p. 47) caution, documents must be approached as 'social facts', created to accomplish particular purposes. This recognition does not diminish their value; rather, it alerts us to the necessity of treating them seriously, but critically.

In this study, I therefore read through each document thoroughly and in relation to the semi-structured interviews. I used documents to inform the questions posed to participants and to compare the data obtained from the documents against the data obtained from the interviews. To enhance the reliability and credibility of the study, I used documentary analysis alongside semi-structured interviews. This approach is endorsed by Bowen (2009) and Denzin (2013). Documentary analysis was particularly useful where direct questioning of participants became difficult, such as when participants were hesitant to respond or share certain information, or experienced memory problems. In such cases, documents provided valuable context and insights that supplemented the interview data, enhancing the overall understanding of the research topic.

Archival research served as the foundational bedrock of the study, providing the necessary historical context and raw documentary evidence (such as meeting minutes, internal reports, and educational materials) to test the claims of Freirean praxis. For example, I searched for specific references to Freire and for signs of the terminology he used (e.g., conscientisation). The archives visited were:

- Historical Papers Research Archive (Wits University, Johannesburg)
- South African History Archive (SAHA) (housed at Wits University, Johannesburg)
- The Alan Paton Centre and Struggle Centre (University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg)

- The Gandhi-Luthuli Documentation Centre (University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban)
- The Western Cape Archives and Records Service (Cape Town)
- Trust for Christian Outreach and Education (TCOE) papers (housed in the Masifundise offices in Cape Town)

I was also fortunate to receive copies of relevant documents housed at UCT Special Collections (University of Cape Town) and the Steve Biko Centre Archive (Qonce) from my supervisor during her visits there. I also sourced documents directly from the participants themselves.

I approached the archival domain with a critical awareness that it has historically been dominated by the State Archives Service (SAS), which served to promote the interests of the apartheid state (Harris, 2002a; Halim, 2018). The South African archival system played a pivotal role in entrenching difference and reinforcing a particular hierarchy of knowledge, thereby perpetuating hegemony (The Archival Platform, 2015, cited in Halim, 2018). For example, I consulted files on documents/publications which had been classified as 'objectionable' by the state's censorship apparatus, indicating that the very language of the official archive was one of suppression. This contextual awareness compelled a critical reading of all sources from the official archives, recognising the archive as a contested site that often consolidates and propagates the 'conspiracy of silence' (Daly, 2017, p. 316). As discussed earlier, I approached documents, not as objective facts, but as evidence of what they were used to accomplish, articulating Atkinson and Coffey (1997).

This archival work itself revealed the operational reality of the archives related to this period of South Africa's history. In line with Harris's (2002a) analysis, the apartheid state's control was evident in confiscated and missing documents. Some collections were incomplete. For example, some files were found with documents with missing pages (for example, some pages of minutes in the IAS folder were missing), whilst other crucial files noted in finding aids were simply missing altogether. A case in point was a file belonging to the General Factory Workers Benefit Fund (GFWBF), an organisation whose archives I wanted to consult (lodged with SAHA) because of its relationship to the IAS and some of the ideological contestations occurring within the student/worker nexus at the time. The folder was empty. It was directly confirmed by participants that GFWBF files had been confiscated during police raids, serving as a tangible manifestation of the state's repressive strategy to destroy the historical record.

Access to some files, like those of the IAS (AH 1585), was restricted, requiring a cumbersome process to gain access that highlighted the historical gatekeeping surrounding information about the liberation struggle. This understanding informed a critical reading of the available documents, guided by the caution of Atkinson and Coffey (1997), that records are social facts to be interrogated, not transparent windows into reality. I discuss my experience of the archives I consulted in more detail in the following chapter, in which I present my data (Chapter Six).

5.6.2 Phase Two: Semi-Structured Interviews

Following the archival research, I conducted semi-structured interviews to triangulate data from the archives and elicit an in-depth understanding (Tan et al., 2019) from those actually involved in ‘Freirean’ literacy projects in the 1970s and 1980s.

Interviews are a foundational qualitative research method designed to generate in-depth data by allowing the researcher to enter the subjective world of the participant (Cohen et al., 2018). The method's utility lies in its capacity to access deeply embedded information, such as lived experiences, motivations, and interpretations, that cannot be captured through observation or documents alone (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Interviews can be categorised by their structure into three main types:

1. Structured Interviews: These utilise a fixed set of questions presented in a rigid sequence. This format is often employed for quantitative or survey-like qualitative data, where consistency across interviews is crucial.
2. Unstructured Interviews: This approach relies on a single prompt, allowing the conversation to flow entirely at the participant's pace. Unstructured interviews are particularly useful for exploratory or biographical data, as they enable participants to share their narratives without constraints.
3. Semi-Structured Interviews: This method follows a pre-devised guide or protocol focused on core topics while maintaining the flexibility to explore topical trajectories and emergent ideas as the conversation unfolds (Magaldi & Berler, 2020). The semi-structured format is particularly advantageous for investigating complex historical phenomena, as it allows for the discovery of new ideas and insights into how individuals perceive their world and explain significant events in their lives (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

The interview process in qualitative research is not neutral; its success hinges on best practices designed to ensure ethical rigour and data richness (Cohen et al., 2018). Key best practices include:

1. Trust and Rapport: Establishing trust between the interviewer and interviewee is essential for obtaining rich, authentic data. A conversational style promotes a relaxed atmosphere and encourages active listening, which can lead to more profound insights (Ehigie & Ehigie, 2005).
2. Informed Consent: Obtaining full consent for the interview process, including audio recording and the use of the participant's identity, is a non-negotiable ethical requirement. It ensures that participants are fully aware of their rights and the nature of the research (Creswell & Poth, 2016).
3. Reflexive Prompts: The semi-structured format must be managed reflexively to ensure that the researcher maintains the focus of the investigation while granting the participant the autonomy to explore pertinent ideas (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). This balance is crucial for fostering an environment where participants feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and experiences.

The semi-structured interview was selected for this study as the most suitable method to investigate a complex historical phenomenon. Its open-ended nature allows for the discovery of new ideas and provides valuable data on how individuals perceive their world and explain significant happenings in their lives (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

By adhering to best practices in the interview process, I aimed to ensure the generation of rich, meaningful data that would contribute to a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences and the broader historical context. I also particularly wanted to honour the voices of those who had been involved in the projects. Honouring these voices while respecting their age entailed several key practices. I actively listened and approached each interview with genuine curiosity and attentiveness, allowing participants to share their stories at their own pace and demonstrating respect for their experiences and time. I used sensitive language when framing questions, avoiding any patronising tones, and emphasised the importance of their contributions in the broader context of history, reinforcing their role in shaping that history and the impact of their stories on future generations.

Flexibility in methodology proved to be an important strategy in addition, allowing for adaptations in the interview format to suit participants’ needs, such as conducting shorter

segments of interviews. Following up with participants after the interviews to share how their contributions had been integrated into the research further reinforced their importance and showed appreciation for their willingness to share their stories.

Establishing trust between the interviewer and interviewee is considered essential for obtaining rich data. Before the interviews, I explained the purpose, process, and each interviewee's role, and obtained consent to audio-record the interview. Within the interviews themselves, I sought to create a conversational style to foster a relaxed atmosphere, which is essential for obtaining rich data (Ehigie & Ehigie, 2005b). Transcripts were double-checked against the audio recordings to correct any mistakes (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021, p. 1360). I kept in constant contact with the participants, and this helped build rapport and facilitated easy access to information (Wilson, 2010), so I could follow up after the interview if necessary.

5.7 Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study was a systematic, multi-layered process designed to move from raw data to theoretically informed interpretation. Data analysis in qualitative research is a systematic process of interpreting and making sense of the data collected to identify patterns, themes, and insights that emerge, allowing researchers to draw meaningful conclusions (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Given the study's theoretical foundation, the data analysis strategy was a structured, multi-stage process grounded in thematic analysis, using a necessary hybrid of inductive and deductive reasoning within and across the different cases; and I also used Rule and John's (2011) model for contextual analysis in case study research.

Due to the complex nature of the research problem, I combined inductive and deductive analysis to leverage the strengths of both approaches and align the analysis with the requirements of the critical paradigm. Deductive analysis was necessary to engage with and examine the study's theoretical framework. This deductive stage involved applying concepts derived from these theoretical frameworks to the data in order to assess the extent to which the projects' actions and motivations reflected, extended, or challenged existing theory. This was particularly important for addressing the theory-led questions (RQ2 and RQ3).

Inductive analysis was equally important in understanding what the documents and participants were actually saying in relation to the research questions. During this stage, I

immersed myself in the data, using open coding to allow patterns to emerge from the participants' accounts and historical documents (Braun & Clarke, 2006). From these codes, I derived themes that emerged from the data itself rather than being predetermined by the theoretical framework (Thomas, 2021). This inductive process was necessary for generating the thick description required to answer RQ1 and for allowing unexpected findings, contradictions, and contextual adaptations to emerge.

The relationship between deductive and inductive analysis was iterative rather than linear, with each process informing and refining the other throughout the study. Initial deductive coding informed the organisation and interpretation of the data, while inductive analysis generated additional themes and prompted further engagement with the theoretical framework. In some instances, findings reinforced existing theoretical propositions; in others, they refined, complicated, or extended them. This movement between theory and data enabled a richer and more nuanced interpretation of the literacy projects under investigation.

5.7.1 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013) is a widely used method employed to identify, analyse, and report patterns (themes) within qualitative data. As discussed above, both inductive and deductive coding strategies were employed during thematic analysis. Inductively, I applied this approach across the entire data set, which included both interviews and archival documents, to explore the participants' experiences, perceptions, and the political meanings they assigned to their work. The analytical process followed standard iterative steps: i) familiarisation with the data through reading and re-reading transcripts and documents; ii) immersion in the data to ensure a deep understanding of its content, allowing me to know the data thoroughly; iii) generating initial (inductive and deductive) codes; iv) searching for descriptive and analytical themes by grouping related codes; v) reviewing and refining these themes for accuracy; and vi) defining and naming the final themes that captured the essence of the findings in relation to the research questions. This thorough approach ensured that the analysis was both comprehensive and reflective of the participants' voices.

In my deductive analysis, the concepts of hegemony, praxis, the three dimensions of power, war of position, and war of manoeuvre provided the initial *a priori* codes (Creswell, 2014; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). I also derived more specific codes from Freire's theory.

5.7.2 Within-Case and Cross-Case Analysis

Analysis was conducted at two levels. The first involved within-case analysis, whereby each literacy project was examined individually in order to understand its historical context, organisational philosophy, pedagogical practices, and relationship to broader political struggles. This enabled each case to be understood on its own terms before comparison across projects was undertaken.

The second level involved cross-case analysis. Drawing on Yin (2018) and Rule and John (2011), themes identified within individual cases were systematically compared across all five projects to identify recurring patterns, points of convergence and divergence, and broader explanations relating to the implementation of Freirean literacy practices. This process enabled the analysis to move beyond the particularity of individual projects and develop broader insights concerning the relationship between literacy, conscientisation, political action, and social transformation in apartheid South Africa.

Through this iterative process of deductive, inductive, within-case, and cross-case analysis, the study balanced theoretical coherence with sensitivity to historical complexity and contextual variation. The findings therefore reflect both the conceptual concerns informing the study and the empirical realities revealed through the data.

5.7.3 Contextual Analysis

Case studies are inherently bound by time and place, making it essential to move beyond mere descriptive historical background and adopt a rigorous analytical contextual framework (Gustafsson, 2017). In this study, I employed the four contextual frames proposed by Rule and John (2011)—background, foreground, liftground, and underground—not merely as a backdrop, but as a primary analytical tool to dissect the complex power dynamics of the Freirean projects in apartheid South Africa. This layered analysis provided a powerful scaffold for integrating the theoretical lenses of Gramsci, Freire, and Lukes, allowing for a nuanced exploration of the interplay between oppression and resistance.

Rule and John (2011) state that within case study research, data analysis is iterative and interpretive, moving from coding and categorising to identifying patterns and developing themes that explain relationships within the data. Interpretation entails making sense of these findings by linking them to theoretical perspectives and contextual factors, ensuring that conclusions are credible and meaningful.

In presenting and analysing this study, I have applied Rule and John's framework as follows:

The **background** frame is the deep historical and structural context of colonialism, racial capitalism, and segregation that established the conditions of oppression in South Africa, as presented in Chapter Three. This frame highlights the macro-level systemic issues that the Freirean projects were compelled to confront. Understanding this background is crucial, as it situates the literacy initiatives within a broader narrative of struggle against deeply entrenched power dynamics.

In contrast, the **foreground** captures the immediate, lived reality of apartheid during the 1970s and 1980s. This reality includes the daily experiences of the pass laws, exploitation, and state violence that individuals faced. The foreground is to some extent presented in Chapter Four, but really only emerges through the rich, thick data generated as part of this study. The crucial analytical tension of this study lies in the dialectical relationship between the final two frames, which map directly onto Gramsci's concept of hegemony and resistance.

The **liftground** refers to the dominant public discourse, encompassing the official narratives, propaganda, and ideology of the apartheid state. From a Gramscian perspective, this terrain represents hegemony, where the ideology of racial superiority and exploitation is normalised as 'common sense'. This aligns with Lukes' third dimension of power, which highlights the insidious ability of the state to shape consciousness, rendering oppression seemingly natural and inevitable. This dynamic contributes to what Freire termed the 'culture of silence,' a significant barrier to liberation where the grievances of the oppressed remain unarticulated. My discussion of Gramsci and Lukes in Chapter Two, and their application to apartheid South Africa in Chapter Three, makes this liftground clear.

Conversely, the **underground** symbolises the hidden and silenced discourses of the oppressed. It encompasses personal stories, community knowledge, and shared grievances that the state actively suppresses. It is this underground that this study has attempted to unearth, and it is presented in Chapters Six and Seven.

The following table illustrates how these varied levels of analysis were integrated, showing the clear link between the empirical data and the theoretical framing of the study. It serves as a map of the entire analytical process, from initial data organisation to the final, theoretically informed discussion of the research questions.

Table 1: Analysis

Level	Description	Theoretical justification
Organisation of Data for Analysis	Develop codes or mapping strategies to systematically organise the data collected from various sources.	Establishing control over the data organisation process to ensure clarity and coherence.
Rich and Thick Descriptions	Construct and validate data from interviews, historical papers, and archival materials to provide a comprehensive understanding of the context.	Empowering participants by valuing their narratives and experiences, aligning with Freire's emphasis on dialogue and critical consciousness.
Thematic Analysis	Using the developed codes to generate overarching themes that emerge from the data.	Collating participants' voices to identify themes that reflect their collective experiences, resonating with Gramsci's concept of organic intellectuals.
Discussion of Data Using Theoretical Lenses	Interpret the data through the frameworks of Freirean language and Gramscian themes to uncover deeper meanings.	Enabling a deeper understanding of the educational and political implications of the data through theoretical lenses, reflecting Freire's focus on empowerment and critical pedagogy.
Discussion of Key Research Questions	Leverage the rich descriptions and identified themes to discuss and interpret answers to key research questions.	Engaging with the themes to address the research questions, reflecting the interconnectedness of the participants' experiences and Gramsci's notion of collective action.
Discussing Research Questions	Employ rich and thick descriptions to provide nuanced answers to the research questions posed in the study.	Highlighting the agency of participants in shaping the narrative and outcomes of the research, consistent with Freire's advocacy for participant agency.
Case Contextual Frame	Use the established contextual frames to analyse the data, ensuring that interpretations are grounded in the specific historical and social contexts of the cases studied.	Acknowledging the influence of historical and social contexts on the participants' experiences and the research findings, in line with Gramsci's analysis of power structures.

5.8 Paradigm, Positionality, and Power

As I have discussed, the critical research paradigm compels a focus on the power dynamics inherent in the topic being studied as well as in the research process itself. This focus meant recognising, for example, potential power imbalances within the projects themselves. For example, the projects involving younger, White facilitators teaching older Black adults under apartheid, operated on an unequal playing field. This power imbalance was not an incidental

detail but a central feature, reflecting the pervasive and systemic inequality of the apartheid regime (Morrow & Torres, 2000).

Applying Freirean theory without confronting this specific context would be misleading. Apartheid was a totalising system of oppression that demanded a nuanced understanding of how liberatory ideas were adapted, and often compromised, within its brutal landscape (Lather, 1991). An initial, celebratory view of the projects' successes had to be replaced by a more critical assessment that questioned whether they genuinely empowered participants or, at times, inadvertently perpetuated existing hierarchies.

Furthermore, this critical approach demanded reflexivity, a deliberate engagement with how my own positionality shaped the research. As a Black researcher who lived under apartheid and participated in literacy initiatives under the banner of Khanya College, I could not approach this study as a detached academic exercise (Bourke, 2014). My experiences as both a subject and a student of resistance informed how I interpreted power, pedagogy, and the tensions within Freirean liberation models. This insider perspective was not primarily a bias to be mitigated but a critical lens through which to interrogate the contradictions between theory and practice (Brookfield, 2012; hooks, 1994; Giroux, 1983; Shor, 1992). These scholars argue that positionality and lived experience are central to understanding how emancipatory education navigates the interplay between ideology and praxis.

It allowed me to ask questions that a 'neutral' researcher might have overlooked, such as 'Whose voices are centred in these narratives?' and 'How do lived experiences of oppression complicate idealised notions of empowerment?'. By grounding this work in my own history, I aimed to expose the gaps between the rhetoric of liberation and its material realities, particularly for those, like myself, who have navigated these systems first-hand (Duncan, 2017). The interviews also inevitably unearthed memories of resistance to confronting the apartheid state and its brutal repercussions for both me and the participants.

This personal history created a dynamic during exchanges with participants, many of whom were older, White, and had institutionalised forms of knowledge tied to the very systems I had resisted. The interplay of power threaded through race, generation, trauma, and the researcher-participant hierarchy required constant negotiation (Collins, 2000). I had to vigilantly interrogate my own position: Was I replicating the 'subject-object' dichotomy Freire warned against? Were my questions inadvertently recentering White voices? In the

process, I guarded against re-traumatising participants (and myself) when revisiting painful histories.

This tension revealed why a critical lens was necessary. It was not abstract theory, but served as a survival tool, one that exposed how ‘liberation’ projects often functioned as contested terrain (Bourdieu, 1990). Some initiatives genuinely empowered communities; others, despite progressive guises, reproduced colonial logics of dependency (Fanon, 1963). My dual role forced me to sit with these contradictions, to recognise, for example, how even well-intentioned White allies could occupy spaces meant for Black liberatory praxis. By naming these layers, I resisted sanitising the past and instead traced how power coiled through every interaction, then and perhaps now. This process of continuous self-interrogation and critical reading was the primary methodological tool for achieving the analytical rigour demanded by the critical paradigm (Lather, 2006).

5.9 Ensuring Research Quality

In qualitative research, particularly within the critical paradigm, ensuring trustworthiness and rigour is essential for establishing the credibility and impact of the findings. Ensuring the quality of research is paramount to any study. In the positivist tradition, research quality is assessed through metrics of validity (whether a measure accurately reflects what it intends to measure) and reliability (consistency of results). However, for qualitative research operating within the critical paradigm, the appropriate standards for ensuring research quality are framed by the concepts of trustworthiness and rigour (Cohen et al., 2018). Trustworthiness consists of four parallel concepts articulated by Lincoln and Guba (1985):

Credibility is akin to internal validity and is about ensuring that the findings accurately reflect the participants’ realities. It involves verifying that the interpretations made by the researcher resonate with the lived experiences of those studied.

Transferability is similar to external validity, and is about ensuring that the findings can be applied to other, similar contexts. It emphasises the qualitative alternative to generalisability, allowing readers to assess the relevance of the findings to their own situations.

Dependability corresponds to reliability and is about ensuring that the research process is consistent and could be replicated. It involves documenting the research process in detail so that others can follow the same path.

Confirmability is related to objectivity and is about ensuring that the findings are grounded in the data rather than influenced by the researcher's biases. It requires transparency in how conclusions are drawn from the data.

However, in the critical paradigm, which is inherently ideological and aims for social transformation, these standard criteria of trustworthiness are often deemed insufficient. Lather (1986, 1993) thus extended the criteria for rigour in critical and feminist research, arguing that the methodology itself must be viewed as praxis. She posits that an emancipatory study must go beyond mere descriptive rigour and incorporate criteria that directly address the goal of social change. Lather's framework thus requires that the researcher demonstrate:

Tactical Validity which involves assessing power dynamics during data generation to ensure that the research process does not reproduce hierarchical power relations. It emphasises the importance of equitable interactions between the researcher and participants.

Referential Adequacy focuses on systematic triangulation against the material world, ensuring that the data is robustly grounded across multiple sources. It enhances the credibility of the findings by drawing from diverse perspectives.

Catalytic Validity assesses the political impact of the research, ensuring that it provokes critical self-reflection and transformation in both participants and the audience, thereby challenging the status quo.

Face Validity is about ensuring that the findings are recognisable and resonate with those being studied, affirming the participants' experiences and perspectives.

This study systematically implemented specific measures to satisfy both the foundational criteria of trustworthiness and the advanced criteria required by the critical paradigm. The following table outlines the criteria applied, the measures implemented, and their links to critical rigour:

Table 2: Ensuring Research Quality

Criterion Applied	Measure Implemented in this Study	Link to Critical Rigour
Credibility / Referential Adequacy	The interviews were specifically designed to triangulate with and bring to life the information gathered from the archival record.	This approach grounds the findings in multiple realities, mitigating the risk of relying on a single, potentially biased source (Confirmability).

Transferability	The descriptive detail provided in Chapter Six allows the reader to judge the applicability of the findings to similar historical and political contexts. The use of a collective case study (five projects) enhances the transferability of the conclusions across other 'Freirean' projects within the South African resistance movement.	This provides the contextual density necessary for other scholars to assess the applicability of the findings to different settings.
Tactical Validity	A continuous process of self-interrogation, as discussed above, and critical reading was applied to the research process. I paid particular attention to power dynamics inherent in interviewing older, White activists, to try to ensure that the research did not replicate the 'subject-object' dichotomy Freire warned against.	This directly addresses Lather's criterion by managing power dynamics and ensuring the research process models the horizontal relationships espoused by critical theory.
Catalytic Validity / Face Validity	Member Checking (Informal) Participants were provided with opportunities to engage with the interpretation of their narratives. I also followed up with participants, seeking clarity or additional information, when there was any doubt about my 'reading' of what they had said.	This ensures the findings are recognisable to the participants and maximises the potential for the research to provoke critical self-reflection and contribute to the ongoing legacy of the struggle.

By implementing these measures, this study not only adhered to the foundational principles of trustworthiness, but also embraced the complexities of conducting research within a critical framework. This commitment to rigour helps to ensure that the findings are credible and also meaningful in the context of social transformation.

However, I am aware that despite these quality control measures, the study retains certain limitations. Every research project has its limitations, and recognising them is important for maintaining trustworthiness and transparency (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In qualitative research, some common limitations are issues related to generalisability, access to participants, and constraints in available data sources. In this study, the case study design inherently limits how far the findings can be generalised beyond the specific cases and the context I examined.

Moreover, I was unable to interview learners directly, which meant I missed the opportunity to capture their lived experiences first-hand. This lack was further exacerbated by the lack of

learner voices in the archival material, leading my analysis to rely mainly on secondary accounts and institutional records. While these limitations prevailed, they do not undermine the value of the study; rather, they underscore the importance of cautious interpretation and a sensitivity to context.

5.10 Ethical Considerations

Research ethics encompass the moral principles and standards that guide the conduct of research, ensuring integrity, fairness, and respect for participants. These ethical standards are essential to protect the rights and well-being of participants, maintain the credibility of the research, and uphold societal trust in scholarly work (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Ethical considerations become particularly nuanced within the critical paradigm, where power relations, positionality, and social justice are central themes (Lather, 1993). In critical research, ethical practice requires a reflexive approach, recognising how the researcher's positionality influences the research process and outcomes, acknowledging power imbalances, and actively working to empower marginalised voices (Bourke, 2014). This approach aims to avoid reproducing power imbalances and to foster a more equitable and empowering research environment, aligning with the core principles of the critical paradigm (Lather, 1993; Bourke, 2014). Within this framework, ethical approaches extend beyond standard procedures to include attentiveness to issues such as power dynamics between the researcher and participants, the risk of potential re-traumatisation, and the transformative intent of the research. For instance, it is of importance to ensure that participants have control over how their stories are shared, to recognise the impact of recalling sensitive experiences, and to foster an environment of trust and safety (Morrow, 2008).

This study adhered to the highest ethical standards, guided by the principles of voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, and the duty to prevent harm. In addition to receiving ethical clearance from the University of KwaZulu-Natal (see Appendix 3), the following measures were implemented:

- **Informed Consent**: All participants received a detailed information sheet and signed a consent form before any interview was conducted. They were made fully aware of the study's purpose and of their rights.

- **Confidentiality and Anonymity**: Participants were given the choice to use their real names or pseudonyms. The potential for identification, even with pseudonyms, was discussed openly, allowing for a truly informed choice. All participants opted to use their real names. All data were stored securely on password-protected devices.
- **Minimising Harm**: I was consciously aware that recalling experiences of apartheid could be traumatic, and I established a clear protocol. Participants were informed they could stop the interview at any time. I provided a supportive environment and had contact information for free counselling services on hand. Additionally, member checking was employed to give participants final control over how their stories were presented, respecting their agency and ensuring the accuracy of their accounts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

5.11 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have detailed the design and methodology of the research project, outlining the implications of my choice of the critical paradigm within which to situate the study. By employing a qualitative, multi-case study design, I aimed to provide a rigorous and ethically sound investigation that respects the voices and experiences of the participants. The integrated use of archival research and semi-structured interviews, coupled with a multi-layered analytical approach, allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the complex interplay of pedagogy, power, and resistance in the context of literacy initiatives during the anti-apartheid struggle. In the next chapter, I present the data that emerged from this study, focusing on the themes and patterns identified through the analysis procedure I have outlined in this chapter.

Chapter 6: Data Presentation

6.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapters, I established the historical context and theoretical framework in which this study is grounded and discussed the methodology used in this study. I argued that a combination of archival research and interviews with those involved in the literacy projects would be appropriate data generation methods to answer the three research questions:

> RQ1: What was the nature of the Freirean literacy projects in the 1970s and 1980s?
>
> RQ2: How did these projects understand and enact the concept of 'praxis'?
>
> RQ3: What was the nature of the 'action' that emerged from these projects, and to what extent did it constitute a war of position or a war of manoeuvre?

In this chapter, I present the data generated from the archives and participant interviews in relation to Research Question 1. The chapter seeks to meet my first objective, which was to examine the objectives, characteristics, and context of the 'Freirean' literacy projects conducted during the 1970s and 1980s, in order to address the lack of detailed research on this topic. This evidence provides the foundation for the analysis in the subsequent chapter to address the issue of whether the 'Freirean' literacy projects of the 1970s and 1980s understood and used Freire's pedagogy as the liberatory, politically transformative tool he intended, or whether they, under the immense pressures of the struggle, reduced it to a more mechanical or instrumental teaching methodology. This chapter and the next therefore, explore how the projects understood praxis, in order to determine whether the action they envisaged constituted a Gramscian war of position (the gradual building of critical consciousness) or a war of manoeuvre (direct, confrontational action) in the struggle against the apartheid state as discussed in Chapter Two.

6.2 The Archival Research

As I discussed in Chapter Five, the initial phase of the research involved extensive archival work, which was not merely a preliminary step to identify interview participants, but was a core data generation activity in its own right. This step was essential for mapping the historical landscape and unearthing the documented life of the literacy projects. The archives

themselves, as this section will show, were not neutral repositories, but, in line with Harris's (2002a) analysis, were complex and often contested sites of struggle, revealing as much in their silences as in their contents.

This journey took me to a wide range of national, university, and community repositories, each holding different pieces of the historical puzzle. At the Historical Papers Research Archive at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits University), I engaged with major collections such as the IAS file and the records of student movements such as the UCM. These collections provided the raw, documentary evidence of the projects' operations, from typed and handwritten meeting minutes, internal reports, and the passionate correspondence that detailed the day-to-day ideological debates and operational challenges.

The South African History Archive (SAHA), with its focus on preserving materials of grassroots movements, offered a different perspective. Here, I explored collections that documented community-based efforts, such as flyers and pamphlets from organisations like the IAS and Umtapo, which provided a glimpse into how these projects presented themselves to the public.

In KwaZulu-Natal, the Alan Paton and Struggle Centre and the Gandhi-Luthuli Documentation Centre (University of KwaZulu-Natal) helped contextualise the ideological underpinnings of the anti-apartheid movement in general, featuring materials that highlighted the intersection of literacy, the BC movement and the burgeoning trade union movement in the region, which provided a nuanced perspective on the intersection of literacy and trade unionism.

My engagement with the South African Committee for Higher Education (SACHED) Digital Archives stemmed from a contemporary development in the preservation of this history. I first heard about the launch of the SACHED Digital Archive while attending the Neville Alexander Annual Conference in 2023. I was immediately keen to explore what digital information they had managed to preserve from this era. This was particularly important, given that many of my interviewees had mentioned some form of synergistic relationship between SACHED and their own projects. Another factor was that SACHED had a working relationship with various organisations involved in the anti-apartheid movement, and I was eager to find documentary evidence of these connections. The SACHED Digital Archive provided valuable insights into the ideological underpinnings of the struggle, particularly regarding the role of education in fostering political consciousness. However, like the

physical TCOE collection, I noted that most of the materials were produced by the organisations themselves to document their own work. This is not unusual, since the purpose of archival research is to access such organisational records. What requires careful attention, however, is the intended audience and function of these documents.

The Trust for Community Outreach and Education (TCOE) (as it is now called) is located in Mowbray, Cape Town. Unlike the formal university repositories, accessing the TCOE's history involved engaging with their informal archive located within their own offices. This presented a unique set of methodological challenges and opportunities. There was no official catalogue or finding aid, so the process involved wading through dusty cupboards and boxes, sifting through decades of unorganised materials (which the organisation had preserved for its network of organisations) in the hope of landing on relevant documents. While this process was less structured, it was incredibly fruitful, yielding internal reports, meeting minutes, and learner-produced booklets that were not available anywhere else.

Throughout the archival research phase, I was acutely aware of the subjectivity inherent in organisational archives. Whether in the case of Masifundise, IAS, or UCM, these collections represent the organisation's own curated memory of itself, so the materials preserved are those the organisation deemed worthy of keeping and handing over. As discussed in Chapter Five, archival theory emphasises the principle of provenance. Archives preserve records in the form they were received, without rearranging or removing items (Atkinson & Coffey, 1997; Scott, 1990). This means that what survives is already a selective narrative shaped by organisational priorities. The critical issue, therefore, is not simply that the documents are self-referential, but the purpose for which they were produced. Internal minutes and correspondence, created for internal deliberation, provide a different kind of evidence than public-facing artefacts such as promotional videos or newsletters, which are designed to present the organisation in a positive light. For instance, a promotional video produced for TCOE, profiling the work of its Masifundise project, illustrates this point. While it is a rich source, its nature as a public-facing artefact means it was designed to present the organisation in a positive light, and therefore requires a critical reading. This differs substantively from internal minutes or correspondence, which, although also self-produced, were created for internal deliberation rather than external representation. As discussed in Chapter Five and articulated by Atkinson and Coffey (1997), documents must be treated as 'social facts' produced for particular purposes and audiences and not assumed to be transparent reflections

of reality. It was the recognition of this distinction that reinforced the necessity of triangulating the sources with interviews wherever possible. In the specific case of Masifundise, however, the scarcity of material in more formal archives limited the scope for triangulation, making the critical reading of organisational documents all the more important. Therefore, a deep, critical reading of these self-produced texts, juxtaposed with the oral histories of the activists involved, became the primary analytical strategy.

A particularly important repository is the University of Cape Town Special Collections. It was here that I discovered two foundational documents for this thesis. The first was Adrienne Bird's (1982) unpublished Master's thesis (submitted to the University of Manchester, and which I could not get from any other source), which provided an invaluable account of the learner profiles for the Learn and Teach project. Bird notes that she was obliged to provide an historical account 'in some detail, as no history of South African adult education exists' (footnote, p. 25). The second document was a draft chapter by Liz Sparg, located within the Neville Alexander Papers (BC1538_F5), titled *Trends in the Development of Alternative Adult Basic Education in the Late 1970s and the 1980s in South Africa*. This document provides a rich overview of the alternative ABE movement at the time, and I have used it as another source for triangulation in this study. I cannot find any evidence that this was ever published.

Finally, the Western Cape Archives and Records Service offered the view from the other side. This repository contained the official apartheid government documents and the records of the Publications Committee, which documented the banning of materials from organisations such as Learn and Teach and Umtapo. It illustrated the official responses to literacy initiatives during the apartheid era, revealing the challenges faced by activists. These documents provided stark, official validation of the state's perception of these literacy projects as a genuine political threat.

6.2.1 My Reflections on the Archival Experience

This archival journey was both fruitful and deeply challenging. It was a process of piecing together a fragmented history. On the one hand, there were moments of profound discovery, such as unearthing the detailed pedagogical guide to Freirean 'codes' within the IAS files. In other instances, as I discussed in Chapter Five, key documents had pages missing. While such absences may simply reflect the everyday realities of organisational record-keeping, such as

misfiling, deterioration, or selective preservation, they also remind us of the broader silences that Harris (2002b) describes in relation to archives under apartheid. Whether accidental or deliberate, these gaps highlighted the need for a critical reading of archival collections, recognising both the practical contingencies of record survival and the political contexts that shaped what was documented and what was left out.

This struggle with the archive was evident from my very first visit. At the Wits History Archive, I found that the primary IAS file (AH 1585) was restricted and required special permission to gain access. In a process that felt like a microcosm of historical gatekeeping, the archivist and I had to consult the finding aid to determine from whom permission should be sought. It was only when it became clear that the original depositors were untraceable or had passed on that I was finally granted access. Interestingly, the history, even decades later, was not freely open; it was guarded.

This experience was amplified at the Western Cape Archives and Records Service. The files I consulted on Learn and Teach and Umtapo were preserved under their original classification as ‘objectionable literature’. In line with the archival principle of provenance, the records remain in the form in which they were received, including the apartheid state’s censorship labels. The very language of the state’s censorship apparatus was still alive in the archival system, labelling these records of liberatory pedagogy as dangerous or illicit. The persistence of this terminology is a reminder of how the state once sought to frame liberatory pedagogy as dangerous or illicit. Gaining access to these materials required navigating a formal process that treated them not simply as historical records, but as documents deemed subversive, highlighting the political weight attached to educational initiatives during that period.

Importantly, the archival journey also revealed the complexities and potential fallibility of both the documentary record itself and the interviews, adding another layer to the question of authenticity. In several instances, when I enquired about specific documents of the participants who had been involved, they directly contested the official record. When asked about the contents of certain meeting minutes and to confirm the timeline displayed, some participants insisted that the dates were incorrect or that the events had unfolded differently than as recorded. This discrepancy between the written archive and living memory does not necessarily invalidate either; rather, it enriches the study. It highlights the possibility that record-keeping in these high-pressure, often clandestine, environments was itself a complex practice, perhaps subject to error, haste, or even strategic ambiguity.

The most glaring and consistent silence, across all archives, was the absence of the learners' voices. While the thoughts, plans, and debates of the (often White) facilitators were frequently meticulously recorded, the direct perspectives of the learners were almost entirely absent. This archival silence was not a mere gap in the record; it was a profound finding in itself. It mirrored the very power dynamics the projects sought to challenge and magnified the critical importance of supplementing the archival findings with the oral histories of the participants who could bring this contested history to life.

6.3 The Interviews

For this research, I initially aimed to interview participants – learners, teachers, curriculum developers, project managers – from the five specific Freirean literacy projects chosen as case studies. However, as described, I encountered significant challenges in tracing individuals who had been learners in these initiatives. Despite my efforts and even with some participants assisting in tracing and locating their former learners, these attempts proved futile. This is, in fact, understandable because many learners were considerably older than their teachers, with Kell stating a 20-30-year age gap (Kell, Interview, 27 September 2024). It also proved impossible to track down some of those learners who my participants had worked with. These difficulties can largely be attributed to the advancing age of the original participants, many of whom are now unwell or have sadly passed away. Given these circumstances, it became increasingly important to capture the experiences, voices, and insights of those who remain, wherever I could find them.

In response to the situation, I broadened the scope of my interviews to include participants from other literacy-related projects operating during the same period in a similar field. This unplanned adjustment aimed to ensure a more comprehensive exploration of Freirean pedagogies during this period. Engaging with individuals from different initiatives allowed me to gather a wider range of perspectives and experiences. This not only enriched my analysis of how these projects navigated the discourse of literacy and emancipation during the anti-apartheid struggle, but also illuminated the interconnectedness of various initiatives. It became clear that, despite differences, these projects shared common challenges and successes in implementing Freirean methods in South Africa under apartheid. This broader participant pool also highlighted the adaptability of Freirean approaches across diverse contexts, thereby enhancing the depth and relevance of my findings. Ultimately, this decision

facilitated a more nuanced understanding of the impact of Freirean literacy projects in South Africa within the complex socio-political landscape of the 1970s and 1980s.

