

**AN INVESTIGATION OF THE USE OF *ASIFUNDE* ! MATERIALS BY
EDUCATORS AND LEARNERS IN MOTHER TONGUE LITERACY CLASSES IN
KWAZULU NATAL.**

LYNETTE LULAMA MBATHA

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DECLARATION

The author hereby declares that the contents of this dissertation, unless specifically indicated to the contrary, are her own work and that the dissertation has not been submitted simultaneously or, at any other time, for another degree.



Lynette Lulama Mbatha

October 2004

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Adult literacy learners and practitioners from Msunduzi and uMngeni municipalities who shared their experiences with me in the interviews conducted for this study.

DEDICATION

I am dedicating this product to the two most important men in my life, both deceased.

To my father, I always remember his words: “I will die a happy man if you achieve a Masters degree”. He died a day after I got my results. He died a happy man. Ngiyabonga Shandu Mthiya kaNdaba.

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ABSTRACT

The study investigates the use of the *Asifunde!* materials by educators and learners in mother tongue literacy classes at two learning sites namely, Msunduzi and uMngeni Municipalities located in KwaZulu-Natal. The study focuses on the ways in which the *Asifunde!* materials (learners' workbook, educators guide and easy readers) are used in the classroom.

The study contributes to a gap in current literature on the use of materials by adult educators and learners. The study poses one critical question: "How do educators and learners in ABE classes use the *Asifunde!* materials?" This question is further elaborated into six sub questions:

- Do educators mediate the content? If so, how?
- How much time do educators spend on each section/page/unit?
- To what extent do educators discuss the content and exercises with learners?
- What is the learners' response (interest/extent of engagement/amount of discussion and enjoyment)?
- How does the level of the material match the learners' needs?
- How much communication is there between learners about the content of the material?

Asifunde! materials were developed in response to call of the then Minister of Education Kader Asmal for a National Literacy Campaign in 1999. The *Asifunde!* material is a literacy course developed specifically for adults who have not had educational opportunities in the past. Its emphasis is on reading and writing mother tongue as well as on the implementation of these skills.

The study is on literacy and literacy learning, which is understood here as the study of reading and writing processes that learners use as they engage in interpreting text. Topics such as: literacy acquisition; purposes of literacy; the role of materials in acquisition of literacy; approaches to teaching reading and writing; and the educator as mediator of learning, are explored in the literature review as they are pertinent to the study.

The study revealed that:

- 1. The use of the learner's book and the educator's guide varies between educators.**
- 2. The educators do not fully understand the educational rationale behind the materials.**
- 3. Learners respond positively to the materials.**
- 4. There is very little use of the easy readers by both the educators and the learners.**
- 5. Learners learning and progress is largely influenced by the educator's use of the materials.**
- 6. The learners are very excited about learning to read English now that they are competent in reading and writing their mother tongue.**

The study presents the following recommendations:

- 1. Training of educators in the use of the material.**
- 2. The revision of the educator's guide to accommodate a range of educators in terms of experience and creativity.**
- 3. Clarification of the focus and purpose of the materials regarding reading and writing.**
- 4. Emphasis on the importance of the easy readers.**
- 5. Inclusion of longer writing exercises towards the end of the book.**

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1. INTRODUCTION

Adult Basic Education (ABE) is an area of education that has an important role to play in the development of a country. The National Training Board in its preliminary report of February 1994 defined ABE as:

the basic phase in the provision of lifelong learning, consisting of levels along a continuum of learning aimed at adults with very little or no formal schooling, having the equivalence of a compulsory school leaving certificate. ABE has the potential to embrace all aspects of training which enable learners to demonstrate technical and practical competencies. It includes a core of knowledge, skills, values, experiences and behaviours which form the basis of a general education to enable individuals to:

- * develop their full potential and continue their life-long education and training**
- * participate actively in society as a whole as well as in service, commerce and industry**
- * develop communication skills in a vernacular and English, subject to national language policy**

- * develop numeracy skills
- * develop critical understanding of the society in which people live (Harley et al 1996, p. 163)

Census 2001 provides statistics that 4,5 million people in South Africa have never had any education and that 4 million are estimated to have some primary education (<http://www.statssa.gov.za>).

It has been argued in the past that Adult Basic Education and Training has been the poorest education sector with scarce resources and minimal training of educators on how to teach adults and how adults learn (Aitchison 2003, Baatjes 2003).

Rule (2003, p. 1) states that:

the education of those who are either too young or too old to attend school is scandalously neglected. If early Childhood Development is the stepdaughter of the education system, Adult Basic Education is the poor sister, and thus far golden slippers have been few and far between.

The South African Constitution states clearly that literacy is a right not a privilege, but it often gets lost behind all the publicity surrounding Matric results and new intake of Grade Ones (Rule, 2003). It is therefore the responsibility of those who are literate to assist in the process of eradicating illiteracy. Hence the Department of Education has a goal of eradicating illiteracy by 2005 (Land 2002b, p. 23).

2. RATIONALE AND RELEVANCE OF THIS STUDY

This study is informed by my nine years of experience as an adult education practitioner at different levels and in different organisations. This experience instilled an interest in me in the use of materials especially mother tongue materials.

In recent years there has been rapid growth in the body of literature pertaining to the field of literacy in South Africa. This new literature includes some increased development and research on materials. The focus of the research has been mainly for mainstream education. Where research has been done in the Adult Basic Education (ABE) field the focus has been on the evaluation of materials and very little research has been done on classroom practices. Some of these evaluations of the materials have been commissioned by developers of materials themselves as a result of pressure from funders (Harley et al, 1996). For example, Harley et al (1996, pp 320-354) provide a list of courses and material that have been evaluated. However, the focus of most articles and books on ABET materials has been on features of the material, such as the layout or relevance. There has been little focus on approaches or ways in which they are used that make them effective or explain in detail their effectiveness in developing literacy skills of adult learners. For example, McKay (2000), mentions that badly written, poorly produced, poorly laid out materials may hinder learning. All these are issues that relate to the format or layout of the material.

Lyster (2003) conducted a study that describes and analyses the corpus of easy readers published for adult readers in South Africa. Her study analysed books according to various criteria relating to genre, theme, design and setting, and English books were analysed in depth in relation to

readability, literacy features and ideology.

There has been very little work done on how the materials are used by educators and learners, Hence, it is the objective of this study to investigate how the *Asifunde!* materials are being used by both the educators and learners in and outside the classroom.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theories provide frameworks for making sense of environmental observations. They serve as bridges between research and education practices and as tools to organise and translate research findings into recommendations for educational practice. Theories of learning differ in how they address critical issues. Some of the more important issues concern how learning occurs, which factors influence learning, what the role of memory is, what the role of motivation is, how transfer occurs, and