The process of selecting participants for interviews was primarily guided by the information available in the archival materials. I purposively identified individuals who played meaningful roles in the 'Freirean' literacy projects, such as project coordinators, teachers, and community leaders. Many of these individuals were prominent figures, and their involvement was well-documented in meeting minutes, reports, and other archival documents, making them relatively straightforward to identify. To further expand my reach, I employed snowball sampling in which existing participants referred me to colleagues and collaborators within the projects, helping to uncover additional perspectives and deepen my understanding of the projects' socio-cultural context.

6.3.1 Research Participants and their Key Contributions

The following table provides a summary of the fifteen participants interviewed for this study, outlining their primary organisational affiliations and their key roles or the unique expertise they contributed to the research. All participants consented to be identified by their real names, and their narratives form the core of the data presented in the rest of this chapter.

Table 3: Participants by Project Involvement

Name of Participant	Projects they were involved with	Justification for Inclusion (Key Role and Contribution to the Study
1. Aitchison, John	SACHED, UCM	He provided an historical overview, connecting the early UCM literacy efforts with the work of SACHED, and tracing the intellectual history of Freire's introduction to South Africa.
2. Andrews, Mercia	SACHED, FedSem, TCOE/Masifundise	Andrews offered a perspective on the synergistic links between key organisations, specifically on how SACHED and TCOE/Masifundise collaborated and shared methodologies.
3. Brown, Susan	Industrial Aid Society (IAS)	As a Literacy Organiser for the IAS, she provided an on-the-ground account of the pedagogical practices, internal debates, and challenges of working with migrant labourers.
4. Budlender, Debbie	NUSAS, WPLP, WPWAB	She provided tangible evidence of the Western Province Literacy Project's praxis by preserving invaluable learner narratives, and offered a practitioner's insight into adapting Freirean methods.

5. Deeb, Mike	NUSAS, Learn and Teach	As an early facilitator trained by the founder of Learn and Teach, he provided a foundational account of the project's origins, its pedagogical methods, and the influence of liberation theology.
6. Favish, Judy	WPLP, Learn and Teach, SACHED, Reiger Park	As a Wilgespruit trainee and co-founder of the WPLP, she offered a foundational narrative and a critically self-reflective, theoretical perspective on the evolution of Freirean praxis across multiple projects.
7. Hogan, Barbara	Industrial Aid Society (IAS)	As an IAS Literacy Coordinator, and a key founding member, her interview provided insight into understanding the project's origins within the ANC-SACTU underground network and for providing a detailed, insider's account of the intense ideological debates (such as 'workerism vs. populism') that shaped the organisation's praxis.
8. Horn, Patricia	UCM, WPLP, Reiger Park	As one of the trainees who attended the 1971 Wilgespruit training and co-founded the WPLP, her narrative was crucial for establishing the direct lineage from student movement activism to the worker movement.
9. Juta, Bulelwa	TCOE/Masifundise	As a facilitator and an officer for Masifundise, she provided an on-the-ground perspective of the Masifundise network's community-based work and its BC-infused liberatory theology.
10. Kell, Cathy	Adult Literacy Project (Cape Literacy)	As a co-ordinator in the Cape Town literacy scene, her interview provided concrete examples of successful learner agency (the Learners' Controlling Committee) within the WPLP's orbit.
11. Molobi, Saul	AZASO, Learn and Teach	As a former Editor-in-Chief of Learn and Teach Publications, he offered insight into the production of mass media for political education and the reasons for the organisation's eventual split.
12. Moloto, Justice	UCM	As a former President of the UCM, his testimony provided an authoritative historical perspective on the genesis of the joint student movement literacy campaigns.
13. Moss, Glenn	Industrial Aid Society (IAS)	Moss was a former Administrative Organiser for the IAS. His memoir and interview offered a high-level, strategic view of the organisation's 'prefigurative' role and its contested location within the liberation struggle.
14. Naicker, Arun	Umtapo Centre	As a long-term director and trainer for the Umtapo Centre, her interview was essential for understanding the application and evolution of a BC-aligned Freirean praxis.
15. von Holdt, Karl	CUPC, SACHED, Learn and Teach	As a practitioner across multiple projects, including Learn and Teach, his narrative was crucial for analysing the practical limitations of Freirean methods and for providing another key example of learner agency.

6.3.2 A Fragile Legacy: The Politics of Silence and Absence

As this study documents the voices of the activists who drove the Freirean literacy movement, it must also confront a profound and recurring finding: the echoing silence of the absent voices. A notable trend was the predominance of White participants, particularly White females (who make up six of the 15 interviewees). This demographic pattern reflects broader societal attitudes during the apartheid era, which often confined educational roles to specific racial and gender groups. For example, Susan Brown, one of the interviewees, remarked that teaching within these projects was perceived as a distinctly female role (Brown, Interview, 7 August 2024). This observation provides important context for understanding the composition and dynamics of project personnel and also aligns with wider societal perceptions of gendered responsibilities during that period. The absence of Black educators and learners, whilst it is a methodological limitation, is also a central and unavoidable truth of this history. It is a direct legacy of the systemic violence, internal political pressures, and structural inequities of the apartheid era. The demographic overview of the participants interviewed for this study starkly reveals the imbalance:

Table 4: Demographic Overview of Participants

Race	Male	Female	Total
White	4	6	10
Black	2	1	3
Indian	-	1	1
Coloured	-	1	1
Total	**6**	**9**	**15**

The first layer of silence is a direct result of the devastating, long-term impact of apartheid on Black health and life expectancy. Participants consistently noted the frailty of Black colleagues who were their age or younger, stressing that the very act of surviving to an advanced age to tell one's story is itself a form of privilege that was systematically denied to many Black South Africans.

The second, more brutal layer of silence is the direct result of state violence and internal movement politics. The archives are filled with the names of activists who were central to the

projects, yet their stories are absent from the record for a number of reasons. Activists like Phindile Mfeti, Miriam Sithole (Hlongwane), and Jeanette Curtis (linked to the IAS) were victims of state-sanctioned murder, torture, and disappearance. Their voices were permanently extinguished by the security forces. Their absence from this study is a direct and haunting testament to the mortal risks they took. Other silences appear to stem from the complex internal dynamics and ideological schisms within the movements. The archival record of the IAS, for instance, alludes to ‘personality differences’ and ‘anti-left cleverness’ (Industrial Aid Society, 1974g).

In some instances, the absence of certain figures from the dominant oral narratives of the organisations raised questions about how collective memory is constructed. Rather than assuming deliberate erasure, these silences can be understood through the lens of archival and memory studies, which emphasise that organisational histories are always selective, shaped by what is remembered, recorded, and deemed significant at the time (Daly, 2017; Harris, 2002b; Scott, 1990). These absences may reflect contested legacies or internal fractures, but they may equally result from the contingencies of documentation, misfiling, or the priorities of narrators. What is important is to recognise that these gaps themselves are meaningful, as they remind us that organisational memory is not a transparent record, but a negotiated narrative, and that silences can illuminate as much as the voices that remain.

Finally, this difficulty of absences is compounded by what Daniels (1996), citing the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) (1993), describes as a historical lack of a research tradition focusing on literacy learners themselves. The scholarly record, like the oral one, has overwhelmingly centred on the providers (Prinsloo, 1995), meaning the perspectives of Black learners were never systematically captured, even within the organisations themselves, and hence are missing from the archives.

6.4 The Case Studies

The origins of the literacy projects can be traced to an internal political crisis within NUSAS in the early 1970s. The emergence of SASO as a formidable challenge, coupled with intense internal debates, led to a crucial organisational overhaul within NUSAS. In response, NUSAS restructured itself, creating dedicated wings such as NUSWEL (Welfare) and NUSED (Education) to channel student energy into community action. This shift provided an institutional framework for initiatives such as the Western Province Literacy Project (WPLP)

and the Industrial Aid Society (IAS) (Curtis, 1971; NUSAS, 1971a, 1971b; Pretorius, n.d.; Ralekhetho, 1971a).

This ideological renewal unfolded against a backdrop of escalating state repression. The government responded to growing activism with harsher measures, including the Schlebusch Commission (1972) and the banning of key student leaders in 1973, severely limiting political space (Curtis, 1971; NUSAS, 1971a, 1971b; Pretorius, n.d.; Ralekhetho, 1971c). In this hostile environment, literacy projects were not merely educational interventions; they became acts of resistance, designed to empower communities and challenge the status quo under conditions of significant risk. This hostile environment was a direct response to the radical ideological framework the students adopted; the ultimate symbol of this political risk was the sustained legal attack on Paulo Freire's foundational text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, as well as all his other publications. The *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was initially banned by the then Censorship Board in May 1971. There was an application for review in 1977, because of the repeal of the previous (1963 Publication and Entertainment Act) legislation governing censorship, and replacement with new legislation in 1974 (*Publications Act* (42 of 1974)); but the banning was upheld by the new Directorate of Publications (IDP, 1977). In 1988, a new application for review was made (Van Niekerk, 1990); it was again declared undesirable (IDP, 1988). It is important to note that the ban applied to circulation and distribution, not to private possession. This hostile environment, a time marked by ideological clarity forged under the shadow of state oppression, defined the operational parameters, risk profile, and strategic necessity for the literacy projects. As discussed in Chapter Four, this historical context is critical for understanding the case studies that follow. It explains why literacy work was deeply political and why its operational strategies reflected both ideological clarity and practical necessity.

This section now turns to the findings for each of the five case studies investigated in this study. To ensure analytical coherence and facilitate comparison, each case is structured thematically around three key areas:

A) **Founding, Purpose, and Strategic Positioning**: In this section, I explore the project's origins, its stated mission, the internal ideological debates and tensions it faced, and its location within the broader liberation movement.

B) Size, Shape, and the Faces of the Movement: Here, I examine the scale of the project, the demographics of its facilitators and learners, and the gaps and silences present in the historical record.

C) Pedagogical Praxis: In this section, I describe the specific, on-the-ground teaching methodologies employed by the projects, and the challenges encountered in the classroom. Pedagogical praxis, in the Freirean sense, is a dynamic political process that begins with the learners' own lived experiences. These experiences are often captured in a 'code' which could either be a picture, story, or play, which is then 'decoded' through a critical, dialogical process. Learners move from description to an analysis of causes and, importantly, to a discussion of transformative action. It is this complete cycle of reflection and action that constitutes praxis.

Before I present the individual case studies, it is important to consider, from the data, the broader context within which they emerged from their perspective. As case studies are integrally connected to their context, each is impossible to truly understand without understanding this context.

6.4.1 The Literacy Projects in Context

This choice of study was driven by my personal interest in Freire and my desire to move beyond a general acknowledgement of his influence to investigate the extent to which South African 'Freirean' literacy projects of the 1970s and 1980s reflected a truly political, liberatory praxis as he intended. I sought to understand how these organisations interpreted his work and integrated it into their practices, to determine to what extent they were using his methodology, and whether or not they were reducing Freire to a 'teaching methodology as opposed to being used as a philosophy or social theory' (Aronowitz, 2012, p. 76).

In Chapter One, I outlined the student-led, worker education, service organisation, church-based, and BC-oriented projects I aimed to explore. Chapters Three and Four place these within the broader historical context of the time, including the specific anti-apartheid movements from which they emerged. As I argued there, the projects did not occur in a vacuum; they were forged in the crucible of apartheid's escalating turmoil. In this section, I provide a more in-depth analysis of this context, drawn from the data.

To understand the 'Freirean' literacy and community development projects of the early 1970s, it is important to situate them within the turbulent politics of the South African student movement at the time. The early 1970s were marked by ideological and organisational shifts within NUSAS, largely triggered by the emergence of SASO in 1969. By 1970, NUSAS faced a crisis: it debated disbandment and decided to continue, restructured into three wings, i.e. NUSED (the educational wing), NUSWEL (the social development wing), and the cultural wing, Aquarius (NUSAS, 1970, 1971, 1976). In a fact sheet to members in 1971, NUSAS president Paul Pretorius called 1970 a year of reassessment, 'one of numerous seminars, consultations, questionnaires, information programmes, requests for advice and ideas and a mass rethink on campuses… probably the most searching and valuable critique was that offered by SASO… White students were on their own and had to formulate a direction and meaningful policy for themselves' (Pretorius, 1972). Relations with SASO were initially fraught; although initial antagonism gave way to a 1971 resolution that NUSAS would not compete on Black campuses, accepting its White-dominated character for the foreseeable future (Ibid).

This period also saw growing interest in worker issues and community development. NUSAS member David Hemson produced an influential paper, *Students and Workers*, calling for Wages Commissions on every campus, and at the 1971 NUSAS Congress, Wages Commissions were prioritised (Hemson, 1971). The NUSWEL head, Ernest Ralekhetho's, report, *Programmes and Projects for 1971*, emphasised that student initiatives should evolve into community-run self-help projects, reflecting Rick Turner's influence on participatory development (Ralekhetho, 1971). To some extent, NUSAS's growing interest in workers can be seen as part of a shift in the organisation's analysis of apartheid South Africa. In his fact sheet, Pretorius (1972) argued that 'NUSAS began to question not only the premises that we had operated on in the sixties but also the values of a White capitalist society. Before students had rejected apartheid in society – now there were signs that society itself needed to be questioned and its values overhauled' (Pretorius, 1972).

Literacy had become an important project of UCM, and subsequently, of SASO, and inevitably also came to be high on the NUSAS agenda. Literacy had been identified by UCM as early as its 1968 Congress (at which Biko and Pityana were present) (UCM, 1968), and UCM staff and office bearers were trained by BLL from early 1970. A NUSWEL report in April 1971 noted: 'We co-operate particularly in the literacy campaign project [with UCM];

but regarding SASO, NUSWEL National will not co-operate with SASO in any project at all. This is due to the SASO official policy. However, contact is maintained on an informal basis, and I think this should be continued' (Ralekhetho, 1971b). UCM continued to work very closely with SASO. For UCM, literacy was seen as part of a broader political project, heavily influenced by the emerging BC of SAS. In his presidential address to UCM's 1970 Congress, Justice Moloto stated that 'all members of the UCM have a role to play in infusing a feeling of "black consciousness" among illiterate blacks through the literacy campaign' (Moloto, 1970). In mid-1971, fifteen UCM-related people (some of whom were also involved in NUSAS) attended a seminar to specifically look at Freirean methods. A letter from Basil Moore in August 1971 states, 'We are in the process of working out a new method of literacy teaching. This involves an enormous amount of work… basically, it is selecting a set of 'generative words' in a particular language which cover most of the syllables, getting pictures done illustrating the words, and eventually drawing up an instruction manual for teachers. The process was time-consuming because generative words needed to be created for each language, as well as for different contexts (e.g. urban versus rural) (Moore, 1971a).

Thus, it is not surprising that at the 1971 NUSAS Congress, literacy training was ranked third in the list of priority projects, with plans for small-scale, long-term projects using church halls after the failure of a large-scale campaign with UCM in the Transkei (Ralekhetho, 1971c). As UCM began to shift to Freire from BLL, so too did NUSAS, as noted in Jeanette Curtis's report on a NUSWEL seminar in late 1971, which contrasted the limitations of the existing method with the promise of the UCM approach, despite its English-language focus (Curtis, 1971). This 'second method' was often referred to as the Sabenta method, linked to Anne Hope and Sally Timmel's Freirean literacy work in Swaziland (Kilroe, 2019).

However, this period was also characterised by increasing state repression, with the Schlebusch Commission (1972) targeting NUSAS and UCM, and raids, passport withdrawals, and the banning of NUSAS leadership in April 1973. By 1976, affected by the negative fallout from the Schlebusch Commission's report on them, NUSAS shifted inward, resolving that campaigns should primarily target students, which contributed to the decline of community-linked projects (NUSAS, 1977).

The beginning of the UCM literacy work in Reiger Park, one of the student-led projects I have included in this study (together with the WPLP project in Cape Town), can be traced to a training workshop conducted by Anne Hope, as Pat Horn disclosed to me in an interview I

conducted in 2019: '*In that movement [UCM], we studied the methodology of Paulo Freire as a method of getting social change. We had a person called Anne Hope, who belonged to the GRAIL, and she trained us on the methodology as a method of student activism'* (Horn, Interview, 30 May 2019). As mentioned earlier, this training was conducted at Wilgespruit Conference Centre in late 1971 (Horn, Personal Communication, 09 October 2025), and involved a critique of their own educational experiences, giving them a practical understanding of Freire's 'banking model' of education (Favish, Interview, 7 August 2024). The core pedagogical approach, as described by Favish, was deeply Freirean (Favish, Interview, 7 August 2024). Consequently, the classes they established were grounded in the lived realities of the community, using discussions about relevant themes as the basis for learning.

Both Horn and Favish soon moved to Cape Town. There, their work transitioned into the WPLP. This new phase saw them collaborating with local leaders such as Zora Mehlomakhulu and Frank Ngudlwa and establishing community structures like the WPWAB (Horn, Interview, 30 May 2019; Budlender, Interview, 8 August 2024), which had grown out of the NUSAS Wages and Economic Commission on the UCT campus. This collaboration ensured the continuation of the literacy work, which had started through a UCM-NUSAS collaboration at UCT, and which was now also being taken over by emerging workers' committees, marking a shift from a student-led initiative to one increasingly integrated with the organised labour movement (Favish, Interview, 7 August 2024).

The IAS also grew out of the NUSAS Wages and Economic Commission established in 1973 at the University of the Witwatersrand to support the development of an independent trade union movement in South Africa. According to Moss (2014), this ultimately led 'to the formation of the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) in April 1979 and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) in December 1985' (p. 88). The IAS supported emerging trade unions, helping workers organise and advocate for their rights inter alia through worker education. However, it faced internal conflicts, funding issues, and the shifting political landscape (Hogan, Interview, 6 August 2024). This included a central ideological conflict, described as the 'workerist versus populist' divide by both Hogan and Brown. The workerist strategy prioritised economic, shop-floor struggles; the populist strategy saw the struggle in broader political terms, requiring a popular front (Brown, Interview, 7 August 2024). As Hogan explained: '*what emerged in the later years was the*

Workerist Movement, which said the site of the struggle was in the factories, and that is how we will win the revolution: factory by factory'. On the other hand, '*Populists would say the struggle is against the state and not against the employer*' (Hogan, Interview, 6 August 2024). These contrasting perspectives were not a mere theoretical debate, but were a defining ideological tension that shaped organisational strategies and pedagogical choices throughout the period.

As Barbara Hogan described, there was a '*growing conflict between those who wanted to keep the IAS strictly focused on providing non-political assistance and others pushing for a more activist, politically engaged approach*' (Hogan, Interview, 6 August 2024). This was initially a tension between the student-worker organisations that had emerged from wages commissions in different parts of the country. Hogan recounted that '*the IAS tried to do something that was more solidly organizationally based, more factory based, but that had more scope for popular mobilisation, and the line of thinking that came out of Durban was to focus on unions as unions, and they hated the idea of literacy, they didn't like anything to do with conscientisation*' (Interview, 6 August 2024). However, the tension eventually came to divide the IAS itself. This internal struggle was a direct, on-the-ground manifestation of the broader ideological debates within the labour movement, a fundamental tension that, as the evidence will show, directly influenced the IAS's practical work. With the emerging trade unions, IAS became redundant (Brown, Interview, 7 August 2024; Moss, Interview, 21 October 2024).

Learn and Teach was initiated in the mid-1970s by young White anti-apartheid activists as a learner-centred literacy organisation that employed Freirean methods to promote accessible adult education (Favish, Interview, 9 June 2019). Its publications targeted communities and contributed to strengthening their capacity for activism. As the political landscape in South Africa began to change in the early 1990s with the transition from apartheid, the focus on educational initiatives also evolved (Molobi, Interview, 13 November 2024). Learn and Teach faced difficulties in maintaining its relevance and funding in this new context. The organisation gradually ceased operations by the mid-1990s.

The TCOE (referring to the Trust for Christian Outreach and Education) was established in 1983. Its affiliate, Masifundise, based in Cape Town, was one of TCOE's founding organisations with literacy at the forefront of its organising drive. The literature and participant testimony reveal a project with a powerful dual foundation (Juta, Interview,14

August 2025). On the one hand, it had a strategic affiliation with the church through FedSem. On the other hand, its core political identity was rooted in the BC movement, linked directly to the legacy of Steve Biko's community programmes and driven by key figures from that tradition (Andrews, Interview, 26 May 2025). In 2013, as a strategic response to allow it to better align with its outreach mission while maintaining its commitment to social justice, the TCOE rebranded as the Trust for Community Outreach and Education (TCOE).

Umtapo Centre was founded in 1986 by prominent BC figures like Strini Moodley, and it represents a case study of a project that is explicitly and unapologetically rooted in the BC movement. Umtapo emerged during a period of heightened violence in KwaZulu-Natal (Naicker, 25 July 2024). The literature and interviews frame it as an organisation that consciously used BC's philosophy of psychological liberation and self-reliance with a Freirean-inspired pedagogy to foster community mobilisation and critical consciousness. As South Africa transitioned away from apartheid in the early 1990s, and the context for community engagement and education began to shift, Umtapo Centre faced a similar fate to that of Learn and Teach. The changing political landscape made securing sustainable funding impossible. In the late 1990s, the organisation gradually diminished in its activities as funding dwindled.

6.4.2 Student Movement-Related Projects: The Reiger Park Literacy Classes and the Western Province Literacy Project

The Reiger Park Literacy Classes and the Western Cape Literacy Project were among the earliest student-led experiments with Freirean praxis in South Africa. They emerged out of UCM, the political crisis that engulfed NUSAS in 1970, and NUSAS's contested relationship with SASO. They illustrate how White student activists sought to engage with Black communities through literacy work, while navigating the constraints of racial identity, organisational legitimacy, and state repression.

A. Founding, Purpose, and Strategic Positioning

The literacy projects that rose from the student movements of the early 1970s were born from a convergence of national organising and a radical ideological shift. As should be clear from the earlier discussion, by 1970, UCM, SASO and NUSAS were all intensely interested in literacy as a form of social action. The literacy work conducted by UCM in Reiger Park emerged as a strategic initiative for White activists seeking to contribute to the liberation

movement, particularly in light of SASO's stance that they should not directly engage in Black community work (Horn, Interview, 25 July 2024).

Sparg (n.d.) situates these projects within a 'proliferation of independent community organisations' that had a 'rich history of resistance' (p. 1). She confirms that the shared vision was one of 'empowerment' and ending apartheid, with methods and content that were 'fundamentally different to the literacy provided by the state and industry' (p. 1). Initially, however, these efforts were based on the BLL methods, with widespread training of volunteers across the country (NUSAS, 1970a)

An attendance register from one such training shows the early involvement of a number of people who were to become prominent in literacy work, such as Pat Horn and Barbara Hogan (NUSAS, 1970b).

A pivotal ideological turning point occurred at a series of seminars at the Wilgespruit Conference Centre in 1971. A key workshop, led by Anne Hope, and almost certainly organised by UCM, was instrumental in introducing activists like Pat Horn, Barbara Hogan, and Judy Favish to Freirean methodology. Favish recalls:

> *We were invited to come together to a workshop in Wilgespruit. Wilgespruit was quite an important meeting place for us in Joburg because it was one of the few places you could go to be in a non-racial group, sleep together, and eat together, and so on and so on... It was a symbolic place, and we all valued it a lot, but for this particular occasion, there was a woman called Anne Hope. Anne Hope had spent time with Paulo Freire in Brazil, and she had been asked by the University Christian Movement to come and join people in the Freirean approach to community development and literacy teaching. So, we had this week-long workshop, which was just, I think for me, …I can't remember the details of the workshop, but it was the most amazing experience; it just blew my mind because it really made you interrogate all of your assumptions about education, about teaching, about the purposes of education.* (Favish, Interview, 7 August 2024).

Hogan corroborates this memory: Wilgespruit was where we '*learned... about Paulo Freire and the Pedagogy of the Oppressed, conscientisation, all of that literacy work*' (Hogan, Interview, 6 August 2024). This training marked a deliberate shift away from the initial BLL's technical approach towards a liberatory, 'socio-psychological' Freirean model focused on fostering critical consciousness.

Initially, as the archival record shows, there was a degree of collaboration in the early literacy campaigns. However, as the BC philosophy crystallised, a principled disengagement from White-led liberal organisations became a central tenet. This growing ideological rift is captured in a 1971 SASO report, which sharply criticised NUSAS as a 'bunch of liberal hypocrites' (SASO, 1970). While this quote reflects the height of the ideological antagonism, it is important to understand it as part of a complex and shifting relationship and not as the final word. It was this tense political landscape that the early, often mixed-race, literacy projects like Reiger Park had to navigate.

The Reiger Park Literacy Classes, which were initiated in Reiger Park, a 'coloured' township in Boksburg, represent an important case study of an early attempt to practically apply Freire's pedagogical theories within the South African anti-apartheid struggle in this period. It seems likely that the classes began in late 1971. A letter from Basil Moore to the chair of UCM in September 1971 reports that a number of English literacy classes would be piloted in December of that year: 'A group in Johannesburg (largely Wits students) … is in the process of devising a method of teaching English to adults who are literate in the vernacular, but not in English and also may not be able to speak English. At this stage all that can be said of the method is that it is a method based on conversation and in this sense is closely related to what we are developing in vernacular literacy'. The classes would be held in the evenings, after work (Moore, 1971b). By January 1972, Moore was able to report that the English literacy project was underway, having started in early December 1971, with eight teachers helping about twenty-four people at St Mary's and other places more convenient for the people involved (Moore, 1971c).

According to my research participants, the classes aimed not only to teach literacy, but also to foster critical consciousness. Reiger Park classes were conducted at St. Anthony's Catholic Church (Horn, Interview, 25 July 2024), where the Dominican nuns offered literacy classes during the day (Cornell, n.d.), and SACHED ran matric English classes at night, with the UCM English literacy classes as an add-on. The night school operated in defiance of apartheid laws because they were '*suspected of being communist-inspired, and we heard that the police sometimes came by day to complain about the literacy'* (Ibid.). In Chapter Four, I stated that the apartheid state had banned all African night schools, thus making Reiger Park classes a site of resistance. Favish and Horn taught around the same time, with Hogan joining later.

Before I discuss the WPLP it is important that I paint a picture of the Cape Town context at the time. The literature and participant interviews reveal that the Cape Town student and activist scene of the 1970s and early 1980s was a particularly fertile ground for the fusion of activism and education. It was a complex and synergistic ecosystem from which several key literacy initiatives emerged, often with activists moving fluidly between different projects and ideological currents.

The scene's origins, as described by Debbie Budlender (a UCT student involved in NUSAS), lie in the vibrant student activism at UCT in the early 1970s. The end of 1972 marked a turning point for the student-led literacy movement. With the official disbandment of the UCM and the conclusion of the Reiger Park literacy classes where they had been teaching, activists like Judy Favish and Pat Horn sought a new vehicle for their work, and this led to their co-founding of the WPLP:

> *We started in Cape Town in 1974, the whole of 1975, then worked for the first few months of '76, and then I moved across to Durban... It was just before the Soweto thing happened because that happened when I had just moved here* [to Durban]. (Horn, Interview, 25 July 2024)

As per the national restructuring, UCT's NUSAS branch was organised into three wings, with NUSWEL involved in literacy work and the Wages Commission at this point engaged in setting up a worker Advice Bureau. Budlender recalls a key 1972 NUSWEL initiative, which was a door-to-door campaign in Mannenberg and Cape Flats where students engaged directly with residents, accompanied by training in group facilitation, a core skill for participatory work (Budlender, Personal Communication, 11 October 2025). Budlender also recalls an independent literacy training initiative, the Western Province Literacy Project, being set up by former Wits students and UCM members, Judy Favish and Pat Horn, who brought with them the pedagogical and political insights from the Wilgespruit trainings and the Reiger Park classes. Budlender and others involved in the Mannenberg project and Workers Advice Bureau received training from this group, and became involved in WPLP (Budlender, Personal Communication, 11 October 2025). Initially, the project collaborated with emerging workers' organisations, such as the WPWAB, which had itself emerged out of the UCT NUSAS Wages and Economics Commission:

> This is what happened:
>
> A group of white students led by Jeanette Curtis (later Schoon) made contact with the SACTU underground through Elijah Loza. Unions were too dangerous. So they decided to form the Western Province Workers' Advice Bureau (WPWAB). Loza brought Zora Mehlomakhulu to one of the meetings at the old Christian Institute. In 1963, as a young woman, she had been the last SACTU official in Cape Town before SACTU was forced to close down.
>
> The WPWAB's tactics were breathtakingly simple. Pamphlets were handed out at railway stations, and the students published a newspaper called *Abasebenzi*. (GPY, 2001).

As a result, the WPLP comprised a diverse mix of activist-facilitators, involving not only White university students, but also labour movement stalwarts like Zora Mehlomakhulu and Barnett Ntsodo (Budlender, Interview, 8 August 2024). Favish recognised the need for continued educational support and subsequently trained most of the facilitators involved in this project (Budlender, Interview, 8 August 2024). According to Favish, '*we* [as the WPLP] *ran literacy groups for Advice Bureau members and I was part of the Workers Advisory project which advised on matters of policy and strategy*' (Favish, Personal Communication, 16 May 2025). This highlights a crucial synergy in that the Wits-trained activists provided the specific Freirean pedagogical framework, while the UCT student structures provided the organisational energy and the connection to local community struggles.

A key archival document from 1975, a flyer for the project (UCT SRC Press, 1975), provides a powerful and unambiguous statement of its founding purpose:

WESTERN PROVINCE LITERACY PROJECT

At the beginning of this year the Western Province Literacy Project was set up in an attempt to provide literacy classes to workers. It is our belief that illiteracy not only diminished the quality of the life of the worker, but also makes it extremely difficult for all the workers to come together and organise to their advantage. Illiterate workers, while not ignorant, are prevented from learning as much as they would like about their situation in order to see what could be done to achieve change. The ability to read and write, in both English and Xhosa will obviously also assist workers in their negotiations with Management.

We believe that while learning to read and write workers should discuss their common problems with a view to getting a better understanding of these problems so that they can see what needs to be done to solve them. We provide classes in Xhosa and English and work with people who are completely illiterate, and also people who can read and write but wish to improve and learn more about other things e.g. South African history.

If you would like to learn to read and write you should come to 88, Station Road, Observatory (Tel:55-9915) or go to the Western Province Advice Bureau, 9, Benbow Building, Beverley Street, Athlone, on Monday, Wednesday or Thursday evenings from 6.00 - 8.00 p.m. or leave a message there during the day and we will contact you. Or at St.Gabriel's Church (I Caure Yase Roma) N.Y.5 Guguletu from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

We also need people who would like to teach others how to read and write, so if you would like to do this, please let us know.

Figure 1: Extract from Abasebenzi No. 4, May 1975, UCT SRC Press

The document makes it clear that the project's mission was explicitly political and counter-hegemonic, in stating that:

> At the beginning of this year[4], the Western Province Literacy Project was set up in an attempt to provide literacy classes to workers. It is our belief that illiteracy not only diminished the quality of the life of the worker, but also makes it extremely difficult for all the workers to come together and organise to their advantage. (UCT SRC Press, 1975).

Classes were conducted in communities such as Gugulethu and Langa, including at a tuberculosis hospital, a testament to the project's commitment to accessibility and community engagement (Budlender, Interview, 8 August 2024), but also at the Western Province Advice Bureau's offices in Athlone, as is evident from the extract (Figure 1). This strategic positioning within the broader labour movement highlights the project's mission to foster literacy as a means of empowerment and social transformation. It frames the project as a

[4] As should be clear, Horn says that the WPLP's main activities commenced in 1974 (Horn, Interview, 25 July 2024). However, Favish, one of the founders said that 'the Western Province Literacy Project (WPLP) was closed after my banning order, then started again in 1975' (Interview, 7 August 2024); this would account for the discrepancy.

direct intervention designed to overcome a key obstacle to worker organisation rather than as a neutral educational service, a statement echoed and confirmed by Favish (Favish, Personal Communication, 16 May 2025).

Favish recalls that the WPLP was instrumental in supporting the early development of trade unions in the region. At the same time, the project sought to strengthen workers' committees as an alternative to formal trade unions, focusing on building workers' capacity for collective action. This work continued until 1976, when key activists Horn, Favish, and Budlender were banned under the Suppression of Communism Act, effectively curtailing the project's activities (Favish, Interview, 7 August 2024). According to Horn, the overarching goal was to empower workers, raise awareness of their rights, and support union organisations (Interview, 18 May 2024). As can be seen from the extract, the project wanted to help workers learn as much as possible about their situation, in order to work out what they could do to change it. Together, Favish and Horn sought to challenge the oppressive system and advocate for social change (Budlender, Interview, 8 August 2024; Kell, Interview, 27 September 2024).

The very act of teaching in the Reiger Park and WPLP projects was a form of political defiance, conducted in a climate of intense fear and state repression. Educators had to navigate logistical and personal challenges, including late-night travel and unsafe commutes. Yet, the classes persisted. An anecdote from the SACHED archives, for instance, recalls how the Dominican nuns who hosted the Reiger Park programme dealt with police inquiries. One nun reportedly told the police she had posted notices to stop the classes, but lamented that the learners tragically 'couldn't read them, so they kept coming' (Cornell, n.d.). This story, whether apocryphal or not, captures the quiet defiance and resilience that characterised the pedagogical space.

B. Size, Shape, and the Faces of the Movement

The Reiger Park classes and Western Cape Literacy Project are best understood as student-led interventions driven by the political imperatives of the era. They were not 'grassroots' initiatives emerging organically from within the communities themselves. In fact, the participant narratives suggest that these were projects initiated by students who chose where to conduct them. This decision was almost certainly influenced by the strong strategic emphasis placed on community engagement by all the major student organisations, SASO, UCM, and NUSAS, as they sought to bridge the gap between the university and the lived reality of the oppressed. Favish recalls that Anne Hope's training, '*helped us see the world*

differently… and understand the basis of the nature of the oppression that people experienced, the underlying structural causes of that oppression' (Favish, Interview, 7 August 2024).

While the specific rationale for selecting the Reiger Park site, for example, is not explicitly detailed in the available accounts, the project's implementation demonstrates a commitment to operating within community spaces. The Reiger Park classes were held in accessible locations like St. Anthony's Catholic Church and facilitators' own homes (as in the case of Favish, who ran classes in the flat where she lived (Favish, Interview, 7 August 2024). Favish and Horn taught around the same time, with Hogan joining later. It would seem that certainly by the time Barbara Hogan was part of the Reiger Park initiative, the literacy classes were being run simultaneously with a SACHED night school initiative at St. Anthony's. One of those involved in the SACHED classes describes the St. Anthony's night school as a challenging environment, with classes of up to 200 'tired adults... miners, nurses, domestic workers' taught by activists like Angela Norman (from SACHED, which worked closely with both UCM and NUSAS) and Barbara Hogan under the constant threat of police intervention (Cornell, n.d.).

The learners primarily consisted of working-class individuals, many of whom were employed in factories and hostels. Notably, men dominated the classes, highlighting the gender dynamics within the worker movement (Horn, Interview, 25 July 2024). As noted by Budlender, her work in townships was conducted clandestinely, since it required her presence in these areas without official permission (Budlender, Interview, 8 August 2024). Both the Reiger Park classes and the WPLP share a common limitation, which is that there are no direct learner profiles available for either initiative. In subsequent years, Budlender became involved in the ALP, a separate initiative that adopted the Freirean methodology. While the learner narratives she collated within ALP do not describe WPLP participants, they provide valuable insight into the kinds of experiences, aspirations, and generative themes that shaped literacy work during this period. These stories suggest profiles of learners who were predominantly migrant workers, often separated from their families, and motivated by a desire for self-improvement and empowerment. For this reason, they offer a plausible though necessarily tentative basis for inferring what might have informed WPLP pedagogy. These assumptions remain interpretive rather than definitive, serving primarily to illuminate

possible continuities within the broader literacy movement rather than to claim empirical certainty about WPLP learners.

C. Pedagogical Practice

The Reiger Park initiative was conceived as a vehicle for political education rather than as a literacy programme. Literacy was taught alongside political awareness: '*we started then responding to things like churches and so on who had adults who wanted to be literate and empowered in the general political sense in the way that Freire(anism) empowers'* (Horn, Interview, 25 July 2024), with classes incorporating discussions of learners' common problems.

According to Favish, they practised trying to do surveys to find out what people's issues were, a process which would form the basis of the generative codes, followed by a description of syllable breakdown and discussions (Favish, Interview, 7 August 2024). Facilitators employed Freirean methods centred on 'generative codes' which used pictures and symbols to spark dialogue. From these discussions, 'generative words' were identified, drawn directly from learners' lived experiences, and then used as the basis for the literacy curriculum. Horn explained: *'We basically got involved with adult literacy and using Paulo Freire methods because the purpose was social change'* (Interview, 30 May 2019). Favish similarly described how classroom dialogues were structured to move from description to analysis and ultimately to transformative action (Interview, 7 August 2024.) This dialogical, problem-posing pedagogy transformed literacy classes into culture circles, where the curriculum was generated from learners' shared problems and oriented toward collective action.

The WPLP extended the Freirean approach by embedding literacy within broader political education. Teachers developed their own instructional materials, but also incorporated learners' writings and experiences, ensuring that the content resonated with participants' realities (Budlender, Interview, 8 August 2024). Within this orbit, as Kell emphasised, literacy was treated as a tool for societal transformation, not merely skill acquisition (Interview, 27 September 2024).

The *Abasebenzi* newsletter was central to the literacy initiative, serving both as a mass communication tool distributed at factory gates and as a classroom text. Budlender recalled how the newsletter was used to raise awareness of union activities while simultaneously

functioning as a pedagogical resource within literacy classes (Interview, 8 August 2024). A typical literacy class followed the Freirean method of dialogue and problem-posing. As Favish explains, sessions often began with a simple question such as '*So what do you see in the picture?*' From this discussion, a generative word would emerge, such as '*abasebenzi* (workers)', prompting learners to reflect on the conditions of workers in South Africa and the issues they faced. The word would then be written on the board, and participants would manipulate its letters to form new words, reinforcing reading skills while sustaining critical discussion (Favish, Interview, 7 August 2024). This dual praxis illustrates the activists' resourcefulness in that a single medium could serve both political campaigning and classroom education. The excerpt from the *Abasebenzi* newsletter (Figure 1) confirms this emphasis on starting with the learners: 'We believe that while learning to read and write, workers should discuss their common problems with a view to getting a better understanding of these problems so that they can see what needs to be done to solve them' (UCT SRC Press, 1975). The flyer also reveals that the classes were not limited to the 'completely illiterate', but extended to those who could already read and write but wanted to deepen their knowledge. Importantly, the project adopted a multilingual approach, offering classes in both English and Xhosa to meet the diverse needs of the workers, and hence involving both White and Black facilitators. This method encouraged participants to analyse their own social contexts and articulate strategies for change. Flexibility in the approach was emphasised, with facilitators adapting materials to remain relevant to learners' lives. Yet challenges persisted because workers were often exhausted from their jobs, and multilingual classrooms complicated communication.

A defining feature of the Western Cape literacy orbit, including the WPLP, was its participatory governance structure. The Learners' Controlling Committee, composed of elected learner representatives, ensured that the programme remained genuinely learner-centred. Steinberg and Suttner (1991) note that these committees enhanced learner autonomy and accountability, while Von Holdt explained that each class elected representatives who then formed a leadership team, mirroring broader community structures such as street and school committees (Interview, 9 August 2024). In this way, WPLP pedagogy was inseparable from the wider struggle for people's power.

The durability of these Freirean principles became evident after WPLP ended. The use of picture codes continued in the ALP which succeeded it (and in which Debbie Budlender

became involved), demonstrating how pedagogical innovations developed within WPLP were carried forward into later literacy work. This continuity sustained the emphasis on dialogical, problem-posing education and reinforced the link between literacy and social transformation.

6.4.3 The student-worker nexus: The Industrial Aid Society (IAS)

Whilst the WPLP shows the emerging overlap between student activism and the worker movement, this alliance is formalised in the literacy classes of the IAS. The IAS, based in Johannesburg, grew out of NUSAS's Wages Commission at Wits University and embodied the political turn toward student-worker alliances in the mid-1970s. It was rooted in the ferment of labour militancy following the Durban strikes of 1973. As I described in Chapter Four, Moss (2014) argues that the IAS explicitly aligned itself with Freirean principles, linking literacy and numeracy to union education and worker consciousness. Its trajectory highlights how student activism migrated into worker education, and how literacy became a tool for collective empowerment within the broader struggle against apartheid.

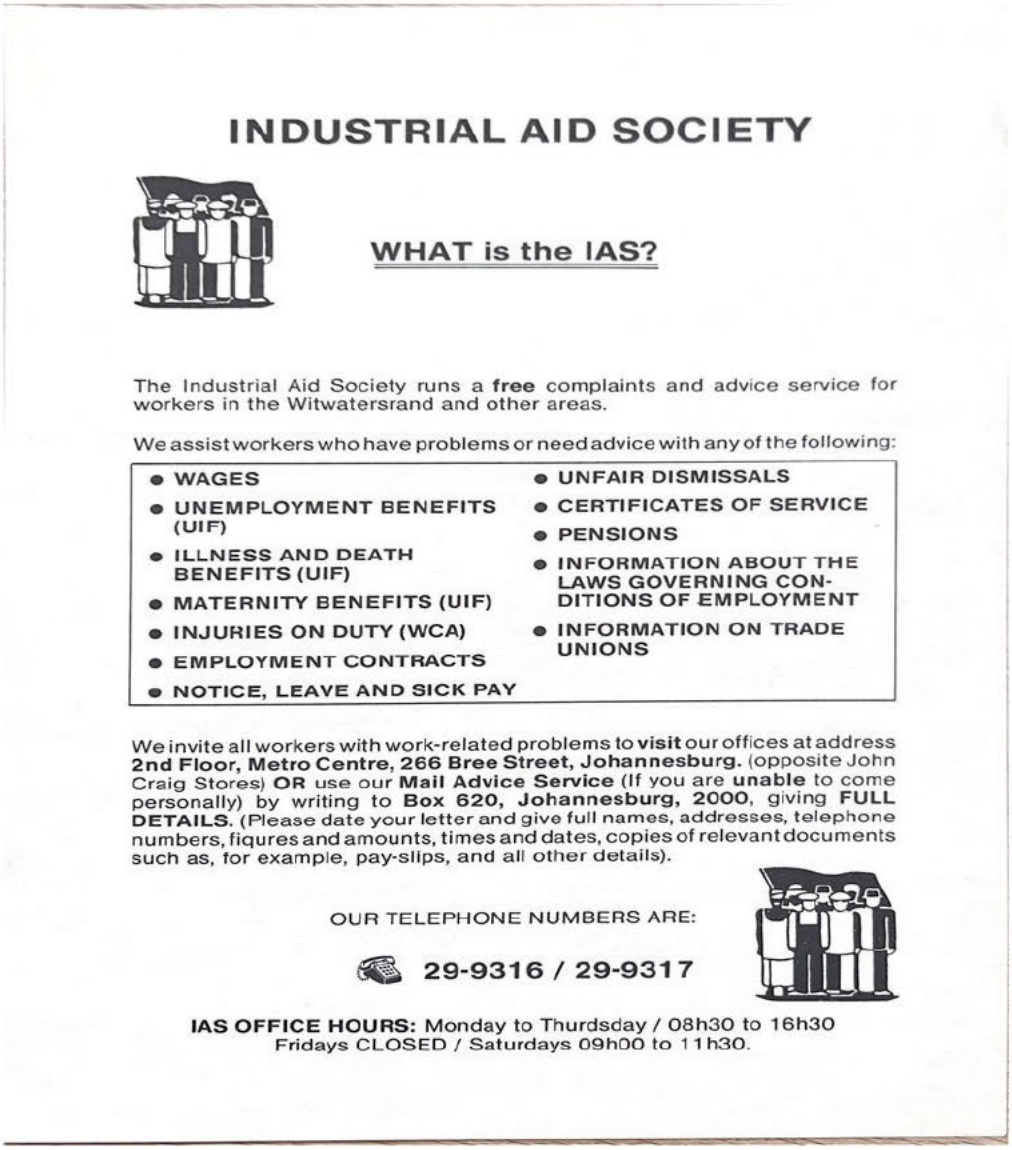
A. Founding, Purpose, and Strategic Positioning

According to Dekker (1974 –1975), the IAS was formally established in March 1974 under the *Friendly Societies Act of 1956* (Act 25 of 1956) The *Friendly Societies Act* was designed to regulate and support the establishment of societies that aimed to provide financial and social assistance to their members, particularly in times of need, such as illness, unemployment, or other hardships. This legal status likely served as a protective cover for what was, from its inception, a deeply political project.

The IAS was born from a complex and contested coalition, with its origin story itself becoming a site of ideological struggle. Hogan situates its founding within the ANC-SACTU network as an evolution of the NUSAS Wages Commissions, deliberately established as an Advice Office rather than a union to provide a 'safe space' for workers (Hogan, Interview, 6 August 2024). In contrast, Brown recalls it as a project initiated by Steven Friedman and Jeanette Curtis (who had both held leadership positions in NUSAS and were both Administrative Organisers of IAS at some point). Yet another source, the minutes from an IAS Steering Committee meeting in 1973, suggests it came from a 'group of African workers' (Industrial Aid Society, 1973). In Moss's opinion, '*the Industrial Aid Society was not a trade union. It was prefigurative of trade unions. It was set up predominantly to deal with, to create bridgeheads, to move into a process of constituting trade unions and*

organising workers' (Moss, Interview, 21 October 2024). These conflicting narratives reveal a fundamental tension between a top-down, student-led initiative and a bottom-up, worker-driven movement that was encoded in the IAS DNA. Despite this, a common purpose was evident: working directly with workers to build a worker movement with a Constitution aligning with that of the Western Province Workers Advice Bureau (WPWAB). This was the resolution taken by the IAS Interim Committee (Industrial Aid Society, 1974b) A stance which sought to build an organised, worker-led movement with shared principles, strategies, and protections.

The stated intention of the IAS was to offer free advice and services to workers in the Witwatersrand area who faced work-related issues such as wages, unfair dismissals, unemployment benefits, and discrimination, as the following flyer (IAS, n.d.a) suggests:



INDUSTRIAL AID SOCIETY

WHAT is the IAS?

The Industrial Aid Society runs a **free** complaints and advice service for workers in the Witwatersrand and other areas.

We assist workers who have problems or need advice with any of the following:

- **WAGES**
- **UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS (UIF)**
- **ILLNESS AND DEATH BENEFITS (UIF)**
- **MATERNITY BENEFITS (UIF)**
- **INJURIES ON DUTY (WCA)**
- **EMPLOYMENT CONTRACTS**
- **NOTICE, LEAVE AND SICK PAY**
- **UNFAIR DISMISSALS**
- **CERTIFICATES OF SERVICE**
- **PENSIONS**
- **INFORMATION ABOUT THE LAWS GOVERNING CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT**
- **INFORMATION ON TRADE UNIONS**

We invite all workers with work-related problems to **visit** our offices at address **2nd Floor, Metro Centre, 266 Bree Street, Johannesburg.** (opposite John Craig Stores) **OR** use our **Mail Advice Service** (If you are **unable** to come personally) by writing to **Box 620, Johannesburg, 2000**, giving **FULL DETAILS.** (Please date your letter and give full names, addresses, telephone numbers, figures and amounts, times and dates, copies of relevant documents such as, for example, pay-slips, and all other details).

OUR TELEPHONE NUMBERS ARE:

29-9316 / 29-9317

IAS OFFICE HOURS: Monday to Thurdsday / 08h30 to 16h30
Fridays CLOSED / Saturdays 09h00 to 11h30.

Figure 2: A flyer for the IAS (SAHA AL2457/M8.3)

Glenn Moss (who had been involved in NUSAS at Wits and later became the IAS's Administrative Organiser) argued that the IAS was designed *'to empower workers and build an independent labour movement'* (Moss, Interview, 21 October, 2024). A key activity was worker education, and '*some of the early trade union organisers actually doubled as literacy coordinators in the evenings. So, they would actually be organising in the factories during the day, and in the evening, they would actually be meeting with some of the factory groups around literacy training and around worker education*' (Moss, Interview 21 October, 2024). As the archival minutes and interviews show, this education involved workshops and discussion groups focused on political theory, labour history, and the practical skills of union organising, such as understanding factory law and shop-steward training (Industrial Aid Society, 1974a). This was the core of its mission to build the *'foundations of an independent trade union movement'* (Moss, Interview, 21 October, 2024). Alongside this, the IAS also ran a dedicated literacy programme, led by facilitators like Barbara Hogan and Susan Brown (Industrial Aid Society, 1974c).

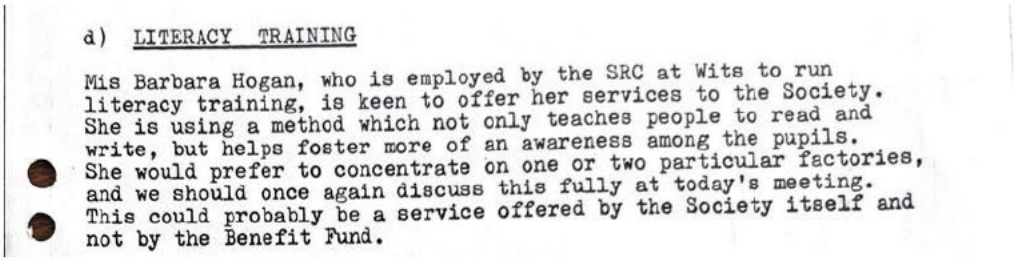
While this programme was seen as an essential component of empowering workers, the evidence suggests that it was often viewed as a distinct, and sometimes secondary, activity to the main project of political worker education. Understanding the relationship and, at times, the tension, between these two educational streams is central to analysing the internal dynamics and pedagogical praxis of the IAS. The close connection to NUSAS meant that many founders came from a '*relatively tight group of student activists, leading to a fluid transition of roles: you were a student one minute, you were a student leader the next minute, you were an embryonic trade unionist... a political activist the next minute*' (Moss, Interview, 21 October 2024). This fluidity contributed to debates over leadership and strategic direction.

However, the fluidity was not without its problems and created major organisational instability in the project's early days. The archival record provides a clear timeline of this instability through the rapid succession of leadership in the key role of Administrative Organiser during 1974. As of March 23rd, the position was held by Jeanette Curtis (Industrial Aid Society, 1974d). By September 7th (Industrial Aid Society, 1974e), the minutes show that Steven Friedman, who had also been serving in this role, resigned from the Committee. This vacancy was then filled by Glenn Moss, who had been the President of the Wits Student Representative Council (SRC). He was first appointed as Temporary Administrative

Organiser in November 1974 (Industrial Aid Society, 1974f), and then formally as the Administrative Organiser on December 18th, 1974 (Industrial Aid Society, 1974h).

This quick turnover, culminating in the appointment of a prominent student leader like Moss, is significant, as it highlights the immense pressures on the young activists and provides a clear, documented example of the direct pipeline of leadership flowing from the formal student movement into the emerging worker movement. At the same time, the 1974 resignation letter of Jeanette Curtis serves as a stark illustration of some of the organisational issues of the different interests involved. She lamented a growing disconnect between the leadership committee and the on-the-ground work, stating, 'I must express my extreme concern that the committee seems increasingly removed from involvement in the work... I frankly do not see this happening at present' (Curtis, 1974). Curtis's frustration highlights a classic problem in volunteer-led movements: the difficulty of keeping a strategic leadership body deeply connected to the demanding, day-to-day 'practical work' of the organisation.

From early on in its history, Barbara Hogan was offering her services to IAS, bringing in her Reiger Park experience (and methodology), as reported in the minutes:



a) LITERACY TRAINING

Mis Barbara Hogan, who is employed by the SRC at Wits to run literacy training, is keen to offer her services to the Society. She is using a method which not only teaches people to read and write, but helps foster more of an awareness among the pupils. She would prefer to concentrate on one or two particular factories, and we should once again discuss this fully at today's meeting. This could probably be a service offered by the Society itself and not by the Benefit Fund.

Figure 3: Extract from the IAS Meeting Minutes, 1973-1974

B. Size, Shape, and the Faces of the Organisation

As should be clear from the discussion so far, a key and complex feature of the IAS was the role of White university graduates. As Susan Brown recalls, many White students were *'seeking a role'* in the national liberation struggle (Brown, Interview, 7 August 2024). This speaks directly to the dilemma faced by White radicals in the era of BC, According to Brown, while Biko's famous injunction was for White allies to *'go back and organise White people'*, this was widely seen as a *'dead end'*, leaving many searching for their place within organisations like the IAS, which operated at the crucial intersection of student and worker

politics. However, as should be clear from the evidence thus far, the IAS also included a number of Black worker activists, many of whom doubled as literacy facilitators.

One of these was Phindile Mfeti, who, '*during the day was an organiser for the embryonic metal union structures and in the evening was doing literacy and worker education training*' (Moss, Interview, 21 October 2024). Minutes from an IAS meeting dated 6 November 1974 record that Mfeti would dress in overalls, 'trying to look like a worker', as he worked to organise outside factories (Industrial Aid Society, 1974), to keep a low profile because he was often targeted for his activism (Hogan, Interview, 6 August 2024). Mfeti was seriously harassed by the apartheid police, who would abduct him, taking him to John Vorster Square, where he would endure brutal beatings throughout the weekend. On one occasion, Hogan recalled carrying him out after a session of severe violence, his jaw broken and barely able to walk: '*You have no idea of the level of oppression*' (Hogan, Interview, 6 August 2024). Mfeti's subsequent disappearance was one of those investigated by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

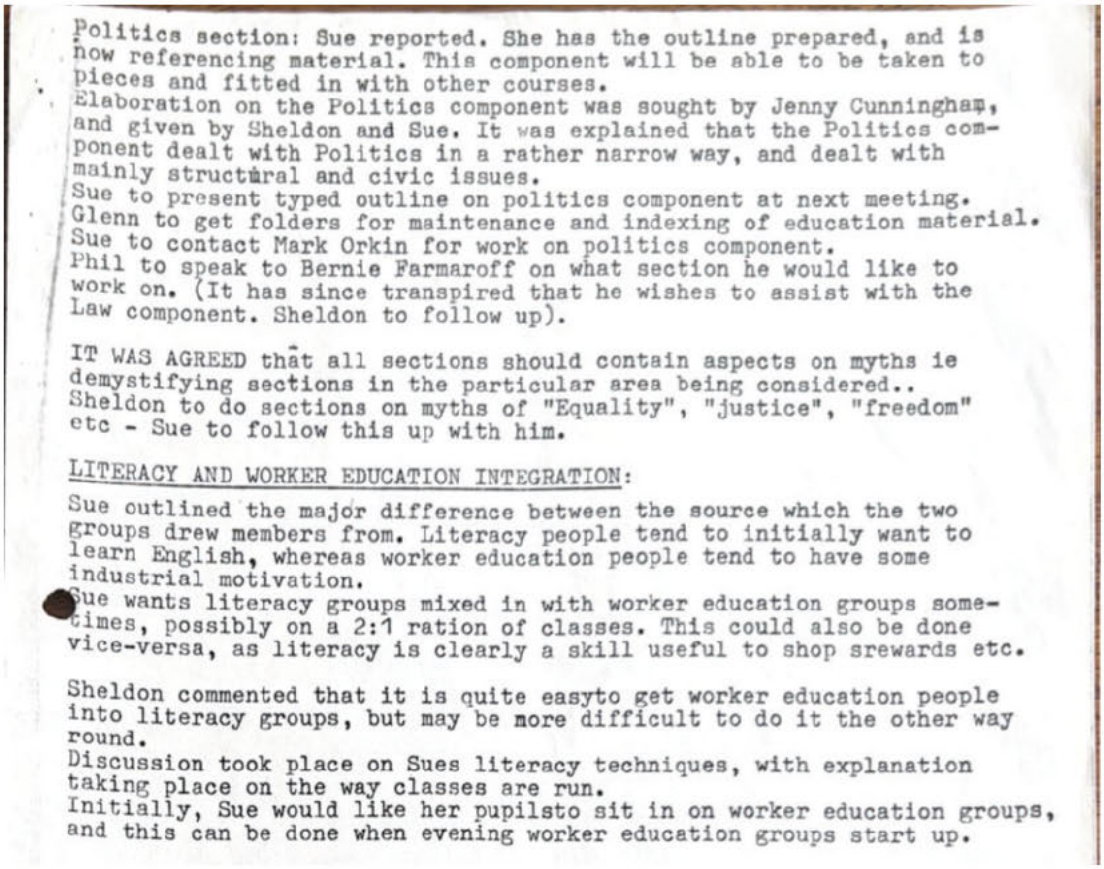
According to Brown (Interview, 7 August 2024) the learners were primarily Zulu-speaking migrant workers residing in Soweto hostels. Their motivations were clear and pragmatic, and that was to learn English to read pay slips, newspapers, and the Bible (Ibid.). However, like the student-led projects, the direct voices of these learners are entirely absent from the records, a silence that is itself a crucial finding about whose stories were preserved.

C. Pedagogical Practice

The educational work of the IAS was a direct reflection of its ideological commitments. The organisation's literacy was evidently never offered at scale, and was under-resourced: Hogan spoke about taking '*small stools from the university to Brixton... and using a door as their desk*', a testament to their commitment (Hogan, Interview, 6 August 2024). The stated goal was not just literacy, but one of fostering critical consciousness, and Barbara Hogan clearly brought this intention and the methodology she had been using to the project.

While the interviews describe the different streams of the IAS's work, a key archival document (Industrial Aid Society, 1974), provides a vivid snapshot of the organisation grappling with exactly how to integrate its two educational projects: the political worker education project and the foundational literacy programme. The document details a

discussion on curriculum development, focusing on the integration of literacy and worker education, as this extract shows (Figure 4):



Politics section: Sue reported. She has the outline prepared, and is now referencing material. This component will be able to be taken to pieces and fitted in with other courses.
Elaboration on the Politics component was sought by Jenny Cunningham, and given by Sheldon and Sue. It was explained that the Politics component dealt with Politics in a rather narrow way, and dealt with mainly structural and civic issues.
Sue to present typed outline on politics component at next meeting.
Glenn to get folders for maintenance and indexing of education material.
Sue to contact Mark Orkin for work on politics component.
Phil to speak to Bernie Farmaroff on what section he would like to work on. (It has since transpired that he wishes to assist with the Law component. Sheldon to follow up).

IT WAS AGREED that all sections should contain aspects on myths ie demystifying sections in the particular area being considered..
Sheldon to do sections on myths of "Equality", "justice", "freedom" etc - Sue to follow this up with him.

LITERACY AND WORKER EDUCATION INTEGRATION:

Sue outlined the major difference between the source which the two groups drew members from. Literacy people tend to initially want to learn English, whereas worker education people tend to have some industrial motivation.
Sue wants literacy groups mixed in with worker education groups sometimes, possibly on a 2:1 ration of classes. This could also be done vice-versa, as literacy is clearly a skill useful to shop srewards etc.

Sheldon commented that it is quite easyto get worker education people into literacy groups, but may be more difficult to do it the other way round.
Discussion took place on Sues literacy techniques, with explanation taking place on the way classes are run.
Initially, Sue would like her pupilsto sit in on worker education groups, and this can be done when evening worker education groups start up.

Figure 4: Excerpt from IAS Meeting Minutes, 1973-1974, File ZA HPRA AH 1585

As can be seen, a commitment to ‘demystifying myths’ is stated, with specific political concepts like ‘Equality’, ‘Justice’ and ‘Freedom’ being assigned to facilitators. There was then a focused discussion on the relationship between the worker education and literacy projects (Industrial Aid Society,1974f).

This document is important for several reasons: a) It provides irrefutable evidence that the IAS was attempting to create a single, integrated pedagogical project, actively resisting the separation of ‘basic skills’ from ‘political education’; b) The debate over the ‘2:1 ratio’ is a concrete manifestation of the ideological ‘workerist versus populist’ tensions, revealing a practical negotiation over priorities. It is possible that these tensions were not only abstract but reflected the positional differences between Wits-based student activists, mainly aligned with NUSAS, and factory-based organisers embedded in shop-floor realities. This divergence may have shaped contrasting views on whether resources should prioritise worker education

or broader political mobilisation; c) The explicit inclusion of concepts like ‘equality’ and ‘justice’ in worker education, coupled with the desire to integrate this into literacy classes, confirms that even the most basic literacy work was intended to be a vehicle for political conscientisation.

This document provides a glimpse into the complex, on-the-ground reality of trying to build a truly integrated and liberatory praxis. However, the most powerful and unambiguous evidence of the IAS’s liberatory pedagogical intent is found in two foundational documents from their archives, which serve as a blueprint for applying Freirean principles. Both are in a folder labelled ‘Teaching and Learning’, which includes an excerpt on ‘codes’ (Industrial Aid Society, n.d.b). The second is a document titled ‘Who are your learners?’ (Industrial Aid Society, n.d.c).

C O D E S

What is a code?

A code represents an issue that is important to the people in the community.

A picture, a song, a play, a tape-recording or anything else that will start off a discussion can be used as a code.

An example of a code:

Let us say that an important theme in the community is the problem of how and where to buy goods cheaply. We could use several things as a code:

A picture - contrasting a supermarket with a café

A list of prices - taken from a newspaper, comparing the prices of goods in different shops

A prepared dialogue - two women have just come back from shopping in different shops and are now comparing the price tags on their goods

Any of these codes show the situation clearly and can be used as the starting point for a discussion.

Is every picture a code?

Not every picture or play can be used as a code. Some pictures show too many confusing details or don't illustrate a problem clearly.

What makes a good code?

Before a co-ordinator uses anything as a code, he must ask some questions.

Is the situation presented in this code:

- relevant? Is the issue important in the lives of the learners?

- familiar? Does it show a situation that the learners know from their life experience?

Figure 5: Industrial Aid Society (IAS): First page of document on codes (Historical Papers Research Archive, File ZA HPRA AH 1585-Learning and Teaching)

As can be seen in the extract (Figure 5), the IAS guide defines a ‘code’ as a representational medium (picture, song, play, dialogue) encapsulating a pertinent community issue, thereby grounding abstract concepts in tangible, everyday realities (i.e. daily experience). However, the guide goes further, delineating specific criteria for effective code design:

- Relevance and familiarity: Codes must resonate directly with learners’ experiences.
- Specificity and clarity: Codes need to be easily understood and pinpoint particular issues.
- Problematic and open-ended: Codes must present a challenge, inviting critical inquiry and demonstrating the potential for change.

These criteria reveal a pedagogy intentionally structured to foster critical engagement and dialogue rather than passive knowledge reception, nurturing a strategic sense of hope, and one clearly grounded in Freirean methodology.

The ‘Learning and Teaching’ document’s key contribution is a structured, five-step questioning pattern designed to guide learners from initial observation to critical analysis and, ultimately, to planning collective action:

1. What do you see happening here?
2. Why does it happen?
3. Does this happen in your place?
4. Why do you think it happens?
5. What can we do about it?

This structured ‘decoding’ process explicitly aimed to bridge the gap between the ‘code’ and the lived experiences of individuals, thus paving the way for potential community action. It was through using these codes, according to the participants, that teaching and learning prioritised engagement to effectively implement transformative educational experiences. The programme explicitly rejected depoliticised ‘textbook’ materials, instead using newspaper articles to introduce concepts of unionism and exploitation (Hogan, Interview, 6 August 2024).

The second key document titled, ‘Who are your learners?’ provides detailed guidelines for conducting community surveys, embodying the core Freirean principle of starting from the learners' own reality. It is a guide for problem-posing education in its purest form. The document instructs co-ordinators to gather comprehensive information about their learners' lives, covering personal circumstances, family dynamics, subsistence, education, leisure, health, community involvement, and beliefs. The goal in the guide, as stated, is to tailor educational programmes to the learners’ specific needs and contexts. This survey process is a foundational element of a Freirean pedagogical framework. It ensures that the ‘generative themes’ for the curriculum are drawn directly from the learners’ lived experiences, not imposed by the facilitator. The survey’s questions are designed to initiate meaningful dialogue and reflection even before the formal class begins, laying the groundwork for the essential process of conscientisation. The document establishes the necessary foundation for this critical awakening by encouraging co-ordinators to explore learners’ beliefs, community involvement, and experiences with injustice. Together, these two documents demonstrate a sophisticated, systematic, and deeply Freirean approach to education, designed not just to teach skills but to empower workers to critically analyse and transform their world.

According to those I interviewed, the methodology was pragmatic. Susan Brown described her classes as a blend of Freirean principles (using a politically charged sentence like, ‘*The man works hard, and wants good pay’* as a ‘code’) and traditional, drill-based approaches (Interview, 7 August 2024). However, this praxis faced immense challenges, including language barriers and difficulty with knowledge retention among exhausted workers.

Hogan later expressed regret that their youthful confidence had led them to dismiss the value of more conventional literacy methods. She reflected on her disillusionment, stating, ‘*But funnily, after about a year or so, I became very disillusioned. And I think, in retrospect, I had the right instincts and not the language [to express this]. Firstly, I said I am not a qualified literacy teacher, and I think I am a fraud; I can’t teach people to read properly. I went and did a literacy course in Durban, a standard literacy course. But I still felt that I was a fraud. Secondly, I am a White woman, unable to speak any language; I could speak a bit of Zulu, no, not speak… but I was taught by a Greek*’ (Interview, 6 August 2024).

6.4.4 Education Service Organisations: Learn and Teach

Learn and Teach was one of the first service organisations created to support literacy work across South Africa. It emerged in a context of growing repression and the need for infrastructural support. Significantly, it positioned literacy as a vehicle for dignity, empowerment, and resistance and not merely as a technical skill. By embedding literacy education within political conscientisation, Learn and Teach reflected the politics of counter-hegemonic organising and the effort to sustain literacy praxis across diverse communities during the 1980s.

A. Founding, Purpose, and Strategic Positioning

An overview of the alternative ABE movement by Liz Sparg identifies Learn and Teach as the ‘oldest of the alternative literacy projects in South Africa’ and instrumental in ‘popularising the Freirean approach’ (Sparg, n.d., p. 12). The document says that it was started in 1974 with support from the Catholic Church and was restructured in 1977 under Mastin Prinsloo. It also details the political pressures the project faced, noting that after Steve Biko’s death, the project was ‘subjected to raids, coordinators were interrogated... and the offices had to be closed down temporarily’ (p. 12).

According to Mike Deeb, the project began as a pilot initiative led by Basia Ledochowska in 1974–75, specifically targeting the literacy needs of domestic workers. Central to this early phase was the training of facilitators in Freirean methods, which emphasised dialogical learning and critical consciousness: ‘*That’s when I heard about Basia Ledochowska, who was organising Paulo Freire’s literacy training… I went on a course that she ran… training us on how to use Paulo Freire to do literacy training. So, this was in 1975*’ (Deeb, Interview, 22 July 2024).

However, other evidence contradicts the claim that the organisation started in 1974. Saul Molobi said ‘*the Learn and Teach Adult Literacy Organisation was formally established in 1982. I’ll double-check the date. Yes, it was established in 1981, followed by the launch of the Learn and Teach magazine in 1982*’ (Molobi, Interview, 13 November 2024). An evaluation report also claims Learn and Teach was founded in June 1981 (Learn and Teach, 1985). Two published sources (i.e. French, 1988, and van Heerden, 1991) say it was started in 1972 – both provide no reference. Certainly, classes were being run well before 1981, as documentary evidence I discuss below proves, and it is possible that the 1981 date refers to

founding of *Learn and Teach* magazine. Clearly, the two were closely connected. The second edition of the magazine, in October/November 1981, contains the following advertisement for the classes:

Learn and Teach helps adults to learn



The **Learn and Teach** organisation helps adults learn to read and write. People learn in groups. **Learn and Teach** helps people start learning groups. We find a co-ordinator (teacher) for the group. And we train the co-ordinator.

We also help groups after they start. We visit groups often to help them. And we print books for groups to read.

In the groups people learn to read and write in their own language. People can learn in Sotho, Xhosa, Zulu, Pedi, Venda, Tswana and Tsonga. When people can read and write in their own language, they learn to read and write in English.

We work with groups in many places. We work with groups in Soweto, Johannesburg, East Rand, Pretoria and Northern Transvaal. We also work with organisations that help learners in Durban and Cape Town.

The organisation in Durban is called the Natal Adult Education Project. The organisation in Cape Town is called Cape Literacy. Do you want to know more about learning groups?

Write to: **Learn and Teach**
P.O. Box 11074
JOHANNESBURG
2000

Or come to see us at: 901 9th Floor SARB House
80 Commissioner Street
(Cnr Simmonds Street)
Johannesburg

or telephone : 834-4011/2

Figure 6: Excerpt from the second issue of Learn and Teach magazine published in October/November 1981 from the Learn and Teach website

The roots of *Learn and Teach* magazine trace back to the early 1970s, when student movements such as the UCM identified a critical gap in the availability of accessible reading materials for newly literate adults. This gap threatened to reverse literacy gains through skill regression (Steinberg & Suttner, 1991). The founding of *Learn and Teach* magazine was a strategic response to this ongoing need.

While public perception closely associated these two entities (the literacy classes and the magazine), an investigation into their affairs conducted by the South African Police Services (SAPS) commenced on 18 November 1989. The investigation revealed that there were actually two distinct organisations, namely Learn and Teach, and Learn and Teach Publications. These were identified as autonomous entities occupying different offices and performing different administrative functions (Van Staden, 1989). This investigation concluded that the organisation (Learn and Teach) had 'contravened Section 2 of the Fundraising Act (Act 107 of 1978), and recommended that the matter be referred to the South African Police for further investigation and possible prosecution for the alleged contraventions' (Van Staden, 1989). This move formalised the structural separation of the two bodies, clarifying their respective roles within the broader adult literacy movement. According to the investigation, the aims and objectives of the organisation were cited as follows:

- Promote the development of literacy skills and English language learning skills.
- Serve as a resource centre for community bodies and groups that promote literacy, and to promote support for those bodies by way of materials, training, etc.
- Be a democratically run organisation.
- Develop the administrative, discursive, and organisational skills needed to run a democratic organisation.
- Foster unity and co-operation with all other progressive literacy organisations in the country (Van Staden, 1989).

From these objectives, it is clear that Learn and Teach was a community-focused, progressive organisation dedicated to improving literacy and English skills. It aimed to empower local groups by providing resources and training, operating democratically, developing organisational capabilities, and collaborating with other literacy initiatives nationwide. According to Bird (1982), the programme aimed to empower learners to develop a rational approach to their lives and environment.

The foundational philosophy of the project is perfectly encapsulated in the introduction to one of its key publications, the *Learn and Teach English Reader*. The opening page is not a set of instructions from an expert, but an invitation into a shared process, stating clearly:

> People who are learning to read and write English wrote this book... They wrote about themselves and their ideas. We hope you enjoy reading this book. Please tell us what you think about it. Is it clear and easy to read? Is it interesting? (Learn and Teach, n.d., p. 1).

This introduction is a powerful piece of evidence. It confirms the project's deep commitment to a learner-centred and potentially Freirean ethos. The emphasis on learner-generated content (wrote this book), the focus on lived experience (wrote about themselves and their ideas), and the explicitly dialogical call for feedback (tell us what you think) demonstrates that the organisation's purpose was not simply to transmit skills, but to create a participatory and empowering educational space.

As the organisation matured, its formal mission evolved, revealing a strategic tension, or perhaps a deliberate ambiguity in its purpose. Archival sources show that while the organisation's constitution positioned it as a tool for political mobilisation, other internal documents framed it as a resource hub supporting diverse literacy initiatives (South African Police Services,1989). Rather than contradictory, this dual identity reflected a sophisticated strategic positioning within the liberation movement. This duality is captured in the words of Saul Molobi, former editor of the magazine: '*The goal was mass-scale education that could be accessible... but also would mobilise them against the apartheid regime*'. Molobi explicitly aligned the project with the ANC's concept of *Umrabulo*: education as a means of political conscientisation (Molobi, Interview, 13 November 2024).

Further external validation of this strategic impact came from a 1985 evaluation conducted (before the magazine's formal separation from the organisation in 1989) by Rachel Jenkins and Klaas Mashishi (Learn and Teach, 1985). The report affirmed Learn and Teach's role in political conscientisation, its close ties to trade union mobilisation, and its repeated targeting by the apartheid state, all of which stressed its effectiveness and perceived threat to the status quo. Boydell's (1990) case study of Learn and Teach's operations in Sophiatown/Triomf reinforces this positioning, noting that Learn and Teach was both a literacy project and a vehicle for empowerment. She explicitly links literacy to broader socio-political struggles in Sophiatown/Triomf. Boydell also underscores the project's vulnerability

to state repression, echoing archival evidence of raids and interrogations, and frames these as indicators of its perceived threat to apartheid structures.

In this context, Learn and Teach was not merely an educational initiative but a political instrument, embedded within the broader struggle against apartheid. Its founding and strategic evolution reflect the complex interplay between pedagogy, ideology, and resistance, positioning it as a key node in South Africa's liberatory education landscape.

B. Size, Shape, and the Faces of the Movement

As mentioned earlier, Learn and Teach grew from a small pilot project into a significant national force. According to Steinberg and Suttner (1991), by the mid-1980s, the magazine had a national circulation of 50,000. While this shows its mass reach, Adrienne Bird's (1982) research provides a rare quantitative snapshot of its on-the-ground teaching operations as of April 1980. The research shows a significant and widespread operation, with over 400 learners enrolled in about 50 groups across Johannesburg. The data, presented in Tables 6.3, 6.4 and 6.5, reveal a widespread network of learning groups across Johannesburg. The statistics are divided into groups in Johannesburg's suburbs, in Soweto, and on the East Rand.

Suburbs

Table 5: Profile of Learn and Teach Learning Groups in Johannesburg Suburbs (April 1980) (Source: Bird, 1982, pp. 6-8)

Location (Suburb)	Language(s)	No. of Groups	No. of Co-ordinators	No. of Learners	Date Started	Meetings per Week
Killarney	Zulu, Sotho, English	3 (1 in each)	1	6	Not yet started New Group	2
Berea Methodist	English	2	2	12	March 1979	1
Triomf	Tswana, English	6 (3 in each)	4	65 (30+35)	October 1979	3
Fordsburg	Zulu/Sotho	2 (1 in each)	2	15 (3+12)	Feb 1979	3
Honeydew	Sotho	1	1	17	Feb 1980	2
Immaculata	English	1	2	10	1974	2
St. Peters by the Lake	Zulu/Sotho	1	1	8	February 1979	1
Medical Research	Zulu/Sotho	2	2	30	February 1980	2
Linden	Zulu/Sotho	1	1	15	October 1978	1
Rivonia	Zulu/Sotho	1	2	8	March 1979	2

Bryanston	Zulu. Tswana	2 (1 in each)	1	36 (20+16)	March 1979	1
Kensington	Zulu, Sotho, English	6 (2 in each)	5 (2+1+2)	50 (23+13+14)	April 1978	2
TOTAL		**28**	**24**	**272**		

The profile shown in Table 6.3 indicates how, in April 1980, Learn and Teach actively engaged suburban communities through diverse literacy programmes. A wide range of groups, like Killarney and Triomf, offered multilingual instruction tailored to specific language demographics. The group sizes spanned from intimate gatherings like the St. Peter's by the Lake group (8 learners) to larger cohorts such as Triomf (6 groups), which speaks of its impact on the community. The number of co-ordinators reflects a commitment to supporting groups. The number of meetings also varied for groups to reach specific goals. The long-term presence was demonstrated through the operation in places like Immaculata, whose operation dated as far back as 1974.

Soweto

Table 6: Profile of Learn and Teach Learning Groups in Soweto (April 1980) (Source: Bird, 1982, pp. 6-8)

Location	Languages	No. of Groups	No. of Co-ordinators	No. of Learners	Date Started	Meetings per Week
Tara Hospital	English	2	1	24	Feb 1980	1
Naledi High	Zulu, Tswana, English	3 (1 each)	1	15 (3+6+6)	Jan 1979	4
Sekanontoane	Zulu	1	2	22	Feb 1979	4
White City	Zulu	1	1	5	May 1979	4
Diepkloof	Zulu	1	1	17	May 1979	4
Jabulani Hostel	Zulu/Sotho	1	1	7	Jan 1979	4
Robin's Company	Tswana	1	1	7	October 1979	1
TOTAL		**10**	**8**	**97**		

East Rand

Table 7: Profile of Learn and Teach Learning Groups on the East Rand (April 1980) (Source: Bird, 1982, pp. 6-8)

Location	Languages	No. of Groups	No. of Co-ordinators	No. of Learners	Date Started	Meetings per Week
Natalspruit Hospital	Zulu/Sotho	1	1	6	October 1979	3
Vosloorus		1	1	16	Jan 1978	2
Thakane	Zulu/ Tswana	1	1	9	Jan 1978	4
Vlakfontein	Zulu/Sotho	2	2	6	May 1977	?
TOTAL		**5**	**5**	**37**		

These tables provide powerful, concrete evidence of the organisation's scale and strategy. Collectively, they show an operation with at least 43 distinct learning groups, served by 37 coordinators, reaching some 406[5]. The data are significant for several key reasons:

Firstly, a high-level multi-lingual strategy is demonstrated, with a strong focus on mother-tongue literacy in Zulu, Sotho, and Tswana alongside English in both the suburbs and the townships. This evidence confirms that the project was deeply committed to a diverse pedagogical approach, and directly contradicts any simplistic notion that these projects were only about teaching English.

Secondly, the project's long-term presence and a period of rapid expansion through the 'Date Started' column is revealed. The existence of a group at Immaculata since 1974 confirms its early origins, as articulated by Deeb. Furthermore, a high number of groups started in 1979, the vast majority of the Soweto groups. This suggests that 1979 was a year of major organisational expansion and outreach, a key finding about the project's history.

A third significance is that the list of locations confirms the project's strategic focus on the working class. The suburban groups certainly served domestic workers and gardeners, while the township groups were located in key community and worker sites, such as a migrant worker hostel (Jabulani Hostel) and hospitals (Natalspruit /Tara Hospitals) and at a private company (Robins Company). These data provide an invaluable, empirical foundation for

[5] Bird's totals are somewhat different from mine (they are higher); I have used the actual figures provided by her in my calculations, since it is not clear how her totals were calculated.

understanding the true size, shape, and strategic focus of the Learn and Teach movement on the ground.

A fourth crucial piece of data notable in the ‘Meetings per Week’ column is about the praxis. The fact that many of the Soweto groups were meeting four times a week is extraordinary. It speaks to an immense level of commitment required from both the learners (who were tired after a full day of work) and the volunteer co-ordinators. It suggests a very intensive and serious learning environment, far beyond a casual weekly class. The project was clearly on a very different scale than the Reiger Park/WPLP and IAS projects.

Lastly, there were clearly a very large number of co-ordinators/facilitators. Unfortunately, Bird’s thesis provides very little information about them. We do know that by 1983, one of them was Favish (Interview, 7 August 2024).

However, we do know something of the learners. The learners’ profile, captured by Bird’s (1982), reveals they were predominantly women over 30, often employed as domestic workers. Their motivations were tied to their lived realities; those in township groups sought literacy for social and political survival (reading newspapers, official documents), while suburban-based groups focused more on job mobility to escape exploitation. There is, however, a pointed silence around the Black co-ordinators and learners who were the heart of the movement, a gap only partially addressed through the rich data in Bird’s thesis.

Boydell’s (1990) case study complements Bird’s quantitative data by providing thematic insights into the composition of Learn and Teach groups in Sophiatown/Triomf, noting their diversity and the strong presence of women learners. She highlights the gaps and silences in the historical record—particularly the underrepresentation of Black facilitators’ voices, while affirming the project’s grassroots character. Boydell also stresses the symbolic significance of Sophiatown/Triomf[6] as a site of cultural resistance, framing the learners’ profiles as part of a broader narrative of urban displacement and struggle.

While Bird’s (1982) research provides a broad demographic sketch, the *Learn and Teach English Reader* offers a direct, powerful, and nuanced profile of the learners in their own words. The narratives reveal a population grappling with the core contradictions of apartheid society. The learners are both men and women, many of whom are migrant workers from ‘far

[6] The people of Sophiatown were forcibly removed to Meadowlands, Soweto, by the apartheid state in 1955. The area was rebuilt as a working-class Whites-only area in the 1960s, renamed Triomf (‘Triumph’), in a classic example of apartheid hegemony.

away, in the country,' including places like Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and Malawi, who 'came to the Witwatersrand to find work' (p. 1). They introduce themselves with a simple, powerful assertion of selfhood: 'I am Margaret.' 'My name is Kenny Phiri.' Maria Moche's statement, 'I am a black woman... I am a South African woman. I am a domestic worker,' is a profound act of locating her multiple identities.

The stories are steeped in economic hardship. Maria Moche recalls her parents' poverty: 'My father was working for R3,00 per month. My mother was working for a bag of mealie meal per month' (p. 5). Kenneth Ndebele's comic-strip narrative of his journey to Johannesburg details a life of looking for work from the age of 16, earning pennies, and arriving in the city without a pass and with no money (pp. 8-10). Their motivations for learning are a compelling mix of the practical and the profound. They want to: 'write letters to my children' (Dorlica Masapu, p. 2), 'read the Bible' (Esther, p. 3), and gain skills for the future. Crucially, the stories reveal that many see literacy as a tool for survival and critical engagement with the world. Richman wants to read because 'I always read newspapers' and it 'helps to avoid danger' (p. 4).

The learners' writing is a direct testimony to the realities of apartheid and the daily grind of apartheid bureaucracy. The pass laws are a central theme, with learners like Richard Moyo asking the fundamental question, 'Why do the police ask only black people for passes?' (p. 58). The experience at the Pass Office is depicted as one of humiliation, inefficiency, and corruption, where bribery is suggested as the only path to service (p. 60). Kenneth Ndebele's is a detailed account of the pass system ('I came to Johannesburg without a pass or a passport'), but also the pain of the migrant labour system ('But I only saw her in my holidays') (pp. 9-10). Zoleka Mjikaliso's short piece on 'School' is a devastatingly simple and powerful critique of Bantu Education: 'The child can't go to school because education is money for an African child. There is no free education' (p. 26). The narratives articulate a clear consciousness of economic hardship. Alfred Gumede details his weekly wage of R27.85, concluding, 'I must buy these things, but my money is not enough' (p. 44). This is further illustrated by Lesia Mlangeni's detailed weekly budget, which shows her R32.00 pay being consumed by rent, food, transport, and hire purchase, leading to the rational conclusion, 'Now I cannot manage with R32.00 because of all the payments' (p. 68).

The narratives contain a sharp political analysis of township life. Thabiso Mokwena's piece on Soweto critiques everything from the inadequate transport to the lack of electricity,

culminating in the blunt assessment of the state-run administration board: ‘So the West Rand Board is worth nothing. It is a complete failure’ (p. 80).

This profile is remarkably consistent with the one gleaned from the WPLP. The themes of migration, family separation, economic exploitation, and a deep yearning for empowerment through education are the shared ‘generative themes’ of the oppressed across the country, and provide a devastating account of learners’ daily confrontation with the systems of apartheid.

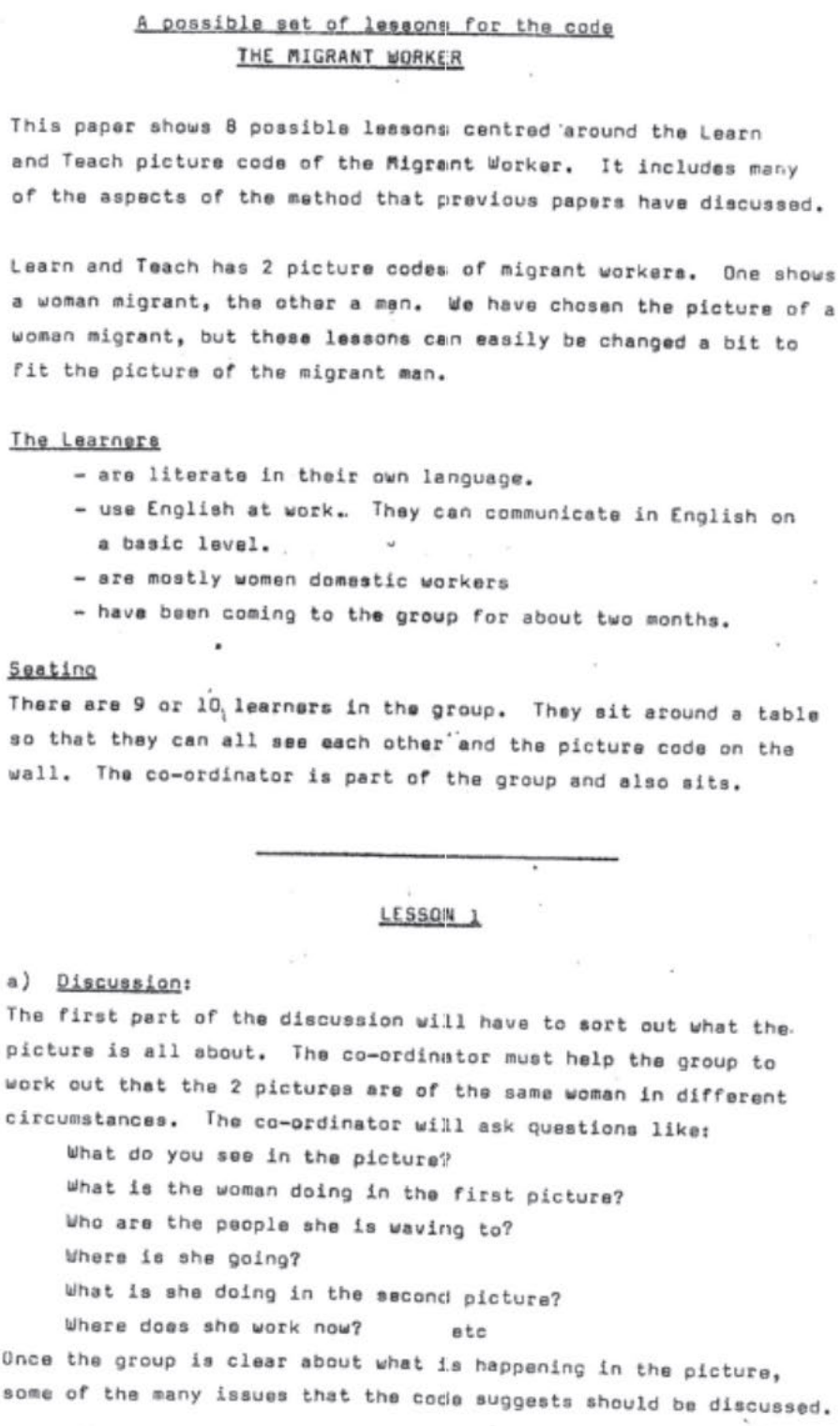
C. Pedagogical Practice

Learn and Teach adopted a dual approach, offering vernacular literacy and English as a Second Language (ESL), supported by an educational magazine to address social and political issues. As explained by former facilitator Ahmed Essop, ‘*Learn and Teach was an adult literacy organisation that provided literacy in both the vernacular and in English for those already literate in their own language. It also published an adult education magazine… covering the social and political issues of the day*’ (Essop, 2024). The programme’s strategic focus was on workers and union members: ‘*I taught English as a second language, primarily to shop stewards and factory workers… The English programme I was running was mainly with union members based in the East Rand*’ (Essop, 2024). The organisation developed tailored materials and maintained connections with unions and community groups, reinforcing its class-based orientation.

Through this approach, Learn and Teach aimed not only to improve literacy but to empower workers, enabling effective communication across diverse workplaces and strengthening collective action. Its role in supporting the independent trade union movement was pivotal in fostering solidarity and advancing social justice. The heart of Learn and Teach’s impact lay in its pedagogy. The pedagogical strategies of these projects can be traced most vividly from the materials they produced and shared, and through the methods they employed. The same principle of building pedagogy around generative themes previously discussed in the first two case studies was central to Learn and Teach’s method. According to Deeb, the core method was discussion-based, using ‘codes’, pictures of real-life situations, to spark conversation and engagement (Interview, 22 July 2024). This method, taught to facilitators like Deeb by Basia Ledochowska, prioritised learner-generated content and confidence over strict grammatical accuracy. The goal, as Deeb explained, was to ‘*connect literacy to their daily lives*’ (Deeb, Interview, 22 July 2024). The curriculum was intentionally political.

Boydell's case study of the Sophiatown/Triomf classes explicitly frames Learn and Teach's pedagogy as a dynamic political process rooted in Freirean praxis. She emphasises the use of 'codes' such as pictures, stories, and plays as central to the method, and describes how these were decoded through critical dialogue, moving learners from description to causal analysis and, ultimately, to discussions of transformative action. Boydell highlights that this complete cycle of reflection and action constituted praxis, and she situates it as a deliberate strategy for political conscientisation rather than mere skill acquisition. Her analysis confirms that Learn and Teach's pedagogy was deeply dialogical, participatory, and aimed at fostering agency among learners.

A striking example comes from the IAS archive (Learn and Teaching, n.d.), where a lesson plan explicitly using the 'Learn and Teach method' was preserved (Figure 7). This discovery is more than a fragment of teaching practice; it is irrefutable proof of the interconnected ecosystem of resistance that this study describes. It shows how Learn and Teach taught their classes, and that methods, materials, and theories were actively shared and circulated between different nodes of the movement, which highlights the collective and dialogical nature of their pedagogy:



A possible set of lessons for the code
THE MIGRANT WORKER

This paper shows 8 possible lessons centred around the Learn and Teach picture code of the Migrant Worker. It includes many of the aspects of the method that previous papers have discussed.

Learn and Teach has 2 picture codes of migrant workers. One shows a woman migrant, the other a man. We have chosen the picture of a woman migrant, but these lessons can easily be changed a bit to fit the picture of the migrant man.

The Learners

- are literate in their own language.
- use English at work. They can communicate in English on a basic level.
- are mostly women domestic workers
- have been coming to the group for about two months.

Seating

There are 9 or 10 learners in the group. They sit around a table so that they can all see each other and the picture code on the wall. The co-ordinator is part of the group and also sits.

LESSON 1

a) Discussion:

The first part of the discussion will have to sort out what the picture is all about. The co-ordinator must help the group to work out that the 2 pictures are of the same woman in different circumstances. The co-ordinator will ask questions like:

What do you see in the picture?
What is the woman doing in the first picture?
Who are the people she is waving to?
Where is she going?
What is she doing in the second picture?
Where does she work now? etc

Once the group is clear about what is happening in the picture, some of the many issues that the code suggests should be discussed.

Figure 7: Learn and Teach Lesson plan from IAS archives ('Learning and Teaching' file, Wits Historical Papers Research Archive, File ZA HPRA AH 1585)

The lesson plan constitutes a textbook example of a Freirean ‘generative theme’ in practice: beginning with lived experience, moving through collective analysis, and opening onto the possibility of transformative action. The lesson begins with a code of ‘Migrant Worker’. The choice of the ‘Migrant Worker’ as a central code was a deliberate political act, foregrounding the migrant labour system, which was the cornerstone of racial capitalism’s exploitation. The lesson positioned this mechanism as the subject of critical inquiry for those most directly affected, in this case, domestic workers.

The *Learn and Teach English Reader* also provides evidence of the organisation’s pedagogical praxis, demonstrating how Freirean principles were translated into learning materials. Its very existence is proof of Learn and Teach’s method. As the introduction states, the learners themselves wrote this book. This is the ultimate expression of a curriculum built from the ‘generative themes’ of the learners’ own lives. The content is not about abstract grammar; it is about their work, their families, their migration stories, and their struggles. The reader functions as a collection of ‘codes’ for discussion, but also shows how codes were part of the literacy groups that had generated the learner writings. Zoleka Mjikaliso’s piece is a response to a picture/code depicting a child excluded from school, but it is also a perfect problem-posing text. The section titled ‘Help’ (pp. 17-20) is a rich exploration of the theme of solidarity, contrasting the ideal (‘People must help each other’) with the harsh reality (‘But here in town it is hard to help your friends when there is something wrong. Sometimes your boss rules you.’).

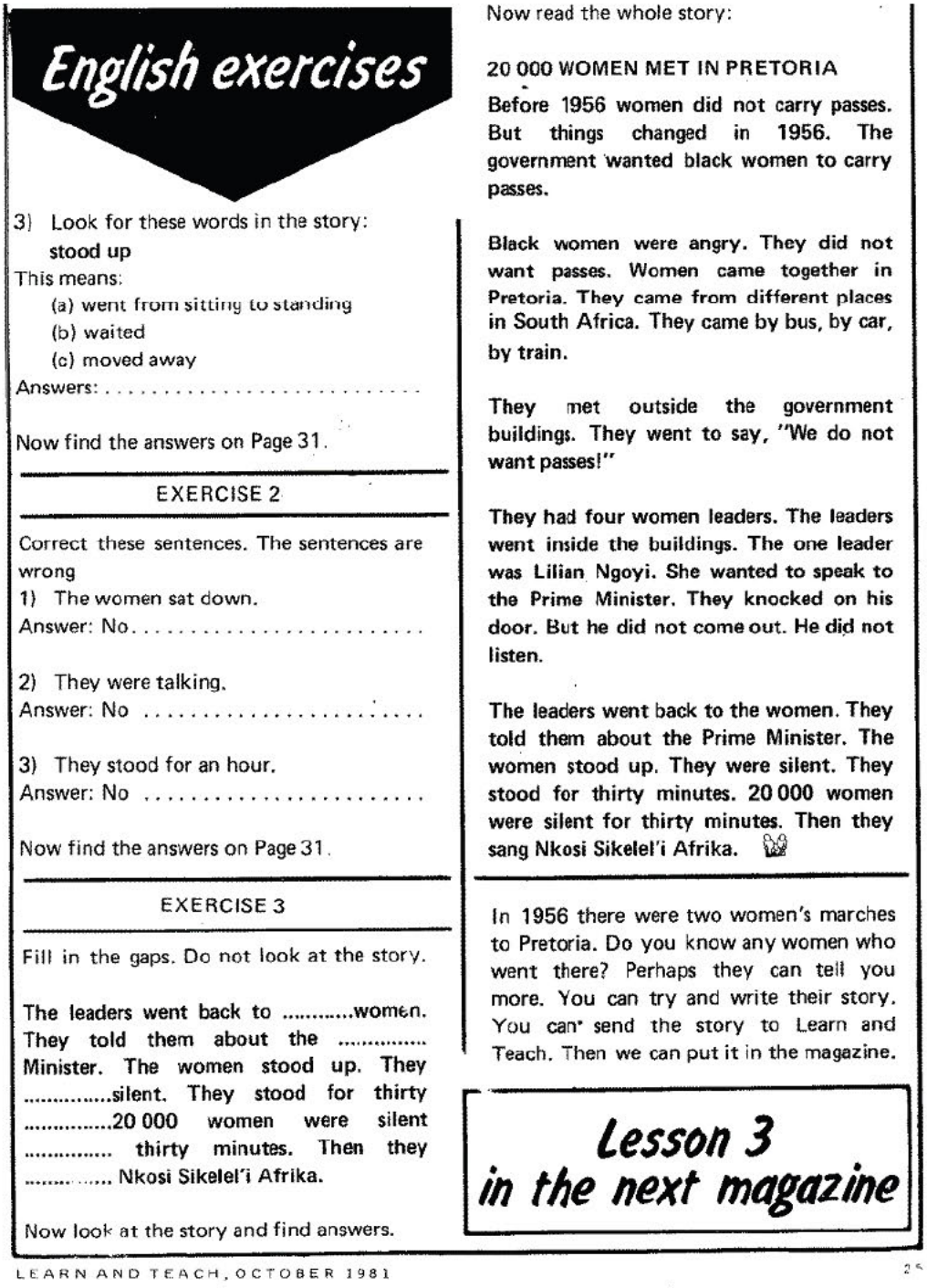
The most sophisticated evidence of the project’s success is found in the learners’ own reflections on the learning process. The text titled ‘What is the difference between a teacher and a co-ordinator?’ is a remarkable piece of meta-analysis. The learner-author critiques the ‘banking model’ (‘the teacher still tries hard to pour some ideas into him’) and praises the Freirean alternative: ‘I like our way of learning more. We are not instructed by someone, but we try hard ourselves to find the way...’ (p. 28). This is direct evidence that the pedagogy was teaching a skill, while successfully fostering a new, critical consciousness about the very nature of education and power.

The *Learn and Teach English Reader* represents a pedagogical praxis designed for political conscientisation. ‘At the Pass Office’ (pp. 60-61) functions as a Freirean ‘code’, using a combination of visuals and multiple learner testimonies to objectify and deconstruct a central experience of oppression for Black South Africans. The section begins with a comic strip that

visually narrates the dehumanising experience. It depicts a long, slow queue, an indifferent and rude official who shouts at the applicant (‘He called me stupid’), and the corrupt reality of the system (‘Somebody told me that if you bribe him, he will help you quickly’). The visuals are stark and immediately relatable, capturing the feelings of powerlessness and frustration. This visual code is then followed by a series of written testimonies from different learners, which deepen the analysis and show the systemic nature of the problem. Josephine Mohlamme details the bureaucratic nightmare of needing multiple documents, such as birth certificates for herself, her husband, and her children, just to apply for a residence permit. Agnes Motaung, on the other hand, describes the feeling of being ignored and dismissed, giving her papers to a clerk who ‘leaves them on the table for a long time’, making her wonder why she is being put aside. Stephen Rapulane, however, provides a direct account of the corruption, stating that he saw some people ‘give some money to the officials and they finished early’, while he was forced to wait all day. The section on ‘Directors’ (p. 47) is a clear lesson in class analysis, moving the learners’ focus from their immediate manager to the unseen ‘owners and big bosses’, like Oppenheimer, who control the system. Similarly, the piece ‘Rich and Poor’ (p. 84) encourages a critical analysis of class divisions within the Black community, ending with a powerful demand for the subaltern voice to be heard: ‘Now these rich ones must give the poor people a chance to talk’.

This reader is not just a collection of stories; it is an engine for praxis. The act of presenting the learners’ own critical analysis of their world back to them validates their experience, while deepening their understanding, and implicitly asking the central Freirean question of ‘What can we do about it?’.

Learn and Teach magazine operated similarly, providing articles that could be (and were) used for discussion in the classroom, but also learning activities, as the following excerpt (Figure 8) shows:



English exercises

3) Look for these words in the story:
stood up
This means:
(a) went from sitting to standing
(b) waited
(c) moved away
Answers: .....

Now find the answers on Page 31.

EXERCISE 2

Correct these sentences. The sentences are wrong
1) The women sat down.
Answer: No. .....

2) They were talking.
Answer: No .....

3) They stood for an hour.
Answer: No .....

Now find the answers on Page 31.

EXERCISE 3

Fill in the gaps. Do not look at the story.

The leaders went back to .....women. They told them about the ..... Minister. The women stood up. They .....silent. They stood for thirty .....20 000 women were silent ..... thirty minutes. Then they ..... Nkosi Sikelel'i Afrika.

Now look at the story and find answers.

Now read the whole story:

20 000 WOMEN MET IN PRETORIA

Before 1956 women did not carry passes. But things changed in 1956. The government wanted black women to carry passes.

Black women were angry. They did not want passes. Women came together in Pretoria. They came from different places in South Africa. They came by bus, by car, by train.

They met outside the government buildings. They went to say, "We do not want passes!"

They had four women leaders. The leaders went inside the buildings. The one leader was Lilian Ngoyi. She wanted to speak to the Prime Minister. They knocked on his door. But he did not come out. He did not listen.

The leaders went back to the women. They told them about the Prime Minister. The women stood up. They were silent. They stood for thirty minutes. 20 000 women were silent for thirty minutes. Then they sang Nkosi Sikelel'i Afrika.

In 1956 there were two women's marches to Pretoria. Do you know any women who went there? Perhaps they can tell you more. You can try and write their story. You can send the story to Learn and Teach. Then we can put it in the magazine.

Lesson 3
in the next magazine

LEARN AND TEACH, OCTOBER 1981

Figure 8: Pages from Learn and Teach magazine, Issue number 2, published in 1981 (Taken from Learn and Teach website)

These pages show that the Learn and Teach project was not just teaching literacy. By providing a platform for critical reflection, it was introducing a new way of seeing the world by framing everyday struggles as political issues.

The effectiveness of *Learn and Teach* magazine as a teaching tool for developing praxis is corroborated by a formal evaluation of *Learn and Teach* magazine conducted in 1985 by Rachel Jenkins of the University of Cape Town (Learn and Teach, 1985). The key findings of the evaluation are described as:

A Tool for Conscientisation: The evaluation concluded that the magazine's primary function was 'political conscientisation', filling a critical gap by providing accessible, alternative information that empowered readers with a critical awareness of their socio-political environment. Edward French, of the HSRC, in a personal communication to the evaluators, commented on the functions of the magazine as follows:

> The radicalism of Learn and Teach is a most desirable alternative to the hegemony of state and business-dominated media. This aspect is handled with great sensitivity. The readers are not left feeling that they are helpless victims, and the tone of resentment, which can be so damaging to the voice of criticism, is very seldom apparent. The stories of suffering, discrimination and exploitation are handled with a rare genius. Such stories very often depersonalise the subjects and stop us from perceiving their humanity because of the mist of sentimentality, pity or indignation. The researchers and writers of Learn and Teach do something very special when they affirm people in degraded and marginalised situations. This must be good for readers in similar positions and for those in more privileged circumstances (Learn and Teach, 1985, p. 3.5).

A Platform for Advocacy and Unionism: The report confirmed the magazine was an active agent of social change, noting its advocacy campaigns and its strong connection to the trade union movement, for whom it served as an important educational and mobilising resource.

State Repression as Validation: A central theme of the magazine was the relentless pressure from the state. The report documented the repeated censorship and banning of the magazine, presenting this as clear evidence that the state viewed Learn and Teach as a direct threat to its political order.

Overall Positive Impact: The evaluation's analysis of reader surveys and distribution challenges led to an overwhelmingly positive conclusion, affirming the magazine's significance as a vital and effective tool for liberatory education in South Africa.

6.4.5 Church-Related Projects: Masifundise

Masifundise, established under the TCOE (Trust for Christian Outreach and Education) represented the fusion of liberation theology, BC principles, and Freirean pedagogy. Masifundise reflected the politics of faith-based activism and the role of the church in grassroots mobilisation. Its literacy work, framed through participatory planning and dialogical processes, demonstrates how religious organisations adapted Freirean praxis to advance social justice and communal empowerment.

A. Founding, Purpose, and Strategic Positioning

The Masifundise Educational Project was founded on the commitment to the principles of liberation theology, BC, and Freirean philosophy, positioning it as an intellectual and political counter to the apartheid state. The project's ideological foundation reveals a deep commitment to internal liberation and self-determination, as explicitly framed by its Chairman, Wallace A. Mgoqi. In the TCOE 1983 Annual Report, Mgoqi's statement about TCOE's educational task resonates strongly with Freire's philosophy:

> God has given us the potential to be fully human and to experience life at its fullest. Underdeveloped Humans cannot be developed Christians because they are dehumanised. Our task must therefore be that of helping people to become fully human. With this goes a commitment to assist people to make use of resources which will help them to develop the potential to be independent and self-sufficient. (TCOE, 1983, p. 2,)

Mgoqi's affirmation of BC and self-reliance is also clear: 'Our experience as a people has made that in the end it is only ourselves who can truly free our minds. Let us then move forward in that spirit' (p. 22).

These BC-aligned statements confirm that the project was fundamentally committed to overcoming the ideological domination by restoring internal agency. Moreover, former Executive Director Mercia Andrews confirms that TCOE and its affiliates were '*deeply rooted in the ideological soil of the BC and sought to continue Steve Biko's legacy*' (Andrews, Interview, 27 May 2025).

The historical origins of Masifundise trace back to grassroots resistance and a strategic imperative to create educational alternatives. I have pieced together the story of their founding from participant testimony and a moving tribute to key founder Nontobeko Moletsane (who had been a nurse at Biko's Zanempilo Community Health Centre) by Mgoqi.

Mgoqi, reminisced about how, in the early seventies, as a young wife of an Anglican priest at St Cyprian's Church in Langa, with young children, Moletsane was studying at SACHED through UNISA. She was already influenced by BC and Black Community Programmes. Her 'restless desire to make a difference…led her to organise support for students dropping out of school, using the local church manse as a place of study' (TCOE Annual Report, 2019, p. 78). This step, according to Mgoqi's tribute, gave birth to Masifundise Educational Project in Langa, Cape Town, a grassroots effort to restore dignity through education and create opportunities for those left behind by systemic barriers. The TCOE 1988 Annual Report corroborates this founding story, stating that TCOE's origins lay in the Parents Action Committee in Langa.

According to Mgoqi's tribute, it was Moletsane who then drove the process of scaling up. In the early 1980s, she initiated contact with a similar initiative in King William's Town called Zingisa Educational Project, itself an 'offshoot from the Ginsberg Bursary Fund' which had been started by Steve Biko. She later connected these groups with Mamphela Ramphele, who had started another educational project in her place of banishment in Tzaneen.

The organisational structure was designed for strategic resilience and national reach. Masifundise Educational Project, Western Cape Region, was formally established as a regional branch of this national effort. Its founding purpose was explicitly articulated as a 'back-up or supportive educational programme in the informal/independent sector' (TCOE, 1983), suggesting a strategy of complementing anti-apartheid educational efforts. The initial structure, manned by a committee from the three 'African' Townships of Langa, Gugulethu and Nyanga (TCOE, 1983) indicated deep community roots, but the operational mandate was designed to 'always be intended to include far-flung areas' (p. 19). The TCOE's Village, District, and Zonal committee structure, culminating in regional policy-making, reveals an ambitious attempt to build a coherent grassroots-to-national framework (ibid.). The August 1984 Management Committee Minutes (Figure 9) are interesting for a number of reasons:



Trust for Christian Outreach and Education

(Of The Federal Theological Seminary of Southern Africa)

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE HELD IN ROOM 11, FEDERAL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY AT 2.00pm ON SATURDAY 18th AUGUST 1984.

M/C 1

PRESENT: Revd. G.A. Duncan (Chairman), Mr D.J. Booysen (Student Rep.), Revd. B.C. Witbooi (Director), Mr M. Ramalepe (N.Trnsvaal), Mr P.B.S. Somhlahlo (E.Cape), Messrs. W.A. Mgoqi, P.D. Davids, T.J. Ndiki (W.Cape), Dr M. Ramphele, Mrs N.F. Mpumlwana, Mr. R.R.V. Bulman (Treasurer)(Co-opted members).

M/C 2

WELCOME: The Chairman welcomed all the members of the committee especially Mr D. Booysen attending his first meeting.

M/C 3

APOLOGIES: Revd. Dr. T.S.N. Gqubule

M/C 4

MINUTES: The minutes of the meeting held on 24th March 1984 having been circulated were confirmed as a true record.

M/C 5

MATTERS ARISING:

OFFICE ACCOMMODATION

It was reported that approaches to sponsors had not been successful. It was AGREED that an approach should be made to the Anglo-American Group Chairman's Fund.

M/C 6

DIRECTOR'S REPORT : The Director tabled his report, copies Having been circulated. it was noted that the names of all the staff members will in future be shown.

1

Figure 9: Extract from TCOE minutes, 1984 (TCOE archives)

As can be seen in Figure 9, the letterhead confirms the structural location of TCOE within the FedSem, whilst the presence of various church ministers in senior positions confirms a close church link. The involvement of Mamphele Ramphele immediately connected the organisation to the BC movement and SASO (TCOE Management Committee, 1984). The regional structure is also evident. Masifundise operated in the politically complex Western Cape, making it necessary to navigate tensions between UDF-aligned groups and others (TCOE, 1993). To ensure resilience, TCOE adopted a decentralised structure, enabling Masifundise to work across diverse regions, requiring context-sensitive strategies.

Despite a strong ideological foundation, Masifundise faced significant internal and external challenges. In the late 1980s, the organisation faced an internal crisis marked by 'sectarian politics, nepotism, and gross inefficiency,' leading to a temporary closure and relocation between 1988 and 1992 (TCOE, 1993, p. 99). According to the Evaluation Report, there was an internal Commission of Enquiry which led to Masifundise's relocation from Langa to Athlone to reset its public image and operational integrity. The Evaluation Report argued that the organisation faced challenges in adapting the People's Participatory Planning (PPP) methodology, and faced constraints including funding shortages, facilitator turnover, and a lack of materials in vernacular languages, which limited its reach and sustainability. The report ultimately recommended that TCOE redefine its relationship with the Fedsem.

Established in 1963 in Alice, Fedsem was an ecumenical response to apartheid's restrictions on theological education (Dennis, 2009). It became a hub for critical thought and leadership formation, deeply influenced by BC and liberation theology. Despite its relocation to Pietermaritzburg and eventual closure in 1993 due to financial and governance challenges, Fedsem's legacy remains significant. In this context, the report's recommendation that TCOE redefine its relationship with Fedsem reflects a strategic effort to reconnect with its historical roots and strengthen ecumenical collaboration for transformative theological education

This historical commitment to ecumenical partnership is mirrored in TCOE's extensive external networks, which position it as a strategic hub for progressive collaboration. The breadth of its external network reveals the scope of TCOE's influence and strategic positioning. The 1987 Annual Report lists a formidable roster of collaborative partners, such as 'SACHED, Wilgespruit, CRIC, USWE, READ, Studies UCT, Masazane, Grahamstown's People's Programme, Black Sash, Legal Resources Centre, 1820 Settlers Monument

Foundation, Rhodes University, Private Schools (to name a few) and community organisations' (TCOE, 1987, p.2).

This extensive and ideologically diverse list of partners, ranging from major progressive educational bodies and civic organisations to university departments and even entities like the 1820 Settlers Monument Foundation, demonstrates TCOE's political dexterity and strategic capacity for coalition-building. The Trust successfully embedded itself within a complex, national ecosystem, which was vital for securing resources, maintaining operational legitimacy, and ensuring organisational resilience against state surveillance and repression

B. Size, shape, and the faces of the movement

An examination of the TCOE records reveals a project that was rapidly expanding in scope and personnel. An early internal evaluation of Masifundise (cited in the 1983 Annual Report) acknowledged a need for strategic expansion, noting that while the project had operated at the District level, 'much field work would have to be done in terms of broadening the operation by way of establishment of committees, as a first step' (TCOE, 1983,p.18). This evaluation seems to have prompted a fairly dramatic expansion. In its early phase, there were only four Masifundise staff members. However, by 1986, the organisation had dramatically increased its human resource capacity, listing an extensive staff of twelve additional members, including Mrs. Nontobeko Moletsane, Mrs. Bulelwa Juta (whom I interviewed for this study), among others (TCOE, 1986). This expansion in staffing signals a major increase in the project's operational scale and the mobilisation of a dedicated cohort of educators and organisers.

The shape of Masifundise's work transcended simple literacy training. The 1986 Report outlines a multi-faceted operational structure that included a number of distinct programmes such as an Advice Office, Resource Centre, Bursary Programme, Vacation School, Literacy, Child/Youth Groups, Self Help Projects and Co-operatives, and Seminars (TCOE, 1986, p. 61). In keeping with many of the other case studies, this wide portfolio suggests an organisation that sought to address the holistic needs of the community, embedding its educational work within a broader mandate of social and economic development, rather than merely imparting basic skills.

By the end of the 1980s, the TCOE network was extensive, with a Head Office in Pietermaritzburg, and as documented in its publications, eight regional operations across the

country, from the Western Cape (Masifundise) to the Transkei (Ilitha) and Bloemfontein (Sedimosang). The literature indicates that its growth was organic, driven by community requests. This ethos is captured in a promotional video produced for the TCOE in 1989 by Lindy Wilson. In the video, which was likely created to document the organisation's work for funders and supporters, TCOE chairperson and Honorary Treasurer Rod Bulman explained, 'People came to us…saying can we please join you. This is what we have got on the ground already. As long as they were genuinely community based and were operating with the people in response to the people's own perceived needs… and the organisation prioritised groups that had already assessed their own needs' (Wilson, 1989, 7:02) . This stance is further corroborated by the Director's Report in the 1983 TCOE Annual Report, which states that: 'We do not begin to think and do for communities but under ideal circumstances allow communities to prioritize their needs and to work towards finding their own solutions' (TCOE, 1983, p .2).

According to an interview conducted by Lindy Wilson with one of the learners in the video, the learner indicated that learners were predominantly women from urban and rural areas whose primary motivation was practical: 'because I want to work, in the work, you can't talk Xhosa, you must speak English', in (4:35). Also in the video, then Director Nontobeko Moletsane argued that a central challenge was balancing these educational goals with the learners' immediate survival needs and that Masifundise's strategic response was therefore to frame literacy as an integral and necessary component of their journey toward self-sufficiency (Wilson, 1989).

The TCOE Evaluation Report of May 1993 corroborates a diverse learner profile, identifying learners as workers in factories, mines, and farms, as well as domestic workers and unemployed individuals in urban and rural areas. As in the other case studies in this study, a significant gap in both the archival record and this research is the absence of direct learner voices. As with the other projects, I was unable to conduct direct interviews with former learners. However, I was fortunate to access two invaluable documents, titled the *TCOE Bayaxoxa Abafundi* (in isiZulu) and *TCOE Siyazithethela* (in isiXhosa), which translates as 'The Students Speak for Themselves' in isiZulu and 'We Speak for Ourselves' in IsiXhosa, which capture the voices of some learners involved in TCOE's educational programmes. Although not specifically linked to Masifundise in the text, some are likely to have been. While the isiZulu booklet appears to fall outside the primary period of this study,

Siyazithethela provides a powerful window into the lives of learners from the Grahamstown regions and the Western Cape, thus presumably including learners from Masifundise.

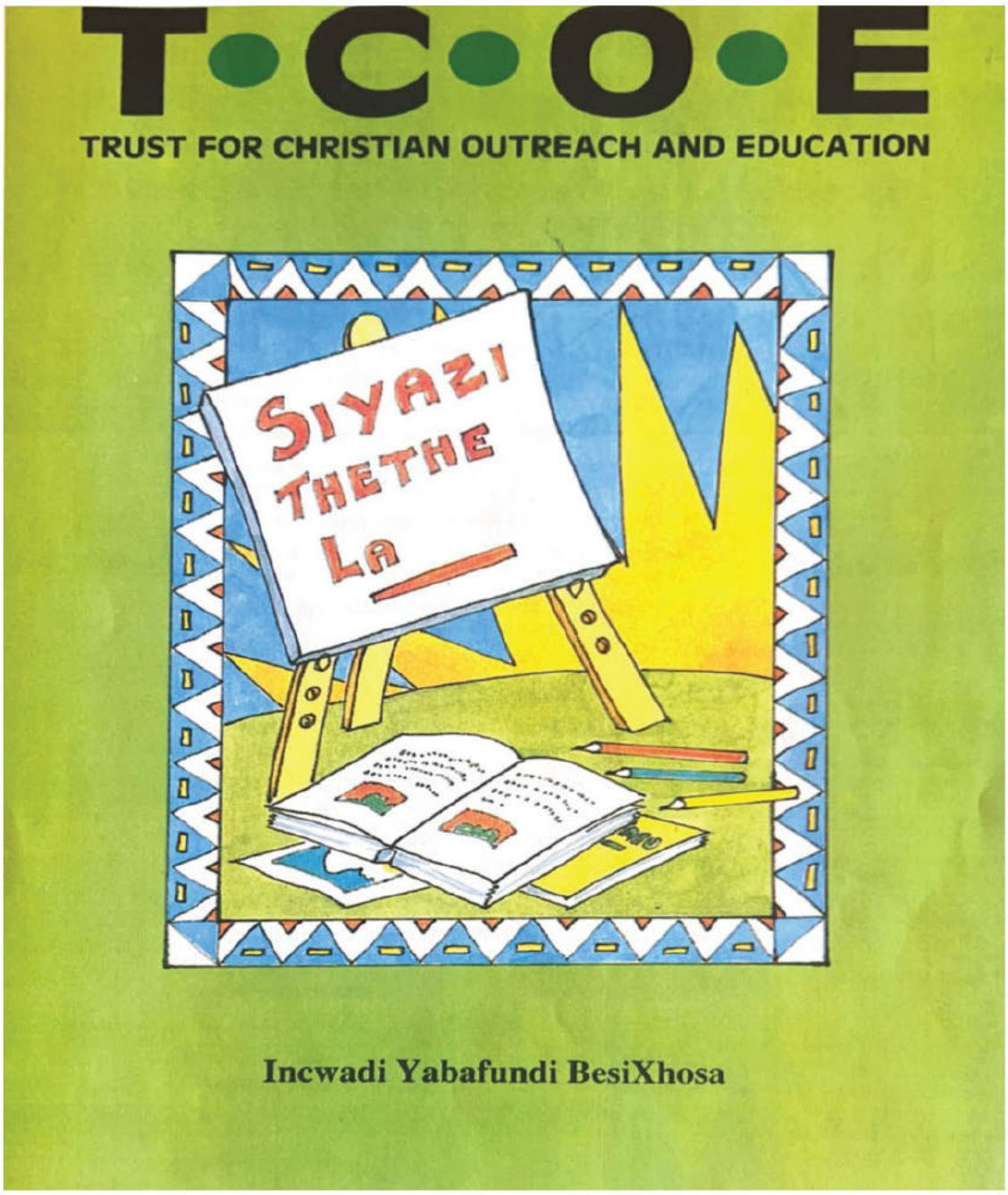


Figure 10: Cover Page of the IsiXhosa Version of the Learner Stories from TCOE, Siyazithethela: Incwadi Yabafundi BesiXhosa

This document is significant because it begins by explicitly outlining the entire TCOE network of educational projects, confirming the scale and geographical spread of the organisation by this stage. It also provides a framing narrative, a synopsis written not by the learners themselves, but by the project organisers. This synopsis states the book's purpose as follows:

> This book is a collection of short stories written by our students about their life experiences... Most of these stories explain the reasons why they couldn't attend school... what these stories reveal is that the conditions we live under have placed many people in very tight and difficult situations... This book also serves as testimony to how deeply people desire education. (TCOE, n.d.-a, p.3)

This framing shows how the lived experience of learners was placed at the forefront, and how the organisation sought to present its learners' experiences to a wider audience. The stories themselves, while sharing similar themes, are deeply personal. The narrative of a learner named Felix is a powerful representative example of the lived realities the project engaged with:

> I was born in Salem. Life was hard because my mother and father had nothing—they were uneducated... My father earned R4.00 a month, and my mother earned R2.00... I got a job working for a white man, herding cattle. I woke up early in the cold and walked barefoot. I began to understand my parents' words about school... Eventually, I got sick with tuberculosis and was hospitalised for two years... I came to Grahamstown. I stayed with my son and my children, struggling. Eventually, I started building a house in Xolani, though I haven't finished due to financial hardship. The cause is the low wages I earn from white employers. (TCOE, n.d.-a, p. 6-8)

The story, along with the others in the booklet, allows for the construction of a rich profile of the TCOE learner. Synthesising these accounts reveals several key themes. Firstly, the narratives are a direct testimony to the impact of apartheid. Learners speak of parents who were uneducated, of extreme poverty, and of leaving school because of economic hardship. Largely because of the impact of apartheid, the stories detail a life of constant struggle, arduous and exploitative labour, debilitating illnesses, displacement, and the persistent challenge of low wages. Despite these immense hardships, the central theme is an unwavering desire for education, seen as a pathway to a better life.

Felix's final, powerful sentence, 'The cause is the low wages I earn from white employers', is a perfect example of Freirean conscientisation. He moves beyond simply describing his personal hardship to identifying its structural, political cause. These powerful narratives provide invaluable insight into the lived realities and emerging consciousness of the individuals at the heart of TCOE's educational project.

The Trust went on to become one of the biggest literacy organisations in South Africa, on par with organisations such as the Learn and Teach in terms of the number of literacy groups served (TCOE,1993). Despite facing challenges such as its large size and weak grassroots structures, Masifundise had roots in Nyanga, Langa, Hermanus and Khayelitsha (Juta, Interview, 14 August 2025) and had a branch in Nduli, Ceres in KwaZulu-Natal (TCOE, 1988).

C. Pedagogical praxis: the people's participatory approach

This section is an exposition of the specific, on-the-ground teaching methodologies employed by the Masifundise literacy classes. Masifundise's pedagogy was grounded in the PPPA methodology, which was a direct attempt to formalise the Freirean cycle of praxis. The methodology was aimed at 'responding to the context, raising critical consciousness and involving people in their own development' (TCOE, 1983-2013, p. 4). This participatory ethos, rooted in Freirean praxis and formalised through PPPA, shaped Moletsane's leadership. Her insistence on community-driven decision-making, collaborating with respected local leaders to avoid externally imposed projects, redefined TCOE's operational philosophy.

Moletsane emphasised that to be truly 'community-based', the organisation had to involve the community in decision-making, collaborating with respected local leaders to ensure projects were not imposed from the outside (Management Committee, 1983). This approach inverted traditional top-down models by placing the community's articulated needs at the centre of the learning process (TCOE, 1991-1993). She explicitly defined this approach in a letter to funders in the early 1990s:

> We have adopted a method of community organising called People's Participatory Planning and Action. This method involves poor people and the marginalised section of the communities, especially women, in decision-making, with regard to how their communities and their lives can be developed. The communities are direct actors in

> identifying their needs, prioritising those needs and developing a plan by which their needs can be realised. TCOE acts as a facilitator of this process (TCOE, n.d.b).

This definition highlights the political intent of the pedagogy, which was to move the marginalised from passive recipients of aid to 'direct actors' in decision-making.

The unpublished '1990s ABE Overview' written by Liz Sparg confirms Masifundise's multi-faceted approach, noting that 'Methods used in the groups have been a combination of approaches: Freirean, life skills and language experience' (Sparg, n.d., p. 28). It details how the first few meetings were spent drawing a 'social map of the community,' with the problems and history of the community forming the basis of the teaching material. It also confirms that TCOE advocated a 'People's Participatory Planning' approach, where the community itself decides on its priorities (p. 28).

The TCOE projects were underpinned by a commitment to praxis. Their records document the integration of responsive pedagogical methods to address immediate student needs. The classes were described by Mercia Andrews as 'radical', aiming to foster awareness of rights and challenge dominant ideologies. She recounted a memorable lesson from 1989, facilitated by Nontobeko Moletsane, which illustrates the use of visual codes. Nontobeko used a large image of a police boot to spark discussion on state violence: '*Ironically, as the class began, the police raided the centre and confiscated the image, viscerally demonstrating the very lesson being taught'* (Andrews, Interview, 27 May 2025).

Another Masifundise facilitator, Bulelwa Juta, stated that their focus as facilitators was '*to conscientise communities to look at their current situation of dehumanisation critically, and ask why the men they were teaching were, for example, living in hostels, and to go out and mobilise their communities with that knowledge as a weapon*' (Interview, 14 August 2025). This powerful quote is a direct and explicit description of the Masifundise's pedagogical praxis – to start with lived experience, and critically reflect on it, and then move towards action.

The curriculum was holistic, blending creative expression with practical skills which was also infused liberation theology. As facilitator Bulelwa Juta explained:

> *We were using pictures, and our classes were mostly under the trees. We were always asking questions, and we would tell them the truth. And that maybe one day we must ask them…We would tell them that God created all of us equal, and we all have a*

> *right to all the goodness. This thing about getting all your riches in heaven does not work. We know no one who has ever come from heaven to tell us if they experienced the riches. Let us all experience the riches now as God intended, because God did not create this inequality* (Juta, Interview, 14 August 2025).

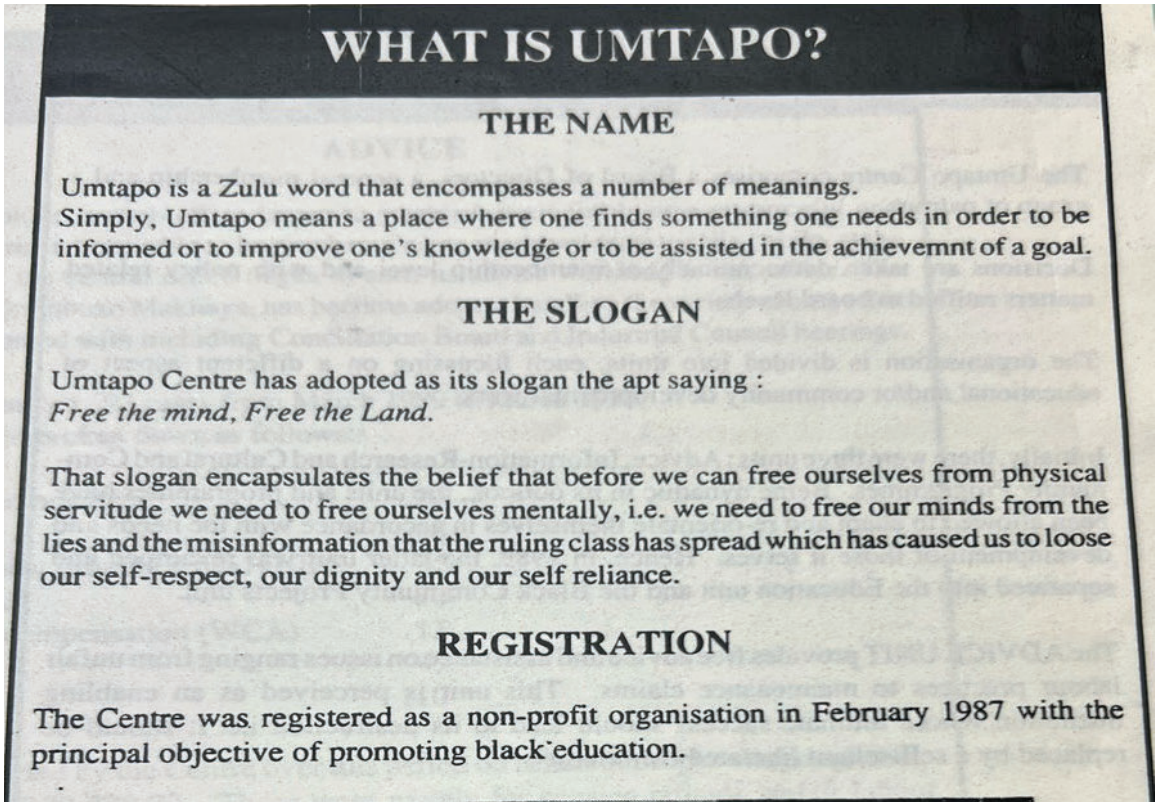
As mentioned earlier, this testimony stresses the fusion of spiritual critique, political education, and liberal theology, all of which were central to Masifundise's praxis. It was through integrating these elements that Masifundise fostered socio-political issues, but also encouraged a deeper understanding of the spiritual dimensions of justice and empowerment within the communities.

6.4.6 Black Consciousness Movement Related Project: Umtapo

The Umtapo Centre was an overtly BC-aligned initiative which was selected because of this connection, but also because it only emerged in the late 1980s, much later than some BC-aligned literacy projects.

A. Founding, Purpose, and Strategic Positioning

The Umtapo Centre was established in 1987 during a period of escalating political violence in KwaZulu-Natal (Umtapo Centre, n.d.c). Its vision is outlined in its foundational documents (Umtapo Centre, n.d.a). By the end of the 1980s, Umtapo was running 18 English literacy groups in the Durban area, using its own materials (van Heerden, 1991). From its inception, its mission was to address deep-seated social injustices by integrating literacy with anti-racism and social justice education, all under the guiding slogan 'Free the mind, Free the Land' (Naicker, Interview, 25 July 2024; Umtapo Centre, n.d.a), as shown in the following excerpt (Figure 11):



WHAT IS UMTAPO?

THE NAME

Umtapo is a Zulu word that encompasses a number of meanings.
Simply, Umtapo means a place where one finds something one needs in order to be informed or to improve one's knowledge or to be assisted in the achievemnt of a goal.

THE SLOGAN

Umtapo Centre has adopted as its slogan the apt saying :
Free the mind, Free the Land.

That slogan encapsulates the belief that before we can free ourselves from physical servitude we need to free ourselves mentally, i.e. we need to free our minds from the lies and the misinformation that the ruling class has spread which has caused us to loose our self-respect, our dignity and our self reliance.

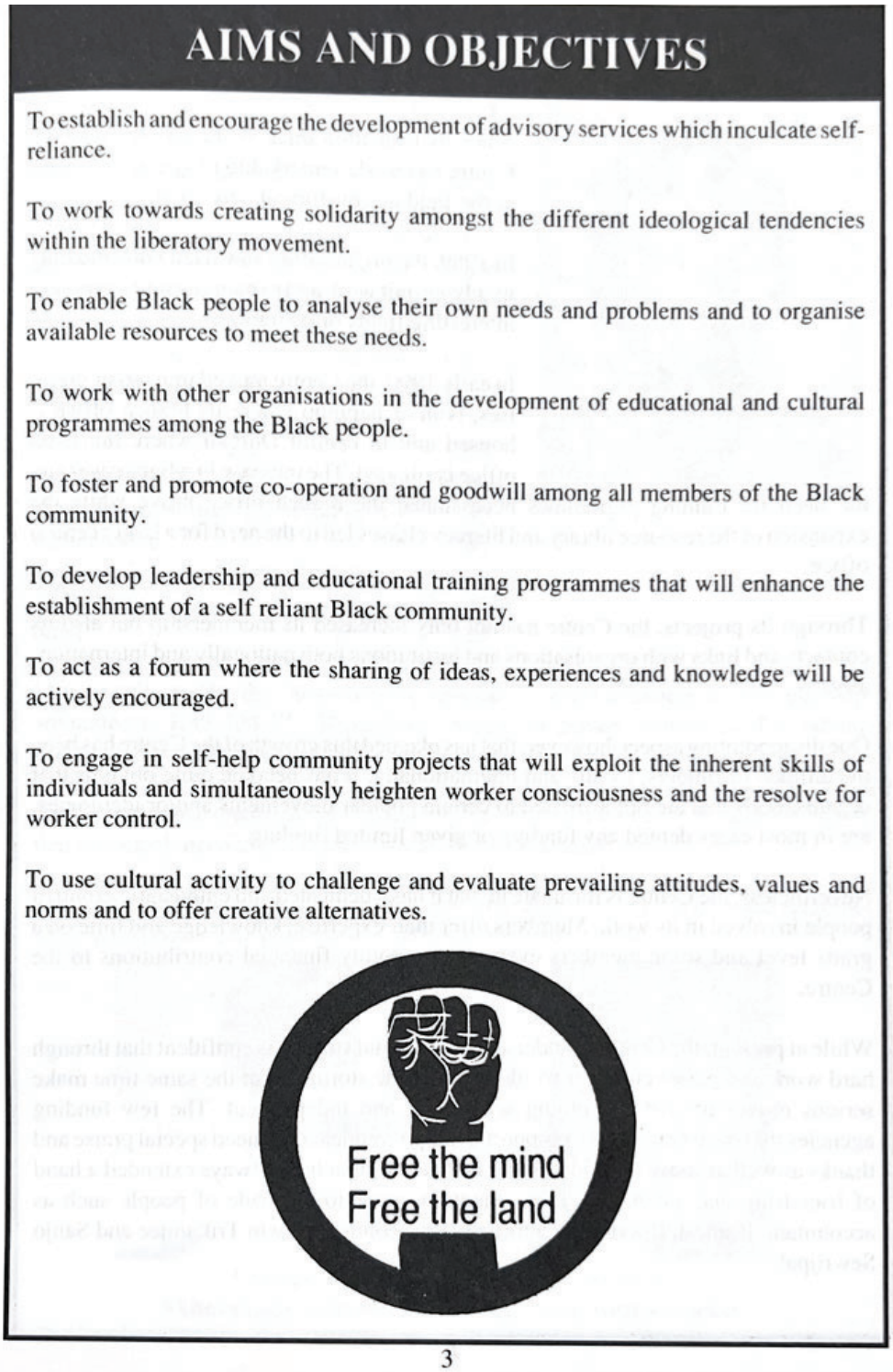
REGISTRATION

The Centre was registered as a non-profit organisation in February 1987 with the principal objective of promoting black education.

Figure 11: Introduction to Umtapo: Empowerment and Education (SAHA, AL2457/N4.5)

As is clear from this background document, Umtapo was ideologically and unapologetically rooted in the BC movement, specifically targeting Black people, with a view to rebuilding self-respect, dignity and self-reliance through changing consciousness. This BC tradition is explicit in its aims and objectives (Figure 12):

Figure 12: Umtapo flyer (SAHA, AL2457/N4.5)



AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

To establish and encourage the development of advisory services which inculcate self-reliance.

To work towards creating solidarity amongst the different ideological tendencies within the liberatory movement.

To enable Black people to analyse their own needs and problems and to organise available resources to meet these needs.

To work with other organisations in the development of educational and cultural programmes among the Black people.

To foster and promote co-operation and goodwill among all members of the Black community.

To develop leadership and educational training programmes that will enhance the establishment of a self reliant Black community.

To act as a forum where the sharing of ideas, experiences and knowledge will be actively encouraged.

To engage in self-help community projects that will exploit the inherent skills of individuals and simultaneously heighten worker consciousness and the resolve for worker control.

To use cultural activity to challenge and evaluate prevailing attitudes, values and norms and to offer creative alternatives.

3

The March 1989–February 1990 Annual Report (Umtapo Centre, 1990) features a striking cover image of a figure raising her fist—a symbol of strength, unity, and resistance against apartheid. Accompanying it is Cabral's powerful call to collective learning:

'Let those who know...
tell those who don't know.
Let those who don't know.
ask those who know.
We must learn from each other,
learn among our dear people and for the people.'

This quote situates Umtapo within Pan-Africanist and anti-imperialist traditions and echoes Freire's dialogical pedagogy. The report reflects Umtapo's mission: using knowledge as a weapon against oppression and advancing education-driven activism during a pivotal era in South Africa's liberation struggle.

Following Cabral's call for collective learning and Umtapo's emphasis on education as a weapon against oppression, another foundational document from the South African History Archive (Umtapo Centre, n.d.b) expands on this vision by outlining practical steps toward Black community self-determination and empowerment. It identifies six key pillars:

- Promoting self-reliance: Creating support systems and advisory services to encourage community independence and resilience.
- Building solidarity: Recognising the diversity of thought within the liberation movement, Umtapo planned to build bridges between different ideological groups to work towards a common goal.
- Empowering critical analysis: Equipping people with the tools to analyse their own needs and strategically use available resources to address them.
- Fostering community and leadership: Cultivating unity, goodwill, and mutual support within the Black community through strong leadership and effective educational training programmes.
- Engaging in practical projects: Initiating self-help community projects that utilised individual skills while raising worker consciousness and strengthening their resolve for worker control.
- Leveraging culture for change: Using cultural activities to challenge outdated attitudes and norms, paving the way for creative and positive alternatives.

These foundational documents outline Umtapo's vision for the Black community, emphasising self-reliance, solidarity, critical analysis, and community leadership (Umtapo, n.d.b). They reflect and reinforce the ideals of the BC movement, particularly in their emphasis on psychological liberation, cultural pride, self-reliance, and community activism, whilst practical projects continue the tradition of the Black Community Projects of the early 1970s. These interconnected themes suggest Umtapo's strong alignment with BC and its commitment to empowering Black individuals while fostering a united and resilient community. This ethos was a direct continuation of Biko's work. Its director, Strini Moodley, was a prominent BC leader and one of the activists trained by Anne Hope in Freirean methodology alongside Steve Biko. The organisation consciously claims this lineage and connection to liberatory pedagogy, a link it has reinforced through symbolic acts.

One of these acts was posthumously awarding the Steve Biko International Peace Award to Paulo Freire in 2005 because his 'ideas and pedagogy formed the basis of Umtapo's modus operandi since it was established' (Peace Afrika, 2005, p. 11), providing clear evidence of Umtapo's self-identification as an heir to both the BC and Freirean traditions. The timing in 2005 suggests not just a historical connection, but an active effort to revitalise and reaffirm the relevance of these philosophies for a new generation in post-apartheid South Africa. The connection, as explained by Peace Afrika (2005) itself, stems from the shared philosophical ground between the two thinkers, which was a commitment to 'critical consciousness, education for liberation, and Freire's solidarity with the oppressed, 'principles that were central to both the Black Consciousness Movement and Freire's own work'.

However, an interview with Asha Moodley, a BC activist deeply involved in the Durban political scene at the time, provides a more granular and nuanced account of Umtapo's specific origins. According to Moodley, the founding of Umtapo was a direct result of an ideological and strategic split within the post-1978 BC activist movement: 'I must point out that Umtapo came about after some of us broke away from the local branch of AZAPO' (Moodley, 2002, p. 60). Moodley explains that the reason for this break was a frustration with what she perceived as an overly intellectual and internally competitive culture that had developed within AZAPO. She identifies an 'intense focus on, you know, I'm a better intellectual than you are phenomenon that was pretty rife in AZAPO', which she felt was becoming 'sterile for any movement' (Ibid. pp. 60). Umtapo was therefore founded as a

conscious course correction, a return to what this group saw as the core principles of the original BC movement.

As Moodley (2002) articulates, Umtapo would define itself as a ‘community service organisation’ with an emphasis on ‘self-reliance and self-development so it sort of expresses the ethos of the Black Consciousness movement’. She explicitly contrasts the internal debates of AZAPO with Umtapo’s purpose, stating that its focus ‘has always been generally a focus of the Black Consciousness movement’, which is to say, a focus on ‘the community’. Moodley’s interview is important because it reveals that Umtapo’s founding was not just a response to the external threat of apartheid, but also an internal response to a perceived crisis within the liberation movement itself. It was a deliberate attempt to reclaim a praxis that was practical, community-focused, and true to the original BC vision of grassroots empowerment.

However, the organisation was also clearly mindful of the need for unity within the anti-apartheid movement. Its inclusion of both the Freedom Charter and the Azanian Manifesto in its 1990 calendar shows a clear attempt to build bridges while maintaining its BC ideological core. In this calendar, Umtapo positions itself as a community hub for education, liberation, and development, offering a wide array of programmes and resources to empower individuals and communities in the Durban area of South Africa. This clearly reflects the pillar on ‘Building solidarity’ across different ideological groups in the foundational document shown in (Figure 12). It positions Umtapo as a mature organisation seeking to play a unifying role in the broader liberation struggle; not as a sectarian BC faction. This is confirmed by an article on censorship in *APDUSA Views* in January 1989, found in the Ghandi Luthuli Documentation Centre, which states:

> I am not unmindful of the approach of certain organisations like the Muslim Youth Movement of South Africa, Umtapo Centre and SACHED. These organisations believe that one aspect of their contribution to the liberatory struggle is to expose their members and constituencies to the ideas of all the tendencies of a liberatory movement. (APDUSA 1989, p. 7)

B. Size, Shape, and the Faces of the Movement

The November 1987 issue of *Umtapo Focus* (Umtapo Centre, 1987) captures the Centre’s intellectual and political vitality during the anti-apartheid struggle. *Umtapo Focus* features articles like *War in Angola*, *Biko Speaks*, and *What is to be done?*, reflecting Umtapo’s deep

engagement with BC and its vision for a non-racial, egalitarian, socialist South Africa. The publication critiques liberal infiltration, black-on-black violence, and divide-and-rule tactics, while promoting open debate guided by logic, historical lessons, and humanity.

It also features international coverage such as the Angolan war and anti-apartheid sports conference which highlight Umtapo's global outlook, linking local liberation to worldwide struggles. It is anchored by Cabral's call to 'learn from each other… for the people', thus emphasising education, empowerment, and solidarity as essential to justice and equality.

Extending this ideological commitment into practice, the Umtapo Centre approached community engagement with distinctive philosophy. Impoverished communities were never seen through a charitable lens, but as active agents of change. This emphasis highlights Umtapo's dedication African humanism and participatory development, emphasising collaboration and empowerment rather than dependency (Umtapo Centre, n.d. a). Its work was widespread, involving programmes in literacy, economic justice, and peace education. The facilitators, like Arun Naicker (one of my research participants), were deeply embedded in the communities they served embodying Umtapo's grassroots ethos.

However, a critical limitation is the absence of detailed information, numbers and direct learner testimonies. While Naicker provides invaluable institutional context and powerful second-hand accounts (such as telling a story of the domestic worker who quit her job after a class on workers' rights), the voices of the learners themselves are missing.

C. Pedagogical Praxis

The Umtapo Centre's commitment to collective learning evolved into a concrete literacy initiative through strategic collaboration and resilience. Umtapo (1990) records that by late 1988, Umtapo began planning an English literacy and ESL programme, drawing on the activist network's intellectual and training resources.

To this end, five members trained as literacy coordinators with Learn and Teach in March 1989, followed by additional training with the TCOE in March 1990 (Umtapo, 1990). This reliance on (Freire-inspired) partner organisations highlight the interconnected nature of the counter-hegemonic activist ecosystem.

The first class launched in June 1989 at Umtapo's main office for residents of the Thokoza Women's Hostel, with a second class in August at the Isipingo branch serving Umlazi, Kwa Makuta, and Umbumbulu. Despite these promising steps, the programme faced serious

challenges: limited venues, scarce funding (with only the Mobil Foundation providing substantial support), and reliance on four part-time volunteer facilitators (Umtapo, 1990).

These constraints reveal the precarious conditions under which even politically sophisticated projects operated. Yet, the programme persisted, driven by dedication rather than resources, seeking not only to teach literacy but to advance dignity, equality, and social justice. In this way, Umtapo's literacy work embodied the enduring spirit of activism in the fight against oppression.

Despite the programme's operational challenges, its deeper significance lay in its pedagogical approach. Moving from the structural realities of the literacy initiative to its educational philosophy, Umtapo's method was a direct and authentic application of Freirean principles. As Naicker explained, classes did not begin with a textbook: '*We used a Freirean methodology, where any training we did would start with profound question of 'Who am I*? (Naicker, Interview, 25 July 2024) (echoing the Learn and Teach methodology outlined previously). This immediately validated the learners' lived realities as the starting point for learning. The methodology explicitly rejected the 'banking' model of education. As Naicker stated, '*There must be dialogue, the teacher doesn't pour'* (Interview, 25 July 2024).

The 'Peace Afrika' (2005) publication perfectly encapsulates this pedagogical goal, summarising Freire's contribution as teaching 'students not only to read and write but to "read the word and the world". Skills alone are not enough, he taught us; the point of education must be to illuminate reality, to unmask how domination works' (p. 11). This confirms that, for Umtapo, the praxis was never just about technical literacy but about political and critical analysis.

The process was built on problem-posing education, creating safe spaces for critical self-discovery. This approach is visually captured (in Figure 13) from a manual used by Umtapo, taken from Anne Hope and Sally Timmel's *Training for Transformation*, which depicts the banking model as a dehumanising, mechanical process:

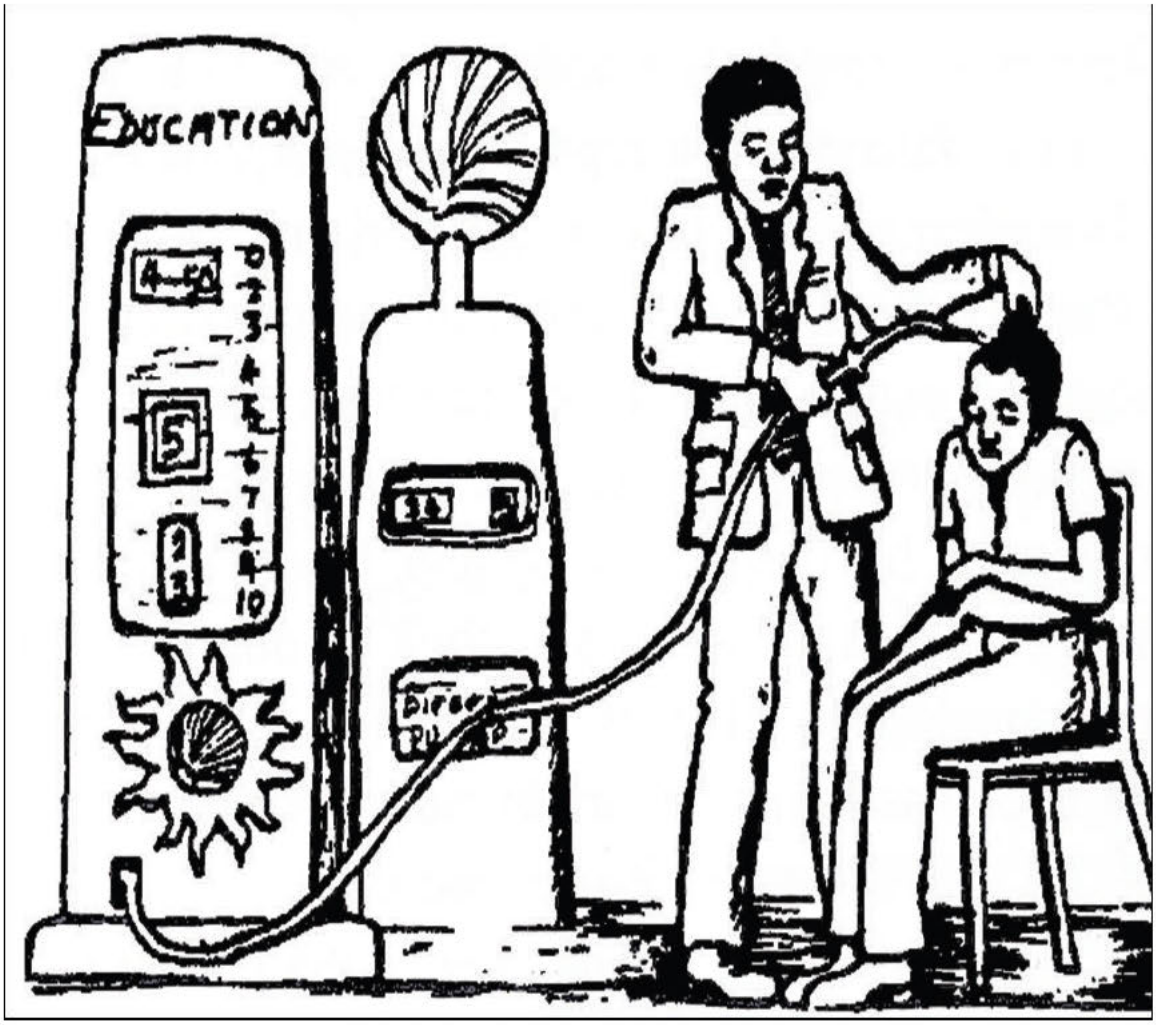


Figure 13: A visual metaphor from the Umtapo training manual critiquing the 'banking model' of education, where knowledge is 'deposited' into passive learners. The image comes directly from Anne Hope and Sally Timmel's Training for Transformation manual (Naicker, Interview, 25 July 2024)

The image was shared by Naicker in my interview with her, and was taken from one of the manuals they used. According to her, this picture was used as a code in Freirean terms forming part of the problem-posing, multi-dimensional representations of everyday life situations and social problems faced by oppressed people (Naicker, personal communication, 22 November 2025). She reflected that its purpose was to provoke critical thinking and spark discussion on issues that people might otherwise avoid. She added that this was used primarily at the beginning of the project to warn against indoctrination, which denies people the ability to think critically. In this case, she stated, education is portrayed as non-neutral and ideological, functioning as a mechanism of indoctrination rather than liberation. The picture

depicts a teacher pouring knowledge of his own choosing into the head of the learner, disregarding prior learning, learner initiative, and collective learning (Naicker, personal communication, 22 November 2025).

The curriculum was dynamic and focused on practical relevance, constantly asking, '*What will they do with it*?' (Naicker, Interview, 25 July 2024). According to Naicker '*We created our own manuals as well as adapted from the Training for Transformation and other activists*' (Personal Communication, 14 October 2025). This framing underscores the deliberate political nature of the pedagogy, aligning with Freirean principles of dialogical education and critical consciousness. By using visual codes to challenge dominant narratives, the curriculum positioned learners as active agents rather than passive recipients of knowledge. The emphasis on locally produced and adapted materials further reflects the project's commitment to contextual relevance and grassroots ownership of the learning process. What is interesting is the use of an image from Hope and Timmel's Freirean-inspired manual as a code, rather than developing a code based on learners' lived experiences.

Unfortunately, I was not able to source any manual used in Umtapo's literacy classes. However, a sample lesson plan from one of Umtapo's Resource Manuals shared by Naicker (Personal Communication, 17 October 2025) provides a concrete example of Umtapo's pedagogical praxis in action and serves as a proxy for Umtapo's pedagogical design. This is in an Umtapo Centre Publication titled *African Peace, Human Rights and Anti-Racism Education: A Resource Manual for Educators and Trainers,* and was edited by Strini Moodley, Deena Soliar and Prof David Macharia. Whilst intended for use in schools, Naicker confirmed that this manual was similar to manuals employed in literacy classes (Naicker, personal communication, 22 November 2025). She argues that while the lesson begins with content (Ubuntu) rather than learners' lived experiences, its dialogical structure and emphasis on action align broadly with Freirean principles (Ibid.). This suggests that Umtapo's approach combined BC philosophy with participatory, praxis-driven education.

The lesson plan in question is titled *Ubuntu - how to employ Ubuntu to restore peace and anti-discrimination* (Figure 14). This lesson fuses BC movement and Freirean methodology in that it in that it starts with the concept of Ubuntu, which is derived from African philosophy. This provides direct evidence of the Umtapo's BC commitment to centring Black intellectual traditions as the foundation for liberation.

Sample Lesson 5

UBUNTU - HOW TO EMPLOY UBUNTU TO RESTORE PEACE AND ANTI-DISCRIMINATION

A. Plenary

1. Put up on a transparency or flip-chart the definition of UBUNTU by Desmond Tutu.

2. Read this together with these students and discuss this fully.

3. When you are sure that they understand the meaning as fully as possible, give them a handout of the definition to file. (If available, the video on Ubuntu by Don Mattera could be shown).

B. Small groups

Ask students to work in small groups and to do the exercise 'The shape of peace and anti-discrimination in our world'

C. Plenary

1. Now ask them to work on a plan of action to promote the concept of Ubuntu in their school.

2. Ask them to write up a full and careful plan together. Do this as a full group activity and ask them to consider who would be the appropriate people to present/or hand this to - the governing body, the school principal, the other teachers, the department of education.

3. Ask someone to type up the plan and another to photocopy it. You need to write a covering letter indicating where the idea emanated from, i.e. the Peace and Anti-Racism Education programme and the session on Ubuntu, and attach it to the plan.

4. Give it to them the next day to hand out as agreed upon.

5. At the next session, discuss whether they did so and their reactions to the plan.

Figure 14: A sample lesson from a Umtapo resource manual

The lesson is also structured as a clear and deliberate cycle of Freirean praxis. It begins with critical reflection (Phase A & B), where students are asked to read, watch, and 'discuss fully' the meaning of Ubuntu and its relationship to their world. It then proceeds to transformative action (Phase C). Learners are asked for their opinions and then encouraged to develop a concrete 'plan of action to promote the concept of Ubuntu in their school'. The lesson details the practical steps of writing the plan and identifying who to present it to, such as the school principal or the department of education. Finally, it closes the loop of praxis. The facilitator is instructed that 'At the next session, discuss whether they did so, and their reactions to the plan,' bringing the results of the real-world action back into the classroom for a new cycle of reflection. This document provides irrefutable evidence that Umtapo's pedagogy was not

abstract or purely theoretical. It was a highly structured, politically charged, and action-oriented methodology designed to equip learners with the tools to be active agents of change in their own communities, directly fulfilling its mission to ‘free the mind, free the land’.

The politically charged climate of apartheid South Africa posed ongoing challenges to organisations and activism. Archival evidence confirms that Umtapo faced state censorship during the late 1980s. A document held at the Western Cape Archives and Records Service (Botha, 1988) records that one of Umtapo’s publications, *Umtapo Focus, Volume 2, Number 3* (which I was unfortunately unable to locate), was officially banned by the state because it was deemed ‘undesirable’, under the Publications Act of 1974. While the exact reasons for the ban are unclear, it signals the state’s concern about Umtapo’s messaging and its perceived threat to apartheid ideology.

6.5 Consolidated Profile of the Activist Participants

The synthesis of narratives from fifteen interviewed activists reveals a complex and interconnected network, a web of connections that spanned different ideological currents, geographical locations, and organisational forms. While no single experience was universal, several powerful patterns emerge that define this generation of educational activists. The majority of the participants in the early student and student/worker projects were White and university-educated, with academic backgrounds from the former privileged institutions such as the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) and the University of Cape Town (UCT).

Their political consciousness was shaped by a confluence of influences such as the international student movements, the rise of the BC movement, the currents of liberation and Black theology, and their involvement in student organisations like NUSAS and the UCM. For a key cluster of these activists, particularly those involved in the early student-led projects, the Freirean training conducted by Anne Hope at the Wilgespruit Conference Centre was a pivotal experience. The training provided them with a shared pedagogical and political language that they then disseminated through their own work to the Reiger Park classes, the WPLP, and the IAS. This echoes the experience that SASO activists later brought this into Umtapo, as outlined by Hadfield (2017), and, as we have seen, Saths Cooper (one of those who attended the SASO training).

However, it is crucial to note that this was not a universal experience for all participants in this study. Other activists came to Freirean ideas through different pathways, some through their engagement with the BC movement more generally, or through the labour movement, or through independent reading of the illicitly circulated *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. What truly unites them is not a single training event, but their shared position within a dense web of connections: Activists from student-aligned movements moved into the worker movement (IAS); individuals with BC roots collaborated with church-aligned structures (TCOE); and service organisations like SACHED and Learn and Teach provided resources and training that cut across these different sectors.

Their work was characterised by a deep and unwavering commitment to social justice, which invariably came with significant personal risks such as banning orders, arrests, detention and constant state surveillance. Ultimately, the collective profile is not of a single homogenous group, but of a diverse network of activists who, despite their different entry points and ideological nuances, shared a fundamental belief in education as a ‘practice of freedom’ and dedicated themselves to waging a counter-hegemonic struggle on the educational front.

6.6 Consolidated Profile of the Learners

Synthesising the detailed profile from Johannesburg and the Western Cape with the descriptive evidence from the other case studies reveals a consistent and powerful collective profile of the learner at the heart of the Freirean literacy movement. While local details varied, the core characteristics of the participants were remarkably similar, confirming that these projects were responding to a shared social and political reality.

Across the WPLP, the IAS, and Learn and Teach (and perhaps Masifundise – although there were more women than men in this case), the learner was a Black migrant worker. They were Zulu-speaking men in the Johannesburg-based hostels targeted by the IAS and Xhosa-speaking men in the Western Cape from the rural ‘homelands’ regions such as the Transkei. They were women, employed as domestic workers in the Learn and Teach suburban groups. In all cases, they were part of a Black low-wage, manual labour force. The defining feature of their lives was the pain of family separation and the immense pressure of being the sole breadwinner, sending remittances back to rural homelands. This was the human cost of the migrant labour system, a theme that echoes from the detailed WPLP narratives to the pragmatic motivations of the IAS learners.

Finally, the profile that emerges is not one of passive victimhood but of developing agency. The case studies suggest that the pathway from critical consciousness to organised action was an important, shared aspiration among many learners in this entire ecosystem of resistance.

A powerful, recurring thread is the learners' desire for self-improvement as a form of resistance. Examples include the motivation to 'read the Bible' (IAS), to 'read newspapers' (Learn and Teach), and to 'help children with homework', acts that asserted dignity and aspiration in a system designed to deny both. Attending night school after a gruelling day of physical labour was a shared act of profound commitment. For some, English literacy was a practical necessity to navigate workplaces, read pay slips, and interact with bureaucratic systems. For others, literacy became a tool for personal empowerment, enabling engagement with the world through newspapers, and, in Freirean terms to 'read the world' (Freire, 1970, p. 35). In the next chapter, I consider this in more detail, determining the extent to which this individual empowerment translated into collective action.

6.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented the data generated through my research, painting a picture of the case study of Freirean literacy projects through the memories of activists and the content of historical archives. The data reveal a complex world of resistance, pedagogical innovation, immense personal risk, and internal contradiction. Having laid this evidentiary groundwork of the Freirean nature of these projects and their praxis, the following chapter provides my analysis, interpreting these findings through the theoretical lenses of Freire and Gramsci to address the study's research questions. Lukes' three-dimensional view of power adds depth to this analysis by examining visible decision-making and agenda-setting along with the more subtle, structural forms of power that shape preferences and limit alternatives. His understanding of power as potential/agency aids in discerning whether the projects indeed built agency and praxis.

Chapter 7: Data Analysis

7.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I presented the data generated in this study. The data need to be seen within the context outlined in the literature review I gave in Chapters Three and Four, and from the theoretical framework. This chapter thus analyses and interprets the data gathered from interviews and archival research to address the research questions.

Since this study is framed by a critical paradigm, this analysis examines the power dynamics at play: the tensions between the projects' emancipatory ideals and the constraints imposed by the apartheid state. In keeping with the critical paradigm, the analysis is shaped by my own positionality as a Black researcher who lived under apartheid and participated in similar literacy initiatives at Khanya College in the late 1980s. This critical lens is not a bias, but a deliberate tool I used to interrogate the contradictions between the rhetoric of liberation and the material realities of the oppressed. I detailed the full discussion of the critical paradigm, reflexivity, and the ethical management of power dynamics in the research process in the Methodology Chapter (Chapter Five).

In Chapter One, I argued that whilst both my own reported experience and the literature present the position that there was definite interest in the ideas of Freire and a number of literacy projects inspired by Freire in South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s, there is in fact very little detail about exactly how these projects used Freire in the classroom. In addition, my own experience in my Masters study (in which I specifically looked at a more recent 'Freirean' project, discovering that there was in fact very little evidence of Freire), and concerns raised by Aronowitz (2012) and Alexander (1990), meant that I approached claims about the 'Freirean' nature of the projects of the 1970s and 1980s with caution. I stated that Aronowitz (2012) argues that while Freire's work, especially the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, has been touted as a 'brilliant methodology of a highly charged political character' (p. 257), it has, however, often been reduced to a teaching methodology as opposed to being used as a political philosophy or social theory. Alexander (1990) claims that 'Freire's method has been co-opted in thousands of different ways in the pursuit of ruling-class, status quo-preserving projects all over the world' (Alexander, 1990, p. 59). There is thus ongoing debate regarding

whether ‘Freirean-inspired projects’ genuinely employ Freirean methodologies as intended by Freire (i.e. in keeping with his political intent). In this study, then, I specifically wanted to explore the praxis of ‘Freirean’ literacy projects in South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s.

In my attempt to understand the literacy projects in the 1970s and 1980s, I generated rich, thick and detailed descriptions of their practices, in order to examine how they conceptualised praxis, and to explore the nature of action within these initiatives, specifically as it relates to whether or not their efforts reflected a war of position or a war of manoeuvre. In this chapter, my aim is to interpret the findings in relation to these questions primarily through the theoretical lenses of Paulo Freire, Antonio Gramsci, and Steven Lukes.

My analysis builds on Freire’s concept of praxis and its reinterpretation by contemporary critical educators who emphasise the political nature of education and its connection to broader cultural forces. Giroux (1988) extends Freire’s ideas into the realm of public pedagogy, highlighting that education is not confined to the classroom but is deeply influenced by societal dynamics. Darder (2012) adds to this dynamic by emphasising the importance of reclaiming cultural voice as a crucial aspect of true liberation, alongside addressing economic inequalities. McLaren (1998), on the other hand, highlights the need to link critical pedagogy with revolutionary class consciousness. My discussion touches on all of these insights.

These perspectives, read together, enable us to view the literacy projects as more than mere technical interventions, but as tools emerging from ideological spaces where issues of identity, power, and resistance are actively negotiated. Through the recognition of the interplay of culture, identity, and politics, we can appreciate how these projects sought to empower individuals and communities in their struggle for liberation.

As discussed in Chapter Two, existing literature on ‘Freirean-inspired’ projects emphasises the important connection between reflection and action (Gadotti, 1994), yet there is a lack of detailed accounts on how these principles are put into practice. Gramscian analyses of civil society (Anderson, 1976; Mayo, 1999) distinguish between war of position and war of manoeuvre, but few studies have explored how these concepts play out in literacy initiatives.

Moreover, research on power and agency in educational movements (Giroux, 1983; Luke, 1997) shows that literacy programmes often become battlegrounds for ideological conflict. In particular, this aspect has not been sufficiently explored in the South African context. This

chapter aims to fill these gaps by bringing together theory, literature, and historical evidence, creating a richer understanding of the case study projects and how literacy initiatives can drive social change. It is structured around the study's three research questions, which are as follows:

Research Question 1: What was the nature of the Freirean literacy projects in the 1970s and 1980s?

Research Question 2: How did these projects understand the concept of 'praxis'?

Research Question 3: What was the nature of the 'action' that emerged from these projects and to what extent did this constitute a war of position or a war of manoeuvre?

7.2 RQ1: What was the nature of the Freirean literacy projects in the 1970s and 1980s?

The first objective of this research was to generate a thick description of the Freirean literacy projects in the 1970s and 1980s. In the opening chapter, I argued that whilst the literature – in particular within the radical education genre – makes a consistent claim that the case study literacy projects were Freirean (Aitchison, 2003; Aitchison & McKay, 2021; French, 1988; Gush & Walters, 1995; Hutton, 1992; Kerfoot, 2009; Moss, 2014; Prinsloo, 1999; van Heerden, 1991), in fact there has been limited detailed exploration of this area of investigation. My review of the literature in Chapter Four revealed that previous scholarship provided only a broad, foundational understanding of these projects, lacking the rich, granular detail generated by this study. I maintained that much of the literature within the radical adult education genre is also overwhelmingly self-referential and frequently unsupported by scholarly references, or it references itself, creating a closed loop of validation. The extant literature acknowledges three main areas of concordance:

a) The projects were fundamentally part of the anti-apartheid struggle (Aitchison, 2003; Aitchison & McKay, 2021; Gush & Walters, 1995; Kerfoot, 2009);
b) The projects were inserted into some of the major ideological contestations of the struggle (e.g., the IAS in the workerist/populist debates (Moss, 2014); the UCM/NUSAS orbit in the BC/White liberal contention (Motala & Vally, 2002); and
c) The projects were subjected to repression from the state (Aitchison, 2003; Gush & Walters, 1995; Moss, 2014).

However, the literature is unclear on exactly how Freire's political philosophy influenced the manner in which the projects positioned themselves within the anti-apartheid struggle. The literature in fact offers very little detail about exactly how Freire's work was integrated into the projects, in the actual classes, the learners' experience, or the specific pedagogical practices and where claims are made, little evidence is provided. The nature of the projects, therefore, remained abstract, necessitating a study to unearth the complex dynamics of the classroom and the organisation. The data presented in Chapter Six met this objective by providing rich detail on the projects' origins, personnel, and operations. The detailed description generated in the data affirm the macro-political context established by existing literature while also providing micro-level insights into the organisations' operation. This evidence presented in the Founding, Purpose, and Strategic Positioning sections of each case demonstrates that these projects were fundamentally part of the anti-apartheid struggle. The data make evident four broad characterisations as: ideologically positioned; shaped by systemic axes of oppression in their class, race and gender profiles; shaped by state repression; and demonstrating fundamental Freirean methodology.

The data show clearly that the projects were actively embedded within core ideological debates within the broader anti-apartheid movement. They were not neutral spaces. For instance, the student movement projects reflected the growing emergence of BC and its critique of White liberalism. Horn recalls '*Those of us who were White students who had sympathy with the philosophy of SASO...had to decide what was to be our role*' (Interview, 18 May 2024). This statement serves to illustrate the tensions: how student movement projects reflected the rise of BC and its critique of White liberalism, that the IAS was characterised by a workerist/populist tension (Brown, Interview, 7 August 2024; Hogan, Interview, 6 August 2024), and the Umtapo Centre was actually formed from an internal split with AZAPO to reclaim a community-oriented BC praxis (Moodley, 2002). However, Umtapo also sought not to distance itself entirely from the Charterist position gaining traction through the UDF in the mid- to late-1980s (as evidenced by the inclusion of the Freedom Charter in its calendar (Umtapo, 1990)). These conflicts illustrate that the projects served as sites for exploring, testing and potentially synthesising competing political theories into practical action, but also that the political beliefs of those involved inherently shaped the projects themselves. For example, Masifundise's alignment to BC principles influenced the extent to which it emphasised community-based projects and approaches to resistance.

The projects' nature was clearly also shaped by the intersection of systemic oppressive factors demonstrated in the profiles of the individuals involved. The typical learner profile was that of exploited, working-class Black migrant workers and domestic workers, whilst the main facilitators often tended to be more middle-class (and in the early initiatives, such as the UCM and NUSAS, White). Moreover, the projects navigated gender dynamics, such as males outnumbering females amongst the learners in the WPLP/IAS worker classes, compared to a much higher incidence of female domestic workers in the Learn and Teach classes. These profile factors highlight the complexities of addressing multiple axes of oppression within the pedagogical framework.

It is also very evident in the data that the projects were seriously affected by state repression, which ultimately validated their political nature. The ongoing harassment and/or detention of staff members, raids on offices, banning of publications such as *Umtapo Focus* (Van Staden, 1989), and confiscation of copies of *Learn and Teach* magazine (Molobi, Interview, 13 November 2024) demonstrate that the state correctly perceived the projects as a direct ideological threat.

Previously missing data really relate to exactly how the classes were run, confirming that the projects were fundamentally Freirean in their pedagogy (codes, generative themes, dialogue), and this pedagogy was inherently political, designed not just for skill transfer, but for social change. Facilitators across all projects (Reiger Park classes, WPLP, IAS, Learn and Teach, Umtapo, and Masifundise) attested to using codes as a key instructional tool to foster critical thinking, encourage dialogue, and promote conscientisation among learners. Despite the thick description, the nature of the projects, however, is somewhat limited by the scarcity of direct learner voices, a crucial finding that largely reflects the very power dynamics and systemic violence (harassment, arrests, forced absence) that the projects sought to challenge.

Having established this broad outline of the nature of the projects, I now provide a deeper, in-depth analysis of the projects in relation to two crucial issues, viz. the extent to which the projects were consciously drawing on Freire's political philosophy, as opposed to simply his pedagogy/methodology; and the extent to which the projects' methodology/pedagogy was consistent with Freire's and with their own political positioning, to support my claims. I do this by considering the projects against a set of specific criteria derived from my analysis of Freire in Chapter Two, drawing on Gramsci and Lukes' contributions to assist. To ensure

clarity, the analysis evaluates the projects based on the following three criteria, which define authentic, counter-hegemonic praxis:

1. Political Purpose (Lukes' third dimension): The extent to which the project explicitly aimed at conscientisation, positioning the systematic critique of apartheid's ideological control as a primary objective.
2. Dialogical Method (Freire's co-intentionality): Evidence that the project employed a problem-posing methodology designed to transform the teacher–learner dichotomy into an authentic, horizontal relationship where learners acted as co-investigators of knowledge.
3. Action Outcome (Gramsci's praxis): The degree to which critical reflection translated into organised collective action, thereby establishing a tangible link between the ideological war of position within the classroom and structural confrontation in the broader struggle.

To facilitate this analysis, I formulated the following questions to reflect the criteria:

1. Did the projects understand contemporary South Africa to be a situation of oppression? If so, who did they understand to be the oppressor? Who did they understand to be the oppressed?
2. Did the projects understand oppression to have an inherently dehumanising impact on people?
3. Did the projects understand oppression to be dehumanising of both the oppressor and oppressed?
4. Did the projects understand all education to be politically positioned (i.e. either supporting oppression, or the struggle against it), and consciously position their literacy project in opposition to the state's (banking/oppressive) education?
5. Did the projects consciously recognise/argue for the need for conscientisation, in order for the oppressed to understand the true nature of their lived experience? Did they comply with Freire's methodology (starting with lived experience, using codes, encouraging dialogue)?
6. Did they consciously try to instil in learners a sense that the world could be changed by people (i.e. building power within, to, and with)?
7. Did they consciously work towards some kind of action related to lived experience, or at very least, discuss what could be done?

I begin the discussion over four sections by considering: firstly, the projects' analysis of the contemporary context of South Africa in order to determine how they understood it to be a situation of oppression; secondly, their understanding of the nature of education in the context of this oppression; thirdly, the dehumanising effects of oppression and the need for concientisation; and lastly, a consideration of their understanding of their educational projects' role in instilling learner agency in relation to the context.

7.2.1 The projects' understanding and analysis of the context

Drawing on Gramsci (1971) and Thomas (2009), I have argued, that a ruling group aims to secure potential allies through hegemony, presenting its worldview as common sense to build consent within civil society. For those who cannot be won over, force is used to maintain control.

Lukes' insights enhance this understanding by providing a nuanced view of 'power over' through his three-dimensional framework, which highlights both overt coercion and the ways in which perceptions and preferences are shaped. His first dimension focuses on observable behaviour in decision-making over key issues where there is an actual conflict of interest. On this level, 'power over' is exercised when one actor or group prevails over another through a visible decision-making process. Considering 'power over' from this angle answers the question 'who wins?' in an open contest. In apartheid South Africa, this was clearly the apartheid state, whose rigged parliamentary power (through excluding everyone not classified as 'White') allowed it to pass legislation and make policy. The example of state's decision to ban publications like *Umtapo Focus* (Van Staden, 1989) and *Learn and Teach* (Smit, 1987) magazine was a stark exercise of 'power over' these organisations. Moreover, banning activists and organisations, police harassment, and detention (and ultimately, sending troops into townships) were all components of this visible dimension of 'power over'.

Lukes (2005) argues that this view is limited because it only sees power where there is open conflict. It is blind to the ways power is used to prevent such conflicts from ever emerging, thereby reproducing the bias of the system it studies. Lukes thus argues that is necessary to consider a second dimension of 'power over'. This is the ability to confine the scope of decision-making to 'safe' issues: the power of 'non-decision-making', or setting the agenda, to prevent the grievances of the group without 'power over' from ever being aired or considered legitimate. It is the power to control the agenda. The apartheid system was a

masterclass in this dimension, entirely excluding Black political participation from the national agenda. The apartheid system exemplified Lukes' second and third dimensions of power through its systematic exclusion of Black political participation and its manipulation of perceptions of rights. Apartheid legislation, such as the Pass Laws, Group Areas Act (Kallaway, 1984), and Bantu Education Act (Chisholm, 1989), enforced racial segregation in housing, education, and mobility, effectively controlling opportunities for collective resistance. Instruments like the Coloured Persons Representative Council, The South African Indian Council, and Bantustan policy were designed to create an illusion of representation, delegitimising Black grievance while maintaining White supremacy (Kallaway, 2002; Seekings & Nattrass, 2005). These measures illustrate how the state combined coercion with ideological manipulation to sustain its power.

However, Lukes critiques this view as still being too tied to conflict (even covert conflict), as it cannot account for situations where power is so effective that it shapes people's desires to prevent conflict from arising at all. This is the third dimension of 'power over'. Lukes argues that this dimension constitutes the most effective and insidious dimension of 'power over' by shaping people's perceptions, cognitions, and preferences. It influences people's very wants so that they accept their role in the existing order. This ideological control works to prevent a 'latent conflict' between the real interests of the oppressed and the interests of the powerful from ever being felt as a grievance. It achieves this by cultivating 'false consciousness' or 'adaptive preferences', in which individuals internalise their own subordination. Lukes makes an explicit connection between this third dimension of 'power over' and Gramsci's hegemony.

This dual strategy of coercion and consent not only structured apartheid's social order but also profoundly shaped the terrain in which the literacy projects operated. Understanding this mechanism used to establish a system of hegemony is essential for analysing how educational initiatives positioned themselves within this system and whether as instruments of compliance or as sites of resistance.

In Chapter Three, I established that whilst apartheid was clearly a system of force, it was also a hegemonic project designed to naturalise racial domination (Christie, 1990; Kallaway, 2002; Morris & Padayachee, 1989; Seekings and Nattrass, 2005). Drawing on the literature, I discussed how in apartheid South Africa, the hegemonic 'common sense' attempted to normalise racial hierarchy and oppression, which was reinforced daily through segregated

education, discriminatory laws, and everyday discourse (Mbakwe & Osuagwu, 2015; Morris & Padayachee, 1989; Pillay, 2013) – for example, the debasing labels of 'boy' or 'girl' for adult Black workers who were either domestic workers or worked in gardens. However, the 'integral' South African state sought to establish a comprehensive hegemony far beyond simple racial oppression. This project was multi-faceted, seeking to normalise an interconnection of interlocking ideologies.

At the South African state's core was a system of racial capitalism, which promoted the belief that a racial hierarchy was both natural and essential for a functioning economy (Beinart, 2001; Dubow, 2014; Legassick, 1974; Pampallis & Bailey, 2001; Wolpe, 1988). This narrative positioned White ownership and Black labour as the only viable order, demonising alternatives like communism as a threat to both racial and economic stability. This economic order was reinforced by a Christian-Nationalist patriarchy, a value system that enforced strict gender roles and used a conservative interpretation of religion to justify social hierarchies under the leadership of the White Afrikaner man (Christie, 1990). These ideologies were then drilled into the national consciousness through a hegemony of knowledge, a differentiated 'banking' education system, as Freire would call it, where Christian National Education created rulers (i.e. cementing White supremacist hegemony across classes) and Bantu Education attempted to engineer a compliant, semi-skilled workforce conditioned to accept its own inferiority (Kallaway, 2002). A counter-hegemonic intervention in this context thus needs to be seen as not just about fighting apartheid; it needed to be about confronting this entire ideological constellation.

The data show that the very nature of the projects was defined by their role in actively contesting apartheid hegemony through ideological struggle. They clearly understood the context to be a situation of systemic oppression. Kell succinctly captures the atmosphere of the time: *'apartheid just ruled our lives completely'* (Interview, 27 September 2024), a sentiment that captures the pervasive reality in which these initiatives operated. Deeb's account reinforces this point. Initially sheltered from apartheid's harshness, he recalls how his engagement with BC and liberation theology transformed his worldview: *'I had to take a stand against apartheid'* (Interview, 22 July 2024). He added, *'apartheid was strong, there was a lot of fear about security police and things like that'*, highlighting the climate of repression and risk in which these projects operated. Horn reflects on the impact of ideological debates within the student movement: *'Those of us who were White students who*

had sympathy with the philosophy of SASO...had to decide what was to be our role' (Interview, 30 July 2024). These testimonies illustrate that literacy work was never neutral; it was consciously positioned within the ideological battles of the anti-apartheid movement, serving as a vehicle for conscientisation and resistance, despite the risks involved. Favish recalls that Anne Hope's training, '*helped us see the world differently… and understand the basis of the nature of the oppression that people experienced, the underlying structural causes of that oppression*' (Favish, Interview, 7 August 2024).

However, although the data show that all of the projects were clearly anti-apartheid, it is evident that each had a somewhat different analysis of the contemporary context. The projects were strategic in identifying and defining the oppressor. The IAS and WPLP directly targeted the economic oppressor (capital) by focusing on pay slips and organising, whilst still being aware of the wider issues of the communities where workers lived (Moss, 2014). Although, as Moss (2024) points out, 'there were certainly different motives for organising workers within the IAS' (p. 166), one of which 'viewed worker organisation as a tool through which advance-guard workers could be recruited for MK training or other underground activity on behalf of the national liberation movement' (Ibid.). The workerist faction within the IAS focused primarily on capitalist hegemony (economic exploitation), aiming to build counter-power at the point of production. As Moss explained, IAS sought to '*run all of the programmes that were going on, which included Worker Complaints and Advice Bureau, Worker Education, Literacy and obviously Fundraising Administration and the embryonic attempts actually to start constituting structures, worker structures within factories'* (Interview, 21 October 2024).

Conversely, Umtapo and TCOE targeted the racial/cultural oppressor (the apartheid state), by emphasising dignity, self-reliance, and direct political engagement. These BC-aligned projects understood apartheid hegemony as an ideological constellation of racial, political, and cultural oppression. Juta from Masifundise described their approach as '*telling them that God created all of us equal, and we all have a right to all the goodness… Let us all experience the riches now as God intended, because God did not create this inequality*' (Interview, 14 August 2025). This illustrates Masifundise's focus on consciousness-raising and challenging ideological justifications for inequality. Umtapo, although similarly rooted in BC principles, consciously adopted a racial capitalism analysis. As noted by Arun: '*Our work was primarily in poor communities… exploited by the then*

system, as we call it, and the current system. And the basis for all of this exploitation, we believe, is the Capitalist system' (Interview, 25 July 2024). This shows Umtapo's explicit linkage of racial and class oppression. The core mission of Umtapo was to rebuild self-respect and dignity under the slogan 'Free the mind, Free the Land', which I argue is a textbook example of a war of position being fought on the terrain of culture and consciousness to dismantle accepted common sense.

Thus, in terms of who they understood to be the oppressor, there is some difference across the projects. Whilst all saw the apartheid state as oppressive and understood oppression in racial terms (i.e. Whites oppressing Blacks), some also saw the oppressor as the capitalist, with the oppressed as the working class. The projects also seem to have differed in the extent to which they understood oppression as dehumanising, for both the oppressed and the oppressor. TCOE/Masifundise affirm that this was their analysis, stating a commitment to combating 'dehumanisation' (TCOE, 1983). In my interview with her, Andrews stated that `*Masifundise believed that understanding the fact that we are all being oppressed in the country was quite critical. There was also quite a big attempt at exposing the inhumanity of the apartheid system*' (Interview, 25 May 2025).

7.2.2 The projects' understanding of education as political

I have established that both Gramsci and Freire understood education as the central mechanism in the production and contestation of hegemony. Education, from their perspective, is never a neutral process: it can either reproduce dominant ideologies and consolidate the power of the ruling group; or it can serve as a counter-hegemonic tool that enables people to recognise how common sense sustains their oppression and begin to construct 'good sense' (Gramsci, 1971). Freire, in particular, distinguished between 'education for domestication' (what he terms a banking model) and 'education for liberation' (or 'problem-posing' education) (1970). Any project claiming a Freirean orientation must therefore position itself explicitly as education for liberation, aimed at critical consciousness and transformative action.

The data show that all the projects began with the premise that all education is political, and they consciously positioned themselves in opposition to the state's education and mainstream literacy provision. They operated on the premise that Bantu Education and state-sanctioned literacy methods were politically positioned tools of domestication. It would appear that, as

they came into contact with Freire's ideas, the early projects increasingly recognised that literacy itself was not neutral and gradually became more critical of the BLL methods they had begun with. Hogan (IAS) recalled that how they '*had major campaigns against Bantu Education… rejection of Bantu Education*' (Interview, 6 August 2024), highlighting the view that apartheid schooling was designed to reproduce subordination rather than empowerment. This understanding aligns with Freire's (and Gramsci's) argument that education can serve to cement hegemony by shaping common sense in ways that sustain oppression. Their increasing recognition of the non-neutrality of literacy is expressed by Horn (Reiger Park and WPLP): '*We had been schooled in the Freirean methodology… it all had to do with how you could be an agent of change… because you would do your literacy around the activism. So, the purpose was just political activism and political consciousness raising*' (Interview, 25 July 2024). This reflects Freire's notion of education for liberation, where learning is dialogical and tied to praxis, rather than banking education that domesticates. Favish described the transformative impact of Freirean training as an experience that '*just blew my mind because it really made you interrogate all of your assumptions about education, about teaching, about the purposes of education*' (Interview, 7 August 2024). This reflection suggests a critical shift away from conventional literacy approaches, such as the BLL methods (discussed in Chapter Three) initially adopted, toward a pedagogy that positioned learners as subjects of history rather than objects of instruction. These accounts demonstrate that the projects understood education as deeply political, first in rejecting Bantu Education as an instrument of ideological control, and later in embracing Freirean principles that reframed literacy as a tool for consciousness and mobilisation.

Another compelling piece of evidence is that the state itself correctly identified this political positioning, as demonstrated by the banning of *Umtapo Focus* and multiple editions of *Learn and Teach* magazine. This act clearly shows that the projects were, at a fundamental level, challenging the oppressor's knowledge system.

7.2.3 The projects' understanding of the need for conscientisation as a critical part of their literacy endeavour

Both Gramsci and Freire argued that by its very nature, oppression is often hidden from us because of hegemony – the way things are is simply absorbed as common sense. Lukes' third dimension of 'power over' helps us understand this further, as the way in which individuals internalise their own subordination, mirroring Gramsci's notion of common sense. Gramsci

(1971) refers to it as the uncritical, internalised beliefs that normalise the status quo, making oppressive conditions appear natural or inevitable. Like false consciousness, it binds the oppressed to the existing order by framing their subordination as mere reality rather than a contestable power structure. Both Gramsci and Lukes expose how ideological control does not merely suppress dissent but pre-empts it by colonising subjectivity. Where Lukes emphasises the invisible suppression of interests, Gramsci highlights the cultural production of consent through everyday narratives, institutions, and language. Freire shows how education for domestication is part of this process because it teaches people to be passive and to accept the world as it is given, reinforcing common sense. Freire (1970, 1974) argues that people need to move from ‘magical consciousness’ (blaming fate), through ‘naïve consciousness’ (blaming individuals), to ‘critical consciousness’ (understanding the systemic, structural causes of oppression). Thus, for all three theorists, liberation requires challenging explicit power toward dismantling the very frameworks of thought that sustain it.

To become aware of the true nature of lived experience as a reflection of oppression is thus a necessary first step toward liberation. Freire (1970) refers to this process as conscientisation, which occurs through problem-posing education. This is a dialogical approach where teachers and students act as co-investigators of knowledge. This method requires a complete transformation of the pedagogical relationship wherein the teacher must become a facilitator, or ‘teacher-student,’ standing with the learners in a horizontal, collaborative dynamic, rejecting the authoritarian ‘banking’ model (Freire, 1970). The facilitator’s role is not to simply dispense knowledge but to present codes that are representations of the learners’ realities for collective analysis. This relationship fosters the humility and mutual trust necessary for the oppressed to name their own world. This ideal of an egalitarian partnership serves as a benchmark against which the practical challenges of the case studies are critically examined, particularly the tensions arising from the dynamic between a White student facilitator and Black adult learners in a deeply racialised society.

In the Freirean process the key tools are generative themes and codes already mentioned. Generative themes are the core issues and contradictions drawn from the learners’ experiences, which are then coded into pictures or stories, allowing the group to objectify and critically analyse their reality. It is through this dialogic reflection that conscientisation occurs. However, while conscientisation may appear as just an intellectual exercise, the entire pedagogical process must culminate in praxis, as discussed in detail under RQ2.

It is clear from the data that the literacy projects were in several ways a direct assault on the 'power over' of the state, in particular its third dimension/hegemony. By forming wages commissions, they addressed the state's economic/structural control. By challenging the passive, authoritarian Bantu Education through Freirean dialogue, they countered the state's ideological/ psychological control. By continuing their work despite raids, bannings, and repressive mechanisms such as the Schlebusch Commission, they defined their struggle against the state's political/coercive power (as detailed in Chapter Six). They evidently also sought to conscientise their learners. According to participants' interviews and the archival data, the Reiger Park classes and WPLP, the IAS, Learn and Teach, Umtapo, and Masifundise, all used Freirean codes (pictures/symbols) and community engagement to generate a curriculum from the learners' lived experiences. However, more important is the how and why they used these methods. These codes were political instruments designed to stimulate dialogue, raise consciousness, and link literacy to activism, as envisaged by Freire. They were not merely pedagogical tools.

Favish explained that after joining Learn and Teach in 1983, her approach consistently prioritized participatory methods, '*using generative codes to spark discussions around social issues*' (Interview, 7 August 2024). Budlender recollected '*using creative methods, such as incorporating codes in literacy materials, to promote critical thinking and active engagement*' (Interview, 7 August 2024). Kell reinforced this, describing codes as central to fostering dialogue and confidence among learners (Interview, 27 October 2024). Archival material from the IAS (IAS, n.d.-b) elaborates on this practice, noting that 'a 'code' represented an important community issue and could take the form of a picture, a song, a play, or a tape recording'. In the classroom, this translated into a discussion-based approach that foregrounded learners' realities. Deeb provided a vivid example of this method in practice, describing how he taught literacy to Black male domestic workers by '*utilising picture contexts* [codes] *relevant to the learners' lives to stimulate conversation*', a technique he learned from Basia Ledochowski. These discussions were used '*to elicit the learners' experiences and extract relevant vocabulary*' (Interview, 22 July 2024). Bird (1982) confirmed that Learn and Teach's pedagogy was discussion-based, using codes, pictures of real-life situations from Black communities to initiate dialogue and critical thinking. This approach was adapted for both vernacular and English literacy, prioritising learner-generated content and confidence over strict grammatical accuracy.

Lists of generative words in vernacular languages generated by UCM include words meaning ‘school’, ‘church’, ‘children’; but also ‘informer’ and ‘state of emergency’ (NUSAS, n.d.a). This shows a deliberate choice of politically-charged words for use in the literacy classes. Another striking example of this radical approach came from Andrews’ recollection of a class in 1989:

> *There were several people in the class, and on the board, Nontobeko put a big image, a poster of a boot. That was the start of the class. What was that boot? It’s the police, the boot of the police. What does that boot mean? I remember this class so well, because as we were going off way through the class, the police raided this centre… and grabbed this boot from the wall. They thought we were sabotaging. But the point I’m making is that it was a simple boot. But this method of Paulo Freire—helping people to think critically—just filtered through everything.* (Andrews, Interview, 25 May 2025)

Importantly, this anecdote captures the essence of Freirean pedagogy, how a single image, in this case a boot, became a generative code that opened dialogue about state violence, power, and resistance. The police raid itself highlights how threatening such consciousness-raising was to the apartheid regime. These methods were not neutral literacy exercises; they were acts of defiance, designed to transform learners from passive recipients into critical agents of change.

The validation of the learners’ lived experience was the basis for conscientisation. The use of codes and generative themes based on learners’ lives deliberately placed taboo subjects like pass laws, police brutality, and labour exploitation onto the classroom agenda. They challenged the state’s ‘power over’ the political agenda by making non-decisions into decisions, asserting that a worker’s life was inherently political. Literacy classes thus became spaces for political education, where learners interrogated the structures that shaped their lives. Andrews emphasised this intent through stating that Masifundise’s ‘*key objective was that you must know your rights’* (Interview, 25 May 2025). Molobi expressed the radical purpose even more explicitly by stating, *‘And then after reading our article, they should feel inspired to challenge the status quo, to challenge apartheid. We should see them in the streets, throwing stones against the police’* (Interview, 13 November 2024). This statement highlights that literacy was never conceived as a neutral skill; it was a weapon of struggle.

Combined with practices such as using codes (like the boot), these approaches illustrate how Freirean pedagogy informed the work: by centring learners' lived experiences and confronting the 'limit-situations' of apartheid, the projects turned education into a site of counter-hegemonic resistance. It is clear from these accounts how these projects understood literacy as a political act by using the codes not simply to teach reading and writing, but to connect education to social transformation enabling learners to interrogate their conditions, articulate their struggles, and participate actively in shaping the agenda for change.

However, while the content of the WPLP /Reiger Park classes, and to some extent the IAS, was liberatory, the form often presented contradictions. In Chapter Four, I noted that French (1988, p. 29) points out that, 'one may find "liberating" qualities in lessons in state and industrial centres, one may find oppressive and domineering approaches being enacted in supposedly liberating programmes'. This scenario is much more likely within a context in which literacy classes mirror structural inequalities, even if inadvertently. The set-up, particularly with younger, White facilitators teaching older Black learners, risks reproducing a subtle banking model and reinforcing ideological 'power over'. French (1988, p. 30) specifically comments: 'The question of authenticity is troublesome in South African literacy projects, for they have all – left, centre, official, private – been initiated and structured by whites'. The paradox that a liberatory pedagogy was often delivered through the lens of structural hierarchy highlights the immense difficulty of achieving horizontal dialogue within the heart of an oppressive state. This structural contradiction is a key point of critique in Freirean pedagogy (Ellsworth, 1989; Gore, 1993), which argues that achieving a truly power-free horizontal relationship is problematic when facilitators hold structural power based on race, class, and social status.

As scholars have pointed out, even well-intentioned facilitators can inadvertently reinforce their 'implicit teacher' authority (Gore, 1993), leading to a 'false dialogue' where learners' voices are subtly constrained by existing social hierarchies. It is in fact clear that there is a 'gap' in the data related to this because learner voices could not be captured. We actually know very little about the relationship between the facilitators and the learners. We do not know the extent to which the facilitators were teacher-learners, and the learners learner-teachers. We have only a brief glimpse of a class from the *Learn and Teach English Reader*, in which one learner says 'I like our way of learning more [than the school teacher 'pouring' ideas into the child]. We are not instructed by someone, but we try hard ourselves to find the

way of English' (Learn and Teach, n.d., p. 27). This statement suggests that, at least in this instance, learners recognised a positive shift away from the traditional banking model, highlighting the potential for meaningful engagement despite the structural challenges.

There is also the issue of the extent to which learners actually needed to be conscientised, given the level of violent oppression within the country. A critical question in applying Freirean pedagogy to the South African context concerns the nature of domination under colonialism and apartheid. In Chapter Two, I considered the argument that within the colonial context, force, rather than hegemony, was the primary form of rule and looked at the fact that Thomas's (2009) reading of Gramsci assumes that there is always a level of coercion in a dialectical relationship with consent. While I also considered critiques highlighting the risks of applying Freirean pedagogy universally (Giroux & McLaren, 1989), these do not fully address the specific historical and political conditions of South Africa. While Freire's model assumes that the oppressed are subject to ideological domination, what Gramsci (1971) terms hegemony, many scholars argue that in South Africa, coercion rather than consent was the primary mode of rule. Colonial and apartheid regimes relied heavily on violent repression, legal segregation, and systemic dispossession, leaving limited space for the kind of ideological incorporation that characterises hegemonic systems. The nature of domination under apartheid, marked by systemic violence and coercion, raises questions about the relevance of Freire's assumptions regarding naive consciousness and the need for conscientisation. To understand these contextual challenges, it is necessary to examine debates on force versus hegemony and the levels of political awareness among oppressed communities in late apartheid South Africa.

The force versus hegemony distinction has significant implications for the notion of conscientisation. If domination were maintained primarily through force, then the assumption that oppressed groups were trapped in a state of naive consciousness becomes problematic. In fact, evidence suggests that political awareness among the oppressed was often high, shaped by lived experiences of systemic violence and by active participation in resistance movements. Thus Mastin Prinsloo, one of those involved in the South African radical adult education movement of the 1980s, reflecting on the period, critiques the adequacy of Freire's 'simple model of social consciousness and political awakening of the poor and oppressed' in late apartheid South Africa. He has argued that Freire's model was largely inadequate

because ‘levels of political awareness and analytical capacities were generally high and diverse amongst the poor in [...] late apartheid South Africa’ (Prinsloo, 2005, p. 32).

7.2.4 The extent to which the projects consciously instilled a sense of agency in their learners

In Chapter Two, I showed Freire’s argument concerning conscientisation: that even if the oppressed become aware of their own oppression, they still may not act to change their situation. There are a number of reasons for this. Learners may remain passive due to fear, internalised fatalism, or a sense of powerlessness (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994). Lukes confirms this when he argues that even when individuals become more conscious of social injustices, they may hesitate to act due to ‘fear of repression’, a ‘lack of resources’, or a ‘feeling of futility’ (Lukes, 1974, p. 24). As succinctly captured by Deeb: ‘*There was a lot of fear about security police and things like that*’ (Interview, 22 July 2024).

The structural pressure of the apartheid state, however, meant that the transition from critical reflection to collective action was frequently mediated by extreme risk. Thus, the primary challenge of the projects was not a hesitation to act on the part of the participants, but the necessity of building organisational structures (like unions or committees) resilient enough to withstand the state’s first dimension (coercive) retaliation. The primary constraint on action was not a failure of will, but the rational and structural consequence of the state’s coercive power. This does not by any chance suggest a ‘culture of silence’ (a pre-critical state), but rather the structural reality of the state’s first dimension, ‘power over’, operating as a massive deterrent. This rational risk assessment confirmed the necessity of the project’s dual strategy: the ideological work of the war of position had to be perfectly aligned with collective strategies that actively built confidence and structural protection (unions) to mitigate this extreme, life-altering risk. This aligns with the call for a pedagogy that cultivates the ‘power within’ necessary to overcome fear through organisation. Thus, according to Freire, education for liberation needs to ensure that learners understand that the world is made by people and can be changed by people, to encourage a sense of agency. Agency relates to the concepts of ‘power within’, ‘power to’ and ‘power with’ (Allen, 1998; Avelino et al., 2021; Gaventa, 2021; Lukes, 2005; Pansardi & Bindi, 2021; Townsend et al., 1999; VeneKlasen & Miller, 2002). ‘Power to’ refers to a person’s capacity or ability to act, an ability to build, create, or achieve outcomes; ‘power with’ refers to the power that emerges through collective action; both states, together with ‘power over’ are all ultimately contingent on ‘power within’.

‘Power within’ is an individual’s sense of self-worth, dignity, and consciousness, the ability to recognise their own interests and desires, and a belief in their ability to act to change the world. People will not act individually or collectively without ‘power within’. The third dimension of power over works precisely by undermining this power within (Lukes, 2005).

As I have argued, apartheid’s hegemony operated at the third dimension of power over in its attempt to make Black people internalise their own inferiority and accept their exploitation as natural (Christie, 1990; Kallaway, 2000; Morris & Padayachee, 1989; Seekings & Nattrass, 2005). It also attempted to undermine any belief in the possibility of change through an ongoing project of harassment, repression and violence (Beinart, 2001; Pampallis & Bailey, 2021; Pillay, 2013). The apartheid state’s primary hegemonic achievement was its success in diminishing the power within of Black South Africans, their self-worth, belief in their own agency, and their conviction that they could change their circumstances. This is precisely the place where these literacy movements and Freirean literacy projects intervened. The escalation of state domination made Gramsci’s war of position a necessity for survival. The literacy projects sought to patiently rebuild the human and ideological capacity that had been destroyed by the state’s repressive tactics (Aitchison, 2003; Freire, 1970; Pillay, 2013). Their precise goal was to rebuild learners’ power within. The engine for this was Freire’s method of conscientisation through the process of critical reflection and dialogue. By helping learners to ‘read their world’, the projects aimed to foster the power within needed to recognise their own power to act. The next step was to channel this individual agency into collective action (power with), creating the solidarity necessary to confront the state’s coercive power over exercised through police, laws, and the military. The strategic question for these movements, framed in Gramscian terms, was how to use their power with through a long war of position (building alternative culture) or a direct war of manoeuvre (confrontational action), as I discuss in detail in relation to the third research question.

The data show that the projects themselves clearly felt a sense of agency, despite the sometimes-extreme harassment and use of force by the state against them. As I have discussed, they mounted a direct assault on the state’s second dimension of power over by exercising their power to define the political agenda. The act of creating curricula from taboo subjects, such as pass laws, exploitation, and police violence, affirms the projects’ power to set an alternative agenda. They transformed issues into explicit educational content that the state had relegated to silence.

The data also suggest that the ultimate aim of the projects was the conscious, systematic construction of counter-power against the state's comprehensive power over,with the clear intention for some kind of action for social change (and hence, they necessarily assumed 'power to', the need for 'power within', and 'power with', discussed in more detail in relation to RQ2). To achieve social change, the stated goal of NUSAS was to tackle the 'root of the social problems... and not simply their manifestations' through the literacy projects (Ralekhetho, 1971c). Also, a clear example is WPLP's mission to help workers 'organise to their advantage' (UCT SRC Press, 1975). Highlighting the clear intention for the project to lead to action is Budlender's observation that '*they [learners]were all going to get up and organise and have a revolution*' (Interview, 7 August 2024). In the IAS, Moss recalls that '*the intention was to try and constitute, from the factory floor upwards, an advanced guard of worker leadership that was politically conscious and able to lead politically as well as able to lead in trade union terms*' (Interview, 21 October 2024). Favish asserted: '*I think in all of the cases, whether it was groups linked to co-ops, groups linked to vegetable gardens, groups linked to unions, the overriding aim was to use the groups to raise political awareness and to help build organisations to mobilise against [apartheid] and for change. So that was the aim'* (Interview, 7 August 2024). This illustrates that literacy and discussion groups were vehicles for collective action and structural change rather than ends in themselves.

With the clear objective of shattering the psychological effects of oppression the literacy groups actively worked to instil a sense of self-awareness, dignity, and agency among their learners. This was partially achieved through conscientisation, the critical consciousness needed to break free from the psychological effects of oppression. Conscientisation explicitly helps people understand that their lived reality is the result of oppression, and not fate, or their own fault. Lived reality is human-made, and thus possible to change (Freire, 1970). A profound example of this process is the experience of the woman who, after attending a literacy class with Umtapo, quit her job because she would no longer tolerate being called a 'girl' (Naicker, Interview, 25 July 2024). The third dimension of power over/hegemony had shaped the woman's worldview to accept this condition as normal. However, the project helped her unlearn this acceptance – it conscientised her, reshaping her desires; she now desired dignity over the security of the job, and recognised her ability to act on this insight (i.e. fostering her power within). Within the IAS, Brown claims that what *'seemed possible to them as they were discussing it, was organising in the factory… ultimately having shop*

stewards… representatives at the factory level, through whom workers could start articulating their demands' (Interview, 7 August 2024). Andrews argues that Masifundise's *'key objective was that you must know your rights'* (Interview, 25 May 2025). Knowing your rights helps build a sense of being able to act when your rights are violated. Thus, apart from conscientisation, there was evidently also a conscious attempt to build agency. The very act of reclaiming identity through the learners' narratives ('My name is...') is a direct challenge to the third dimension of power, where apartheid sought to erase humanity and dignity. This assertion of identity is the cultivation of power within, the essential building block for collective resistance. Even in the absence of learner voices, we can infer acts of resistance and self-determination as further evidence of agency and dignity in action.

However, the structural arrangement of these projects posed a constant risk of undermining agency by reproducing the very hierarchies they sought to dismantle. By positioning predominantly White, younger facilitators as the ultimate pedagogical authorities, despite their linguistic and contextual disadvantages, the early student movement projects risked reinforcing the 'common sense' of White saviourism (Gramsci, 1971). This unexamined belief that marginalised communities require external 'saving' by dominant groups was normalised through pedagogical structures that framed White leadership as logical or benevolent. The possible acceptance of this arrangement by learners would have represented the state's third dimension of power in action (Lukes, 2005): the successful internalising of hegemony where structural oppression is normalised through pedagogical practice. This structural contradiction, rather than being an anomaly, became a constant internal struggle for the projects. Interestingly, this occurrence would also go against Freire's (1970) argument that only the oppressed can end oppression – any action by the oppressor in this regard is really only ever 'false charity'. Freire's methods can be said to have ultimately failed here because they require shattering ideological domination, yet the interventions' design reproduced the very power relations they claimed to challenge. True liberation would have demanded centering Black educators as architects of the literacy process, not as the participants.

7.3 RQ 2: How did these projects understand the concept of praxis?

The second research objective was to understand how the literacy projects understood the concept of praxis. This section thus explores how the projects conceptualised, interpreted, and operationalised praxis.

Gramsci defined praxis as the philosophical unity of theory and practice and as the active political engagement necessary to transform societal hegemonic relations (Gramsci, 1971). In other words, a conscious and organised effort to turn ideas into real-world change through collective action (Gramsci, 1971). For Gramsci, praxis is essential for revolutionary change, achieved through the organic synthesis of reflection, the critical intellectual work of developing 'good sense' and challenging dominant ideologies and action – the collective struggle against the ruling class (Gramsci, 1971). A key aspect of this process is the formation of organic intellectuals, who emerge from the oppressed community to articulate and lead the counter-hegemonic struggle (Gramsci, 1971). These leaders bridge the gap between abstract theory and mass political action, ensuring that the movement is rooted in the lived experiences and realities of those they represent. While some scholars, such as Bourke (1984), note that activists often relinquished privileged positions to participate fully in liberation struggles, the defining characteristic of organic intellectuals is their rootedness in the social group whose interests they champion.

Reflecting Gramsci, Freire defines praxis as 'reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it' (Freire, 1970, p. 70). Both are essential – Freire (1970) arguing that reflection without action is mere 'verbalism,' while action without reflection is mindless 'activism' (p. 66). As a cyclical process, praxis demands two interconnected movements:

1. Critical Reflection, which is the systematic process of reading the world to uncover the structural, political causes of personal problems (conscientisation).

2. Transformative Action, which is the collective application of this critical insight to change the oppressive structures (as part of either a war of position, or a war of manoeuvre).

Existing literature tends to be silent on the precise application of praxis, often assuming an implicit link between literacy and activism (e.g., Moss's (2014) discussion of the IAS's emancipatory aims), and is also not clear on the extent to which praxis was fostered within

the literacy classrooms, or remained the terrain of the project leaders and/or facilitators. This study employs archival and oral history data to empirically dissect how praxis was understood and practised.

From the data, it would seem that for the projects, praxis functioned as an operational tool in Gramsci's war of position, a means to shift ideological common sense and develop a revolutionary, critical consciousness among oppressed communities as the basis for action. This operated on two levels: at the level of the project/organisation itself and how it understood its own role in the struggle (for example, NUSAS made it clear that through the literacy projects their aim was to tackle the 'root of the social problems... and not simply their manifestations' (Ralekhetho, 1971b, cited in Chapter Six); and at the level of the literacy classroom. Table 8 summarises the first level, showing how each project articulated its understanding of praxis, linking its aims to the theoretical cycle of reflection and action.

Table 8: Case Study Projects and Praxis

Project	Example of Praxis	Theoretical Interpretation
WPLP	Mission statement: Illiteracy 'makes it extremely difficult for all the workers to come together and organise to their advantage' (*Abasebenzi* English Translation, 1975).	This is a clear, political objective: literacy is a precondition for collective action. The goal of the reflection within the literacy classes is explicitly to facilitate the action (organisation), linking the consciousness-raising of the third dimension to the confrontation of the first dimension.
IAS	The internal debate over a '2:1 ratio of literacy to worker education classes' (IAS, 1974)	The IAS formally wrestled with integrating reflection (in the literacy classes) with action (as intended through worker education), making their internal ideological conflict a practical debate over the optimal ratio of praxis.
Learn and Teach	The production and dissemination of the *Learn and Teach* magazine/English Reader, which featured learner-generated stories on daily struggles (e.g., housing, wages, police harassment) alongside practical information (e.g., how to contact a lawyer, union information)	The Learn and Teach Literacy Organisation institutionalised praxis by making the magazine itself an ongoing mechanism of the action-reflection cycle (Molobi, Interview, 13 November 2024). The reflection (conscientisation) occurred through the learners' written stories and critical discussions of the codes/themes published in the magazine (*Learn and Teach*). The action was immediately facilitated by the magazine's practical and organisational content, effectively bridging the gap between critical reflection and the collective action required for community

		self-help and legal/labour engagement. The magazine acted as a continuous, mass-disseminated tool of counter-hegemonic organisation and political education (Learn and Teach, 1983))
Masifundise	The People's Participatory Planning and Action (PPPA) method, where communities are 'direct actors in identifying their needs, prioritising those needs and developing a plan' (TCOE, n.d.b)	This is a formal institutionalisation of the Freirean cycle, attempting to merge the reflection of needs assessment with the action of community planning.
Umtapo	Slogan: 'Free the mind, Free the Land' (Naicker, Interview, 25 July 2024)	This phrase encapsulates the two movements of praxis: 'Free the mind' is the reflection/conscientisation component, and 'Free the Land' is the action/transformation component. Their curriculum was designed to bridge this gap by starting with the concept of Ubuntu and ending with a 'plan of action to promote the concept of Ubuntu in their school' (Umtapo Manual, p. 169).

The table highlights that all the projects maintained a principled commitment to Freirean praxis, articulating aims that explicitly linked reflection to collective, transformative action. Despite contextual adaptations driven by the realities of apartheid, each project conceptualised literacy and community engagement as integral to challenging oppressive structures. For instance, the IAS's internal debate over balancing literacy and worker education exemplifies an understanding that praxis involves an ongoing dialectic, where reflection informs action, and vice versa. Masifundise's participatory planning method operationalises this cycle, embedding power to and power with into its core processes. Similarly, WPLP's mission couples consciousness-raising directly with organisation, while Umtapo's slogan vividly encapsulates the duality of 'free the mind' and 'free the land,' as stages in a collective praxis.

These aims reflect a shared recognition that praxis in this context entailed both critical understanding of the world and active participation in its transformation, an explicit strategy of resistance and empowerment under a repressive regime. These examples exemplify how the projects translated the principles of Freirean praxis into concrete actions, navigating the complexities of their oppressive context. What is less clear is the extent to which the action envisaged would then be subjected to reflection.

In addition, internal organisational debates, such as the workerist-populist divide within the IAS and the separation of the magazine from the literacy wing of Learn and Teach, reveal ongoing strategic tensions. These divides reflect different visions of the revolutionary process. These could be framed as emphasising long-term cultural transformation and overt political confrontation and highlighting the inherently contradictory terrain within which praxis was enacted. However, critical reflection highlights that, although imperfect and fraught with contradictions, the praxis represented a vital, strategic effort to resist and subvert hegemonic power structures from within the system's own limitations.

Having examined the internal paradoxes and systemic contradictions, it is crucial to understand how these internal shifts translated into tangible political strategies. Through acts like building their own organisations (unions, civics) and creating their own media (*Learn and Teach* magazine), the oppressed begin to seize agenda-setting power. The collective power created is used to force previously silenced issues like worker exploitation or pass laws onto the political agenda, breaking the 'mobilisation of bias' (Lukes, 2005) that had kept those issues off the table. This is the critical intermediate moment where the internal ideological liberation that results from Freirean conscientisation, and the recognition of true interests and needs (as opposed to those presented by common sense/the third dimension of power over) translates into a demonstrable, collective, external action that structurally challenges the existing rules of political engagement. As defined by Freire (1970), this seamless unity of reflection and action is the core of praxis, which is the sole means by which the oppressed can overcome their condition and transform their world. This transition, from the critical reading of the world to the organised act of transforming it, is the essence of praxis in action. It is an act of political re-definition, forcing the dominant power to acknowledge the existence of organised counter-preferences. This creation of an alternative agenda is the necessary organisational and political preparation that precedes any direct confrontation with the first dimension of power.

Overall, the projects' articulated aims and practical implementation demonstrate a nuanced understanding and committed application of Freirean praxis, reflecting their strategic effort to foster critical consciousness and collective action under an oppressive regime. This analysis provides a foundation to explore how praxis translated into concrete strategies of resistance, which is addressed in the subsequent section in response to RQ3.

At the level of the classroom, as discussed above, the core of the pedagogical praxis lay in the use of generative themes and codes to initiate critical reflection, transforming the classroom into a safe space for conscientisation. The projects universally employed Freirean codes to move learners from description of lived reality to structural analysis. The IAS's pedagogical guide explicitly uses a five-step questioning pattern designed to move from 'What do you see happening here?' to 'What can we do about it?' This structure is irrefutable evidence of a pedagogy designed to foster 'power to'.

However, while rooted in Freirean principles, the application of praxis in apartheid South Africa was riddled with paradoxes, the main ones being the structural contradiction of the facilitator-learner relationship and the psychological challenge of epistemic privilege. The most significant contradiction was the use of younger, White facilitators teaching older, Black learners. This is a dynamic fundamentally at odds with the ideal of horizontal dialogue. This structural power imbalance threatened to reproduce the very banking model Freire sought to dismantle, reflecting the immense difficulty of enacting genuine co-creation within apartheid's racial hierarchies. Some of the critiques of Freire I have raised have centred on precisely this issue. As discussed earlier, the power dynamics even in Freirean settings remain unavoidable. Even within dialogical pedagogy, facilitators hold structural power based on race, class, and social capital (Ellsworth, 1989). This influence can shape the form and direction of dialogue, risking the reproduction of hierarchical roles and what Gore (1993) terms 'false dialogue' (p. 93). Learners may withhold genuine criticism or simply echo the views they believe the facilitator wants to hear, which undermines the authenticity of conscientisation and transforms the dialogical space into a subtly repressive environment (Ellsworth, 1989). It seems likely that precisely this kind of dynamic may have occurred in some of the very early projects.

The application of Freirean praxis was also constrained by the systemic realities of the suppression of Black intellectuals, resource scarcity, and the racialised 'epistemic privilege' of White facilitators. These factors compromised the egalitarian intent but, arguably, represented pragmatic responses of using unearned privilege to promote conscientisation where Black-led initiatives were unattainable. This pragmatic adaptation highlights the complexity of applying liberation pedagogy under repressive conditions.

Thus, while the initiatives aimed to cultivate critical consciousness, various structural and psychological barriers may have hindered the transition from reflection to meaningful action.

Nevertheless, there is some evidence of praxis in the classroom, the most powerful of which is the learners' own writing. The *Learn and Teach English Reader* content, where learners detail their exploitation and family separation, validates the reflection phase. It proves that the educational content was successfully generated from the 'limit-situations' of the oppressed. The learner who wrote, 'The child can't go to school because education is money for an African child' (Learn and Teach, n.d., p. 26) demonstrates a critical analysis of the structural nature of Bantu Education which is the very definition of conscientisation. Kealeboheng's piece in 'Rich and poor' in the same reader is likewise a clear analysis of class (Ibid., p. 84). These writings are not mere exercises in language; they are acts of naming oppression and imagining alternatives, validating the Freirean cycle of reflection and action. However, as Freire makes clear, the point is action. The success of the reflection component must be measured by its capacity to produce tangible action. This action component directly links RQ2 to the strategy of RQ3, and is thus discussed in greater detail.

7.4 RQ 3: What was the nature of the 'action' explored in these projects, and to what extent did this constitute a war of position or a war of manoeuvre?

The underlying objective of this research question was to gain insight into the nature of 'action' explored in these literacy projects and the extent to which it constituted a war of position or a war of manoeuvre, from a Gramscian perspective. This research question thus explores the specific actions undertaken by or promoted by these projects and how they embodied either a war of position as a long-term ideological and cultural struggle against hegemony, or a war of manoeuvre as immediate, confrontational tactics (Gramsci, 1971).

As has already been discussed, Gramsci (1971) proposed that wherever possible, a ruling class maintains its power by making its own worldview appear as the natural, inevitable order of things to as much of the population as possible. In apartheid South Africa, hegemonic common sense attempted to normalise racial hierarchy and oppression to foster the interests of racial capitalism. As should be clear from the discussion thus far, in this context the literacy projects served as a classic example of a war of position, to shape consciousness, build alternative institutions, and win ideological ground. By fostering critical awareness among learners, the projects challenged the narrative of racial hierarchy, replacing oppressive ideologies with the language of dignity, rights, and liberation. They constructed 'trenches' of

resistance by fostering solidarity, through creating alternative organisations (such as labour organisations), and through creating alternative media such as *Abasebenzi* and *Learn and Teach* magazine, which created counter-hegemonic spaces. The development of 'organic intellectuals', community leaders, shop stewards, and activists, was central to this effort, cultivating grassroots leadership from the ground up. The pedagogical approach emphasised critical thinking, collective reflection, and social networks, laying the groundwork for future mobilisation.

Critically, as has been discussed in relation to the first two research questions, the projects fostered agency ('power within') and action, some of which was at an individual level ('power to'), but some of which was collective ('power with'). For most of the projects, action was the intention, and frequently, this was envisaged as joint (i.e. 'power with'). The most direct evidence of collective action lies in the worker-aligned projects, but Masifundise's and Umtapo's community development focus is also clearly underpinned by an assumption of collective action. All these actions were significant but appear to have remained within the realm of non-violent, organised resistance (although a notable exception is Molobi's statement that '*And then after reading our article, they should feel inspired to challenge the status quo, to challenge apartheid. We should see them in the streets, throwing stones against the police'* (Interview, 13 November 2024)). While the encouraged actions were confrontational and transformative, they were not insurrectionary. Leaners may have been encouraged to challenge unjust policies, to mobilise fellow workers, and to engage in strikes or protests, but these strategies did not constitute a war of manoeuvre in Gramsci's (1971) sense, which would involve physically overwhelming the coercive apparatus of the state through insurrection or armed struggle. Instead, these initiatives exemplified a war of position, a long-term struggle to build ideological consensus, organisational capacity, and cultural hegemony (Gramsci, 1971).

However, as is clear from the data, the literacy projects' strategic orientation was deeply rooted in their ideological commitments and responses to regional crises. Yet, their choices in curriculum and alliances illustrated diverse approaches to resistance, shaped by both ideological alignments and pragmatic considerations. The choices made were, therefore, deeply political. A BC-aligned project like Umtapo would necessarily prioritise a curriculum that began with identity, Black history, and an implicit anti-capitalist critique., whereas a project emerging from the non-racial, Charterist-aligned student movement, while still

radical, would be more open to White participation and might frame the struggle in terms that prioritised national unity over immediate class conflict.

Table 9 illustrates key examples of actions that embody this integrated approach, highlighting how the projects coordinated long-term cultural change with immediate confrontational tactics.

Table 9: Case Study Projects and Action

Project Focus	Primary Action Strategy	Focus of Resistance	Link to Power Dimensions
WPLP/IAS	Workplace mobilization and union-building	Capital/Employer (Workplace struggle)	War of position assault on the first dimension of power (Employer's power over wages/conditions) and second dimension (agenda-setting in unions).
Umtapo	Ideological formation through curriculum	Racial/Cultural Hegemony	War of position assault on third dimension of power (false consciousness/power within), leading to agency and action (individual and/or collective) in personal life.
Masifundise	Community organising and service mobilization	Apartheid state, but also racial/cultural hegemony	War of position through using PPPA to seize community agenda, thus an assault on second dimension, to enable agency and action (Credit Unions, protests).
Learn and Teach	Media, literacy and information dissemination	Information Control (Media/Literacy)	War of position (Magazine content for conscientisation); (Mass circulation to break state information control).

Clearly, collectively the focus was on building ideological consensus, enhancing organisational capacity, and fostering cultural resistance within civil society. These initiatives aimed to gradually erode hegemonic structures through education, mobilisation, and non-violent direct action, aligning closely with the logic of war of position. The projects, by prioritising these strategies, sought to create lasting change and empower communities without resorting to violence.

I would argue that the nexus between ideological positioning, how the organisations/projects understood their role, and how they implemented Freire is important, and requires deeper analysis. In the following discussion, then, I focus on different aspects of this: the workerist versus populist tension in particular; other ideological schisms within the organisations and

resulting internal conflict; organic intellectuals and class suicide; intersecting intellectual traditions; and contradictions within solidarity.

7.4.1 The Workerist-Populist Tension as A Strategic Debate on Counter-Hegemony

One of the defining features of the IAS was the ideological conflict between workerist and populist strategies. In Chapter 6, I shared data from IAS minutes, which showed a debate on how the literacy project should relate to the worker education project, which I argued portrayed an ideological workerist versus populist tension. This tension reflects a long-standing academic debate in South Africa regarding the primary drivers of liberation, often framed by scholars like Moss (2014) and Legassick (1974) as the ideological split between National Liberation and Class Struggle.

In his work at around the time IAS was formed, *South Africa: Capital Accumulation and Violence* (1974), Legassick argued that apartheid's authoritarian racial order was deeply intertwined with the imperatives of capitalist development, particularly in the mining and industrial sectors. He stated that, 'Apartheid is not simply an ideology of racial domination; it is materially rooted in the imperatives of capital accumulation' (p. 281). This analysis informed the workerist thinking, which located the terrain of the struggle at the point of production. The workerist approach pursued a sectoral war of position aimed at empowering workers to confront exploitation through militant union action. In Freirean terms, this was conscientisation in practice. The use of 'codes' such as pay slips, workplace grievances, and factory conditions became dialogic tools for enabling workers to develop a critical consciousness and organisational capacity. As discussed in Chapter 2, Lukes (2005) suggests this builds the 'power within' and 'power with' to challenge 'power over'.

This ideological division was particularly evident in the surrounding worker education institutions. The debate between Rick Turner and organisers like Johnny Copelyn highlights the core conflict at play. Turner, representing the Institute of Industrial Education (IIE), 'advocated for broad, open-ended education that would serve as a platform for diverse discussions and debates' (Keniston, 2013, pp. 175–176). In contrast, Copelyn, associated with the Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUACC), argued for intensive, focused training specifically for shop stewards, viewing it as essential for the survival of the organisation. He famously criticised Turner's approach, labelling it a 'dangerous diversion from the immediate

needs of worker leadership' (Copelyn, 2016, p. 16–17). This clash of perspectives reflects a deeper tension within the movement, which is the balance between fostering a broad educational dialogue and addressing the urgent, practical training needs of workers. While Turner envisioned a space for expansive ideas and discussions, Copelyn emphasised the necessity of equipping leaders with the specific skills required to navigate the challenges faced by workers in a repressive environment. This debate highlighted the complexities of organising and educating within a context of struggle, where the stakes were high, and the need for effective leadership was critical.

These debated spilled over into other worker education projects, including the IAS. For the IAS, as per Brown's testimony: '*The action that seemed possible…was organising in the factory…a long series of discussions to get to the question of ultimately having shop stewards*' (Brown, Interview, 7 August 2024). This demonstrates that their classroom adopted Copelyn's pragmatic, focused approach; the war of position was a means to achieve specific structural action. Moss reinforces this, contrasting IAS's goals with reformist unions by stating that '*those [parallel unions] were seen as…trade unions that wanted to focus predominantly on improving material conditions…rather than linking that to a politics that was both anti-apartheid and…socialist*' (Moss, Interview, 21 October 2024).

The Populist strategies, by contrast, sought a broader counter-hegemonic project, challenging apartheid's ideological apparatus across civil society. This position often preferred the general union model, which linked factory struggles directly to community issues, reflecting the strategic position rejected by Copelyn as ignoring economic realities (Copelyn, 2016). Rooted in Black Consciousness and later incorporating class analysis, organisations like Umtapo framed the struggle through cultural and communal values such as Ubuntu, aiming to dismantle capitalist individualism while pursuing national liberation. The Populists thus embraced the 'broader anti-apartheid mobilisation' across communities and sectors (Moss, 2014, p. 167), prioritising unity against the apartheid state over a singular focus on international proletarian solidarity. This approach extended conscientisation beyond the factory floor to communities, churches, and identity politics, prioritising unity against the apartheid state over international proletarian solidarity.

Across the dataset, from IAS/WPLP to Umtapo/Masifundise, the shared strategic problem was the need for a war of position, but the solutions diverged. The workerists focused on workplace organisation and class struggle, while populists emphasised national unity and

cultural resistance. As a result, Freirean pedagogy was not applied uniformly; it became an arena for ideological negotiation. The classroom thus mirrored South Africa's liberation struggle, confronting both racial capitalism and apartheid's ideological apparatus. Ultimately, the workerist–populist tension was a debate over the scope and timing of confrontation, whether to abolish apartheid's racial state for national democracy, or abolish capitalism through proletarian internationalism. These debates shaped organisational strategies and the broader anti-apartheid movement, revealing the complexity of forging a 'historic bloc' under conditions of dual oppression.

7.4.2 The 'Ideological Schism' as Internal Conflict

In Chapter 6, I examined the formal separation of *Learn and Teach* magazine from the Learn and Teach Literacy Organisation, its parent body. I argue that the separation was triggered by state and financial pressure (e.g., funding investigations which made the openly political magazine a liability), but its form reflected deeper strategic tension. This mirrors patterns such as the workerist-populist divide within the IAS and other case studies. The magazine adopted a confrontational approach using overt political messaging and reporting on labour struggles while the literacy wing pursued a gradual war of position grounded in Freirean principles.

This split was not unique. Masifundise managed similar tensions by creating a dual structure of setting up an Advice Office for direct action alongside participatory planning for long-term change. Umtapo combined cultural and ideological education with concrete action plans in schools. In this light, Learn and Teach's separation was a pragmatic solution meant to isolate the high-risk magazine to protect the foundational literacy work.

The significance lies not in proving the split was purely ideological, but in recognising that structural negotiation itself signals organisational strain in balancing Gramscian strategic demands. Across the dataset, projects faced the same dilemma of how to reconcile urgent, high-risk confrontation with patient efforts to build revolutionary consciousness. These organisations did not advocate insurrection; rather, they developed adaptive strategies where limited manoeuvre complemented a sustained war of position. This complexity did not lead to failure, but was a defining feature of their struggle.

7.4.3 The Human Engine of Counter-Hegemony: Organic Intellectuals and ‘Class Suicide’

As discussed in Chapter Two, Gramsci (1971) argues that a revolutionary movement requires organic intellectuals, which he describes as leaders emerging from within subaltern groups and translating lived experience into ‘good sense.’ In this context, the activists driving these projects were pivotal.

In three of the five case studies, Reiger Park/WPLP, IAS, and the early Learn and Teach Literacy Organisation, many of these individuals were from privileged backgrounds. Their participation often involved what Cabral describes as a form of ‘class suicide’ (Meisenhelder, 1993), a conscious rejection of material and ideological privileges to join the liberation struggle. This choice demanded profound personal transformation and a break with entrenched racial and class hierarchies. Activists enacted this by living and working in marginalised communities, adopting egalitarian practices within project structures, and committing to the struggle, often at personal risk.

Their journeys (which I discuss further in 7.4.4) reveal an intersection of ethics and political strategy. The decision to ‘cross the line’ was both a moral stance and a tactical move to strengthen grassroots mobilisation. In doing so, these individuals became agents of a counter-hegemonic project rooted in solidarity rather than privilege. However, due to their privileged class origins, their role requires careful qualification to distinguish it from the subaltern-led formation of organic intellectuals who emerged directly from the working class.

As discussed above, Gramsci (1971) conceives organic intellectuals as figures who arise from a specific class formation to articulate its experience and translate its ‘common sense’ into ‘good sense,’ and help build the ‘historic bloc’ capable of counter-hegemony. In the context of the literacy projects examined in this study, two distinct yet interdependent subjects emerged, and these are a) subaltern organic intellectuals who provided leadership from below, and b) bourgeois allies whose catalytic support widened the terrain for conscientisation and organisation without undermining the agency of subaltern groups.

In this case, subaltern organic intellectuals were Black leaders such as Zora Mehlomakhulu, Phindile Mfeti, (discussed in Chapter 6), and facilitators from TCOE and Umtapo (as documented in interviews), who embodied Gramsci’s (1971) original concept. They were rooted in factory floors, townships, and churches, and according

to Hogan reflected that these intellectuals '*were a younger generation of people, some of whom were in factories, who were educated, and who wanted to learn more. So, they started to come in, running political education*' (Hogan, Interview, 6 August 2024). They converted lived oppression into strategic clarity, linking immediate grievances to structural critique and collective action.

Their leadership validates the Freirean method (Freire, 1970) as a true dialogical pedagogy that treats learners as co-creators of knowledge, generating consciousness through problem-posing around concrete 'codes' (shop-floor conditions, community struggles). They were not passive beneficiaries; they organised, spoke, and led, demonstrating that the war of position was driven from below by those whose knowledge was forged in struggle. The success of this subaltern-led pedagogy is confirmed by the operational outcomes of Learn and Teach Literacy Organisation (the parent body), whose English programme was facilitated by activists like Ahmed Essop (Essop, 2024). Essop argues that this programme targeted and trained shop stewards and union members - the advanced cadre of working-class leadership necessary for the workerist strategy and for the consolidation of the 'historic bloc'.

In contrast, bourgeois activists, who were predominantly white students and professionals from privileged institutions, did not fully fit Gramsci's (1971) class-origin criterion. Yet, through a deliberate alignment with the oppressed, they potentially enacted class suicide. As discussed earlier, they consciously renounced material and ideological privilege to participate in liberation. In Freirean terms, this solidarity required relinquishing dominance to engage in authentic dialogue (Freire, 1970), a stance often reinforced by Black Consciousness ethics that warned against paternalistic intrusion. Horn captures this dynamic, noting the influence of Black Consciousness ideology, which emphasised that their role was not to impose themselves on Black communities. '*The Black Consciousness ideology kind of said that it wasn't our role to be going into Black communities... So, we accepted that... And in that context, we got involved in the Freirean learning*' (Horn, Interview, 25 July 2024). This encapsulates the essence of class suicide, which involved rejecting one's own origins and embracing genuine solidarity, often leading to a disconnection from their origins even at the risk of arrest, detention, and alienation from their own families and communities (Bourdieu, 1984).

In practice, these allies translated local experiences into accessible political language, crafted counter-narratives against apartheid ideology, built solidarity networks, and created enabling

spaces for critical consciousness and organisation. Their contribution was catalytic and infrastructural, not directive: they widened access to resources, protected fragile initiatives, and linked local organising to broader labour and anti-apartheid formations while deferring leadership to subaltern actors.

This dual dynamic of leadership from below, coupled with catalytic support from above, clarifies the human engine of counter-hegemony I spoke about earlier in the projects studied. Subaltern organic intellectuals provided the political direction and organisational backbone of the war of position; bourgeois allies extended its capacity, reach, and resilience without substituting its core leadership. This distinction is crucial because it preserves Gramsci's (1971) class-rooted conception of organic intellectuals while acknowledging the strategic value of allied participation when conducted through Freire's (1970) dialogical ethics and Cabral's solidarity.

Without a doubt, the literacy projects' success hinged on subaltern-led formation of organic intellectuals exemplified by figures like Mehlomakhulu and Mfeti and supported by bourgeois allies who undertook class suicide to enable, rather than direct, the struggle. This formation demonstrates how grassroots leadership and principled solidarity together consolidated the war of position, translating everyday oppression into organised counter-hegemonic practice as articulated by Gramsci (1971).

7.4.4 The Epistemic Struggle and Contradictions of Solidarity

The structural risk of the supporting white role is compounded by the critical finding that the historical record is severely limited by the absence of direct learner voices, which is a profound methodological gap that itself reveals the pervasive impact of apartheid's epistemic violence. This absence means that our analysis of the perceived tensions between facilitator intentions and the perceptions of local communities is limited.

This structural silence is accompanied by a subtle tension in the oral history accounts of the white activists. A critical analysis of the interviews reveals a recurring silence that complicates this narrative of solidarity because, of all the former student activists interviewed, only one explicitly articulated having learned from the older, Black learners they were teaching. This silence is a profound finding. It suggests that even in a conscious act of class suicide, some privileges and hierarchies are unconsciously reproduced. It was far more difficult to shed their 'epistemic privilege', the deeply ingrained assumption that their formal,

theoretical knowledge was superior. This reveals a subtle tension between the Freirean ideal of a fully dialogical, co-learning environment and the lived reality of the classroom (Freire, 1988). This critical finding must temper the success of class suicide, demonstrating that the full challenge to hegemony requires an internal struggle against unconscious intellectual authority, a struggle even the most committed activists found difficult to win.

In this context, the literacy projects illustrated the ongoing tension and strategic interplay between these two approaches, which are the internal struggle against epistemic privilege and the external struggle against apartheid. While the use of ‘codes’ and participatory learning in the classes exemplified the war of position, the adaptation from a community-focused approach to direct engagement with existing unions demonstrated a strategic evolution and shift in emphasis. They strategically combined the long-term cultural transformation of the war of position with more immediate, confrontational actions (the limited war of manoeuvre), demonstrating a sophisticated and complex understanding of social change processes

7.4.5 Concluding Analysis: The Paradoxical and Strategic Dimensions of Praxis

This analysis reveals that enacting Freirean praxis within the context of apartheid was a complex act filled with contradictions and strategic pragmatism. The very structure of many literacy projects, which often involved privileged facilitators teaching oppressed learners, risked reproducing the ‘banking model’ of education and perpetuating racial and class hierarchies, an outcome that stands in stark contrast to Freire’s vision of horizontal dialogue. Yet, this paradox became a form of praxis in itself, representing a pragmatic, problem-solving response shaped by critical reflection on what was achievable under the brutal constraints of the system.

The projects deliberately weaponised their contradictions, leveraging unearned privilege not to dominate but to carve out protected spaces for conscientisation that might otherwise have been politically suppressed. Through the lens of Lukes’ (2005) analysis, we can see how these efforts systematically challenged the ‘power over’ exerted by the state and capital. Initially, this was done through cultural and ideological work (the war of position - targeting Lukes’ third dimension), and later through tactical, collective action, which constituted a limited war of manoeuvre (confronting the first dimension).

This serves as a testament that these projects served as incubators for a counter-hegemonic war of position, actively building alternative institutions that confronted systemic oppression. They demonstrated that even amid systemic contradictions and limitations, praxis could create moments of genuine agency. There are also heart-warming stories of acts of fostering lived experiences of freedom from within the heart of an oppressive system, evidenced by the Umtapo learner who quit her job rather than tolerate dehumanisation (an act of personal, Freirean defiance) and by the collective narratives of learner self-assertion documented in the *Abafundi Bayazithethela* publication of TCOE/Masifundise, and by the learner-generated stories and political reporting published in the Learn and Teach magazine (a direct reclamation of narrative control). This highlights the idea that, in the complex landscape of resistance, imperfect but strategic praxis remains a vital force for social transformation.

7.5 Conclusion

In this analysis, I have demonstrated that the Freirean literacy projects of the 1970s and 1980s were far more than just educational initiatives; they were multifaceted political interventions that operated on ideological, cultural, and organisational levels. These projects, at their core, were fundamentally counter-hegemonic, aiming to dismantle the dominant apartheid ideology by fostering critical consciousness and creating alternative spaces for resistance. This is evident both in the constant state repression they faced and in the profound personal transformations experienced by the participants involved.

While the approach creatively linked reflection with action, its implementation was not without challenges, particularly the central paradox of enacting a liberatory pedagogy within the rigid racial hierarchies of apartheid. The projects embodied a dual strategy of resistance in that they engaged in Gramsci's (1971) war of position by patiently cultivating a liberatory culture, while also laying the groundwork for the necessary war of manoeuvre through confrontational action. This dynamic approach to social change highlights the complexity and depth of their efforts.

Chapter 8: Conclusion - The Enduring Legacy of Literacy as Liberation

8.1 Introduction: From Personal Struggle to the Enduring Legacy of Literacy as Liberation

In this concluding chapter, I synthesise the findings and the analysis I presented in the preceding chapters. I draw together the personal and the political, the historical and the theoretical. This will help me summarise the key arguments that have emerged from the analysis of Freirean-inspired literacy projects in apartheid South Africa. I discuss the study's contribution to knowledge, acknowledge its limitations, and propose avenues for future research. Ultimately, I draw a final, reflective conclusion on the enduring legacy of these projects and the lessons they hold for the ongoing struggle for social justice, a struggle that has defined both this research and my life.

Embarking on this thesis journey has been both a profound and challenging experience, punctuated by personal struggles that date back to my days as a young student at Khanya College. Not merely an academic exercise, this research was an act of confronting the pervasive nature of apartheid and its enduring impact on society. My formative years were marked by fierce political engagement, including the harsh reality of police brutality, a vivid reminder of the oppressive forces at play on the path toward 'education for liberation' and agency.

As very young students, we were subjected to violent crackdowns that left us physically and emotionally scarred, yet our resolve only deepened. Throughout this academic journey, the loneliness inherent in academic pursuits mirrored the solitude I felt in those politically charged environments. Each reference to social equity in my readings evoked vivid memories of the struggles I witnessed and the beatings and arrests I endured.

This research sought to weave together the threads of my personal history and my academic inquiries, with my experiences at Khanya College urging me to actively engage in the critical dialogues that challenge systemic inequalities. Through this work, I hoped to honour the lives and struggles of those who stood beside me. This journey is not just mine; it is a testimony to the resilience of all who dare to engage in transformative education.

This academic pursuit was propelled by a core personal and scholarly question. The question I wanted to answer for myself was, 'Was there, in apartheid South Africa, a genuine Freirean praxis, or did activists simply create something and call it Freirean?' As argued by Aronowitz (2012), and recounted in my MA thesis (Thusi, 2018), many initiatives claiming to follow Freirean principles interpret the philosophy superficially, equating it with merely being 'interactive' or fostering expressive freedom, thereby failing to achieve the critical consciousness-raising and action necessary for social change. This study, therefore, was a journey taken with trepidation, seeking evidence of a pedagogy that propagated '*a world that is more round, less ugly, and more just*' (Freire, 1970, p. 26).

My research questions are:

Research Question 1: What was the nature of the Freirean literacy projects in the 1970s and 1980s?

Research Question 2: How did these projects understand and enact the concept of 'praxis'?

Research Question 3: What was the nature of the 'action' that emerged from these projects, and to what extent did it constitute a war of position or a war of manoeuvre?

I have answered these questions through focusing on five literacy projects operating in the 1970s and 1980s across different elements of the broader anti-apartheid struggle, and conducting archival research, focusing in particular on collections 'from below', and interviews with those directly involved in the projects. As discussed in Chapters Five and Six, it did not prove easy to find surviving participants in the projects, particularly learners.

8.2 Thesis Overview

This dissertation is about the strategic role of Freirean literacy projects during apartheid South Africa, and I have argued that these initiatives were important counter-hegemonic efforts in the broader struggle for social change. Beginning with Chapter One, the stage is set with a personal and political context for the research. This chapter outlines the central issue of how literacy projects rooted in Freirean pedagogy helped resist the ideological and structural domination of apartheid, emphasising the significance of education as a tool for liberation.

The main argument of this thesis is that anti-apartheid literacy projects were educational programmes, but also politically charged spaces of counter-hegemonic action. These projects

translated the complex, three-dimensional oppression imposed by the apartheid state (as described by Lukes, 2005) into a foundational war of position (Gramsci, 1971). In doing so, they fostered the consciousness and agency necessary for a more organised and confrontational war of manoeuvre in the liberation struggle. Ultimately, this blend of imperfect theory, strategic contradictions, and deep activist commitment created a powerful force for dismantling the ideological foundations of the apartheid regime.

The thesis unfolds across seven chapters. Chapter Two lays the groundwork for the analysis by integrating Gramsci's theory of hegemony and the war of position with Freire's ideas of conscientisation and praxis alongside Lukes' three dimensions of power. Chapters Three and Four then contextualise this theoretical framework by examining the mechanisms of state repression, particularly through Bantu Education, and the counter-hegemonic responses from movements like BC and student activism. This sets the stage for the case studies within the political landscape of the time. After detailing the methodology in Chapter Five and presenting the descriptive findings of the projects in Chapter Six, Chapter Seven becomes the heart of the analysis. Here, the empirical evidence is synthesised with the theoretical framework to address the research questions. Finally, the concluding eighth chapter summarises the main arguments, reflects on the contributions of this work, and discusses its implications for understanding liberatory education and social movements.

8.3 Summary of Key Findings and Arguments

This thesis set out to explore the nature, praxis, and strategic function of Freirean-inspired literacy projects in apartheid South Africa. To that end, the study effectively addressed its three research questions by synthesising archival data and participant narratives with the theoretical frameworks of Gramsci (1971), Freire (1970), and Lukes (2005).

8.3.1 Research Question 1: What was the nature of the Freirean literacy projects in the 1970s and 1980s?

The research concludes that these projects were authentic, strategic counter-hegemonic interventions rather than mere educational reforms.

The projects were genuinely Freirean, successfully countering critiques that they reduced his pedagogy to a simple technique. They strategically adapted Freire's core principles to the harsh realities of the apartheid state. A key aspect of their approach was the commitment

to conscientisation as the foundation of all knowledge, which recognised the oppressive realities faced by learners. These projects emerged as direct responses to political repression, evolving from broad community development initiatives to more focused, organisationally supportive structures, such as unions, as the state intensified its oppressive measures. Thus, their nature reflected the dynamics of the political underground.

8.3.2 Research Question 2: How did these projects understand the concept of ‘praxis’?

The concept of praxis was understood by the projects as a dynamic, dialectical unity, rather than a sequence of separate stages. The literacy classroom functioned as the crucial site for the war of position, where ideological struggles took place. This environment was specifically designed to inspire and support organised, confrontational actions, a necessarily limited war of manoeuvre. The study findings reveal that the political consciousness developed in the classroom was quickly translated into concrete actions and structures, such as trade unions and the formation of subaltern leadership within the projects. These concrete initiatives directly challenged the existing power structures and capital. This synthesis illustrates that the projects were focused on creating the ‘preconditions’, or the necessary shifts in hegemony, that would ultimately enable a more comprehensive revolutionary war of manoeuvre. Through understanding this process, we can see how the war of position and limited confrontation are interconnected and how they worked together within the South African context. The operational understanding of praxis aimed to ultimately dismantle the state’s ‘power over,’ as described by Lukes. This dismantling was achieved through a pathway of sorts, one that suggests that praxis translated the invisible ideological critiques (Lukes’ third dimension) into observable political actions (Lukes’ first dimension), establishing a clear link between ideological liberation and structural change.

8.3.3 Research Question 3: What was the nature of the ‘action’ that emerged from these projects, and to what extent did this constitute a war of position or a war of manoeuvre?

The nature of the action was defined by a strategic synthesis, focusing primarily on the war of position while strategically engaging in confrontational action that stopped short of insurrection. The action constituted a war of position at the base of civil society (the classroom and community), which was the much-needed precondition for all other forms of action. The internal ideological debates, such as the workerist-populist tension, were evidence

of a serious strategic engagement with the scope of this ideological war. Action, as Lukes' notion of transformation, warranted the core strategic mechanism that was the systematic deconstruction of the state's 'power over.' This effort was constantly met by the state's first dimension force through its raids, bannings, and arrests, which were explicitly aimed at undermining the nascent 'power to' and 'power with.' The projects' actions were thus a 'limited war of manoeuvre,' defined by organised, strategic confrontation (unionisation, localised resistance) that was a necessary defensive and political extension of the war of position, rather than an attempt at complete revolutionary insurrection. The projects' resilience demonstrated their capacity to exercise 'power to' and to maintain collective action despite coercive state power.

Nevertheless, the action was waged amidst deep internal contradictions, highlighting that the ultimate challenge to power involved both external political action (the strategic confrontation) and also an internal struggle against unconscious hierarchies, which, I argue, is the final, most difficult form of the war of position.

The state's first dimension measures of force sought to demonstrate the futility of resistance and to disempower the movement. Yet, despite these coercive tactics, the resilience demonstrated through the projects in the face of repression, validated their capacity to exercise 'power to' and the ability to act and resist despite systemic violence and intimidation. In essence, these initiatives by the literacy projects exemplified the capacity of oppressed communities to maintain their agency and collective action even under brutal, coercive 'power over' by the state.

The analysis has yielded several key conceptual conclusions that provide a nuanced and multifaceted understanding of this vital chapter of the liberation struggle.

Conclusion 1: The Thesis of Authentic Praxis

This study concludes that the projects were indeed Freirean, effectively disrupting the critique (such as Aronowitz's (2012)) that these initiatives reduced the pedagogy to a mere technique. The projects demonstrate that the true power of Freire's work lies in a core set of principles that were creatively and strategically adapted to the brutal realities of the struggle. These principles were not applied as a rigid formula. The compliance with the epistemology of conscientisation, making the learner's oppressive reality the source of all knowledge, was authentic and non-negotiable.

Conclusion 2: Resistance as an Integrated, Dialectical Strategy

The dual Gramscian strategies of resistance were a deeply integrated, dialectical process. The literacy classroom was the quintessential war of position (ideological struggle) that was explicitly designed to fuel confrontational action. This is demonstrated by the finding that the political consciousness built in the classroom was immediately channelled into tangible structures like worker organisation, trade unions and subaltern leadership formations within the projects themselves. This process successfully establishes the necessary preconditions for the broader liberation struggle, resolving the war of position/limited war of manoeuvre dichotomy for the South African context.

Conclusion 3: Power Transformation via the 3D-to-1D Pathway

The core strategic mechanism of the movement was the systematic deconstruction of the state's 'power over.' The projects targeted its invisible third dimension by cultivating 'power within' (agency), which then served as the engine for seizing the second dimension (agenda-setting), ultimately leading to confrontations in the first dimension (strikes, protests). This establishes a clear, observable analytical pathway, the 3D-to-1D Pathway that operationalises how ideological liberation translates into external structural change.

Conclusion 4: The Epistemic Politics of Absence and Privilege

The history of the literacy projects is profoundly shaped by the politics of absence and internal contradiction. The overwhelming silence of Black learner voices, while it is a methodological limitation, is also a core finding that reveals the totalising nature of apartheid's epistemic violence. This absence, coupled with the persistence of 'epistemic privilege' among even the most dedicated White activists, forces a critical conclusion: that the struggle against external hegemony must always be accompanied by a rigorous, continuous struggle against internal hierarchies within the counter-hegemonic project itself.

8.4 Contribution to Knowledge

This thesis makes several original contributions to the fields of education, history, and social movement studies:

The study moves beyond a romanticised assumption about Freire or the application of his methodology to provide a vital, contextualised critique of his pedagogy under fire. It provides an analytically grounded, context-specific model of integrated praxis in a setting of repression, demonstrating how Freirean methodology was strategically adapted to the unique constraints of the apartheid integral state. It demonstrates that the strategic compromise forced by apartheid (such as the facilitator-learner paradox) was not a failure of Freirean theory, but a necessary and successful act of situated praxis.

The thesis provides a unique contribution by empirically operationalising Steven Lukes' dimensions of power within a pedagogical context, bringing him into conversation with Gramsci (1971) and with Freire (1970). It moves beyond a theoretical description to establish the three dimensions of 'power over' as a useful way in which to understand how Freirean conscientisation functions as the engine for cultivating 'power within' (agency), activating 'power to', and encouraging 'power with' (solidarity), transforming power relations from the internal ideological level outward.

The study demonstrated that the war of position (conscientisation and collective action) was a single, integrated process, therefore providing a potential model for analysing the strategies of post-colonial social movements. This analysis validates the strategic necessity of ideological work as the fundamental precondition for successful political confrontation.

8.5 Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

No research is without its limitations, and it is essential to recognise the constraints that influenced this study. Research limitations, as I discussed in Chapter Five, may include factors such as the scope of the research, the availability of data, potential biases in data generation or analysis, and the generalisability of the findings. Acknowledging these constraints allows for a more nuanced understanding of the results and their implications by providing context for future research in this area.

The most significant limitation of this study is also one of its most poignant findings. The profound difficulty in locating and interviewing the learners themselves is not merely a logistical gap; it is an echo of the historical erasure that these projects fought against. This silence is a testament to what I want to call the 'hegemony of the archive'. This is the phenomenon where documentary history, often by default, represents and preserves the

narratives of those who held power or were institutionally organised, while systematically silencing the voices of the most marginalised. Whilst I specifically sought out ‘alternative’ archives which record the anti-apartheid struggle, this problem remains – the archives reflect the voices of those in leadership positions. This means that this study, while vital, tells only one half of a crucial story.

The research relies on oral histories collected decades after the events occurred. While memory is a valuable source of data, it is inherently selective and can be reshaped over time, which introduces potential biases and inaccuracies. Therefore, it is crucial to triangulate these oral accounts with archival evidence (bearing in mind the ‘hegemony of the archives’) whenever possible to enhance the reliability and validity of the findings. This approach created a more comprehensive and balanced understanding of the events in question, acknowledging both the strengths and limitations of memory as a historical source.

This study provides an in-depth analysis of five specific projects and does not claim to present a comprehensive history of all literacy initiatives during the period. Given the focused nature of this research, it is important to recognise that the findings may not capture the full diversity of experiences and approaches within the broader landscape of anti-apartheid literacy work in the period under study.

Consequently, several avenues for future research emerge, including the exploration of additional projects, comparative studies across different contexts, and investigations into the long-term impacts of literacy initiatives. Research of this kind could contribute to a more holistic understanding of literacy efforts during this time and address the gaps identified in this study.

The most urgent task for future researchers is to undertake the necessary work to trace and interview former learners of similar projects, perhaps later in the time period, as their voices represent a crucial missing piece of this historical puzzle. The perspectives of those directly impacted by these literacy initiatives would be invaluable for a more complete understanding. Engaging with former learners would enrich the existing narratives, but, more importantly, it would provide deeper insights into the personal experiences and outcomes of these educational efforts, thereby enhancing the overall historical record.

A comparative study examining these South African projects alongside similar Freirean-inspired initiatives in other contexts of struggle, such as Latin America and Palestine, would

yield valuable insights into the diverse applications of critical pedagogy. However, it is important to recognise that while comparisons can illuminate common themes and strategies, they must also account for the unique historical, cultural, and political contexts of each setting. Differences in socio-economic conditions, educational systems, and local resistance movements may influence the effectiveness and reception of these initiatives. Therefore, any comparative analysis should be approached with caution, ensuring that the specificities of each context are carefully considered to avoid oversimplification and to appreciate the complexities involved in implementing Freirean pedagogies across varied landscapes of struggle.

A study focused specifically on the role and experiences of women as facilitators and learners would be a crucial contribution to the existing literature. While this research has highlighted various aspects of the literacy projects, the unique perspectives and challenges faced by women in these roles have not been fully explored. Understanding how gender dynamics influence both the facilitation of literacy programmes and the learning experiences of women can provide deeper insight into the effectiveness and inclusivity of these initiatives. Moreover, this type of study could reveal the ways in which women's participation shapes the broader social and cultural contexts of literacy work, ultimately contributing to a more nuanced understanding of empowerment and agency within educational settings. By centring women's voices and experiences, this research could also inform future programme design and policy decisions aimed at promoting gender equity in literacy education.

Research that follows the life trajectories of former activists and learners into the post-apartheid era could illuminate the long-term impact of their engagement in these projects. A longitudinal study would provide valuable insights into how participation in literacy initiatives has influenced individuals' personal and professional lives, and their roles in their communities. However, it is important to recognise that the post-apartheid context presents a complex landscape shaped by ongoing socio-economic challenges and shifting political dynamics. Therefore, this type of research should consider how these broader changes may affect the experiences and outcomes of former participants. It would be essential to account for the diversity of experiences among individuals, as factors such as race, class, and gender may significantly shape their trajectories. The research could, by examining these nuances, contribute to a deeper understanding of the lasting effects of literacy work and its role in fostering social change in a post-apartheid society.

8.6 Concluding Reflection

This research has been a journey back into a past that is both personal and political, intertwining my own experiences with those of the participants. Their voices resonated deeply with my own, serving as powerful reminders of the courage it took to light candles of knowledge in the suffocating darkness of apartheid. As Freire would have hoped, the Freirean literacy projects were more than just lessons in reading the word; they were profound lessons in reading the world, equipping individuals with the critical consciousness necessary to interrogate their realities and challenge the status quo. These initiatives were acts of intellectual and political defiance, asserting a fundamental truth.

The truth that ***every human being has the right to a voice, to dignity, and to be the author of their own destiny.***

The legacy of the Freirean literacy projects is twofold:

a) They stand as a powerful testament to the deep connection between critical literacy and liberation, while also reminding us of the challenges inherent in revolutionary pedagogy.

b) Their strategic brilliance lay in their paradoxical nature of operating within oppressive structures while striving to dismantle them.

This lesson from the South African struggle resonates strongly with Freire's insight into the political nature of learning. At their core, these initiatives affirmed that 'critical thinking is not an attribute of the elite, but a right of all human beings' (Freire, 1998, p. 35). To deny this possibility, Freire warns, 'is to deny education itself' (p. 36). Activists and learners embraced this conviction, recognising that '***education must begin with the conviction that it cannot remain neutral in the face of injustice***' (p. 39). These Freirean literacy projects demonstrated Freire's principle that 'the more critically conscious individuals become, the more they will intervene in reality as committed subjects' (p. 40) by translating critical awareness into organised action. In doing so, subaltern leaders and their allies forged their own agency, proving that 'freedom and autonomy are not gifts; they are the result of a process of critical engagement with the world' (p. 47).

This study demonstrates the transformative potential of political education waged from the margins. By tracing the history of anti-apartheid literacy projects, it reveals how these initiatives functioned as quiet but powerful acts of resistance challenging domination not

through grand gestures, but through the collaborative, critical act of ‘learning to read the word and the world’. In doing so, the research contributes to our understanding of liberatory education as a strategic tool in social movements, offering a historical model for how genuine social change is achieved: not through a single, monolithic strategy, but through patient, contested, and paradoxical struggles across ideological and political terrains. This study affirms that the deepest forms of resistance often begin in spaces of learning, where dialogue and reflection become acts of defiance. By recovering these histories, the thesis enriches scholarship on education and social justice by offering enduring lessons for contemporary struggles for equality and human dignity.

While the political landscape of South Africa has transformed, the deep inequalities forged by apartheid persist, manifesting in economic disparities, social injustices, and systemic discrimination. The need for a critically conscious citizenry is as urgent as ever, as individuals must navigate a complex world where the remnants of oppression continue to shape their lives. The legacy of these projects lies in their unwavering commitment to education as a practice of freedom, but without being a perfect, unblemished model. They remind us that in the ongoing fight against oppression, both in South Africa and across the globe, ***the act of learning to read the world critically remains one of our most potent and revolutionary weapon****s*.

This critical engagement with knowledge empowers individuals to question dominant narratives, challenge oppressive structures, and envision alternative futures. It fosters a sense of agency and solidarity among learners, encouraging them to become active participants in their communities and advocates for social justice. The struggle to dismantle the foundations of inequality is a permanent war of position, requiring persistent effort, resilience, and strategic action. ***It is a slow, patient, and sometimes dangerous war, but it is the only war that holds the ultimate promise of a more just and humane future***.

As we reflect on the lessons of the past, we must also look to the present and future, and recognise that the fight for equity and justice is ongoing. The stories of those who participated in these literacy projects serve as a testament to the transformative power of education and the enduring spirit of resistance. They challenge us to engage with our own contexts critically, to advocate for marginalised voices, and to commit ourselves to the collective struggle for a world where everyone can exercise their right to knowledge, dignity, and self-determination.

In this light, the importance of the Freirean literacy projects in apartheid South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s is not merely historical; it is a call to action for current and future generations to continue the work of liberation and empowerment through education.

A luta continua

The struggle continues

Mapambano yanaendelea

Kurwira kunoramba kuchienderera mberi

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Appendix 1: Interview schedules

My name is Zamalotshwa Thusi. I am a PhD student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, and would like to know more about the literacy projects you were involved with in the 1970s or 1980s. As per our previous discussion, I would like to interview you about the literacy classes that you were involved with at this time.

QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

Introduction

1. Can you please give me a bit of background about yourself? [Prompt for details of involvement with any organization/union, etc. Prompt for details on what they did for a living, where they might have worked, etc.]
2. What was your experience of the situation in the country in the 1970s and 1980s?

The classes

3. I would now like to find out more about the literacy projects you were involved in. Firstly, please tell me what literacy projects you were involved in? [If they were involved in more than one, then the following questions are for each one]
4. How did you come to be involved in the project's literacy classes?
5. When did you first get involved? How long were you involved? [Prompt for anything about the project/class before they joined; and what ultimately happened to it]
6. What do you think was the purpose of the classes?
7. In which region/area were the classes?
8. Can you tell me more about the classroom in which you taught? [Apart from where the classroom was physically located, prompt for any detail they can remember about the classroom such as whether there were things on the wall and what the significance of these was; what kind of furniture there was; etc.]
9. How often were classes run?
10. Were the classes run at night or during the day? What was the reason for running them at that specific time?
11. How long was each class?
12. Who was targeted by these literacy classes (i.e. as learners)? Why? Did this target group change over time? If so, why? How were new learners recruited?
13. How many learners did you generally have? Did this number change over time? If so, why did you think it changed? Who tended to come to the classes/not come?
14. What was taught in the project's classes? What did you teach? Can you tell me about anything that you can specifically remember about what you taught? [i.e. prompt for specific lessons, rather than e.g. 'English'] How was this received by the learners?
15. Tell me about your experience of teaching the classes – for example, how did you usually start each class? Than what did you do? How did you finish classes?

16. What informed the way you taught? Did it follow a certain methodology? Please tell me more about it?
17. Who or what was the influence behind these classes? [Prompt for broader details – i.e. whose idea it was to run the classes; as well as specific details i.t.o. pedagogy etc.]
ONLY IF THE ANSWER TO THE 'PURPOSE' Q.6 SUGGESTED THIS IN ANY WAY, then
17b. What was the nature of action that you wanted learners to take through their involvement these classes?
18. Did you use particular materials in the classes? Can you tell me a bit more about these? [Prompt for who developed them/where they came from/language used/illustration etc.]. Would you perhaps have any of the material that you used? Would you be able to share this with me?
19. Are you still in touch with anyone else who was part of these classes? [Prompt for their names, roles, location and if they will be willing to share their contact details with me].
20. Is there any specific memory that you have about these classes that you could tell me about before we finish?

Thank you for your time. I will be in contact to arrange a way in which you can check that my notes on this interview so that you can add anything more you remember after this interview, or correct anything I got wrong.

QUESTIONS FOR LEARNERS

Introduction

1. Can you please give me a bit of background about yourself? [Prompt for details of involvement with any organization/union, etc. Prompt for details on what they did for a living, where they might have worked, etc.]
2. What was your experience of the situation in the country in the 1970s and 1980s? [Prompt for the issues that they dealt with at that time]

The classes

3. I would now like to find out more about the literacy classes that you were involved in. Firstly, please tell me if you can remember what organization ran the classes?
4. How did you first get to be involved in these classes? [Prompt for who recruited them and how recruitment was done/how they heard about the classes]
5. Why did get involved in these classes?
6. When did you first get involved? How long were you involved in these literacy classes? [Prompt for anything they might know about the classes before they got involved; why they stopped being involved; what ultimately happened to the classes]

7. What do you think was the purpose of these classes? What did you think the organizers hoped to achieve/gain/learn from these classes? What did you hope to achieve/gain/learn?
8. In which region/area were the classes that you attended?
9. Did you attend many different classes, in different subjects? [IF SO, then make sure the following questions include the different classes]
10. Can you tell me more about the classroom in which you were taught? [Apart from where the classroom was physically located, prompt for any detail they can remember about the classroom such as whether there were things on the wall and what the significance of these was; what kind of furniture there was; etc.]
11. How often were classes run?
12. Were the classes run at night or during the day? Why do you think the classes were run at that specific time?
13. How long was each class?
14. Who were the other learners in the literacy classes? Why? Did this group change over time? If so, why?
15. How many of you were in the classes? Did this number change over time? If so, why do you think it changed?
16. Did you attend the class regularly? If so, why? If not, why not?
17. What were you taught in your classes? Can you tell me about anything that you can specifically remember about what you taught? [i.e. prompt for specific lessons, rather than e.g. 'English'] What did you think of what you were taught? What did the other learners think?
18. Tell me about your experience of being in the classes - for example, how did each class usually start? Than what happened? How did the classes finish?
19. What do you think you were supposed to do with what you learned in these classes? What did you do?
20. Did you belong to any political organization, if so which one? Was your political organization linked to these classes in any way? If so, how?
21. Are you still in touch with anyone else who was part of these classes? [Prompt for their names, roles, location and if they will be willing to share their contact details with me].
22. Is there any specific memory that you have about these classes that you could tell me about before we finish?

Thank you for your time. I will be in contact to arrange a way in which you can check my notes on this interview so that you can add anything more you remember after this interview or correct anything I got wrong.

QUESTIONS FOR MATERIAL DEVELOPERS

Introduction

1. Can you please give me a bit of background about yourself? [Prompt for details on involvement with any organization, membership of a union/a workplace forum, etc.]
2. What was your experience of the situation in the country in the 1970s and 1980s?

The Learning Materials

3. I would now like to find out more about the literacy materials you were involved in developing. Firstly, please tell me what projects you developed materials for? How did you come to be involved in developing materials for this project/s?
4. What do you think was the purpose of the literacy classes run by this project/s?
5. Please tell me more about what you can remember about the material that you developed? [Prompt for details about the materials themselves (subject matter, language, layout, illustrations, size, frequency, etc.), as well as specifically who wanted them developed, why they were developed, where they drew from in developing the materials, what informed the way in which they developed the materials]
6. What did you hope people who were being taught using these materials would do after they were taught?
7. Would you perhaps have any of the material that you developed? Would you be able to share this with me?
8. Are you still in touch with anyone else who was part of these classes? [Prompt for their names, roles, location and if they will be willing to share their contact details with me].
9. Before we finish, is there any specific memory that you have associated with developing materials at that time?

Thank you for your time. I will be in contact to arrange a way in which you can check my notes on this interview so that you can add anything more you remember after this interview or correct anything I got wrong.

QUESTIONS FOR LITERACY CLASSES ORGANIZERS

Introduction

1. Can you please give me a bit of background about yourself? [Prompt for details of involvement with any organization/union, etc. Prompt for details on what they did for a living, where they might have worked, etc.]
2. What was your experience of the situation in the country in the 1970s and 1980s?

The classes

3. I would now like to find out more about the literacy projects you were involved in. Firstly, please tell me about your experience of setting up the literacy classes.
4. Who or what was the influence behind these classes? [Prompt for broader details – i.e. whose idea it was to run the classes; the background/context that led to the setting up of the literacy classes].
5. When did you first get involved? How long were you involved for? [Prompt for any detail about the setting up, the management and what ultimately happened to the project]

6. What was the reason/aim/objective/purpose for setting up/starting the project's literacy classes?
7. What did you want to achieve through these classes?
8. What did you want to see being taught in these classes? [Prompt for any detail related to the choice of what was taught and the reasons thereof].
9. What was the nature of action that you wanted learners to take through their involvement these classes?
10. In which region/area were you based?
11. Who was targeted by these literacy classes (i.e. as learners)? Why? Did this target group change over time? [Prompt for any detail related to the planning, recruitment and choice of teaching venues].
12. How did you go about selecting teachers?
13. How did you train teachers? [Prompt for details on teacher training, including who was appointed to conduct the training of teachers]
14. Was the teacher training related to any specific methodology? Please tell me more about it. [Prompt for details about training related to pedagogy]
15. Did you use particular materials in the classes? Can you tell me a bit more about these? [Prompt for who developed them/where they came from/language used/illustration etc.]. Would you perhaps have any of the material that was used? Would you be able to share this with me?
16. Are you still in touch with anyone else who was part of the project or the classes? [Prompt for their names, roles, location and if they will be willing to share their contact details with me].
17. Is there any specific memory that you have about the project or the classes that you could tell me about before we finish?

Thank you for your time. I will be in contact to arrange a way in which you can check that my notes on this interview so that you can add anything more you remember after this interview or correct anything I got wrong.

Appendix 2: Informed consent

Date:

Dear [title and surname to be inserted]

My name is Zamalotshwa Thusi. I am doing a PhD in Adult Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. My cell phone number is [redacted] and my email address is [redacted].

I am hoping that you will agree to participate in a study about the literacy classes and projects that you were involved in in the 1970s or 1980s. The aim of this research is to understand how the literacy classes were conducted and how you experienced them. I also want to understand what the purpose of these projects was.

I would like to interview you about the literacy projects you were involved in. This should take about an hour and a half. I would like to record the interview, so that I can make accurate notes about the interview. I will then schedule time for you to check if my notes properly record what you said, and so that you can make any changes you want.

Because I am going to be asking you about your experiences in the apartheid period of the 1970s and the 1980s, it is possible that the interview might bring up bad memories from the past. If you feel that you need help in dealing with these memories, then you can call **SADAG – 0800 456 789** for free from any cell phone network in South Africa at any time of the day or night, on any day of the week.

However, I hope that the study will help people now remember these remarkable literacy classes, and the people who were involved in them. I also hope the study might help activists of our time, and social movements, to find ways of speaking truth to power.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number_____).

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher at [redacted] or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION
Research Office, Westville Campus
Govan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4000
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA
Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Please note:

1. Participation in this research is voluntary. This means that if you do not want to be part of this study, that is your right. You can also agree to be part of the research now, but then later decide you do not want to participate. So, you are free to decide not to be part of the study at any time you choose. You can simply email me on my email address which is [redacted] or you can phone me on [redacted] and tell me that you do not want to be part of the study.
2. If you do not want me to use your real name, I can call you by another name in the study. You can choose what name you want me to use. If you want me to use another name, I cannot promise that no-one will guess that it is you, because what you tell me might include details that make it possible for someone to work out that it was you.

The detailed notes I make from the interview I have with you will be kept locked away in a safe office or on a computer protected by a password. After 5 years, they will be destroyed. If you agree to be part of this study, then please fill in and sign the consent form.

CONSENT

I ..... have been informed about the study **South African 'Freirean' Literacy Projects in the 1970s and 1980s: An exploration of their praxis** by Zamalotshwa Thusi.

I understand that the purpose of the study is to understand my experience of the literacy project/s that I was involved in in South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s. I understand that I will be interviewed about my experiences.

I have been given a chance to ask questions about the study and am satisfied with the answers I got.

I know that it is my choice to participate in this study or not, and that I am free to withdraw at any time I choose.

I know that there is the possibility of the interview bringing back bad memories about the experiences of the past apartheid era, and that I can contact **SADAG – 0800 456 789**, should I need to talk to someone about dealing with these memories.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study, I understand that I may contact the researcher at [redacted] or [redacted]

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 researcher then I may contact:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION
Research Office, Westville Campus
Govan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4000
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA
Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview YES / NO

Use any written documents I have provided in the final thesis YES / NO

_____ _____

Signature of Participant Date

_____ _____

Signature of Witness Date

(Where applicable)

_____ _____

Signature of Translator Date

(Where applicable)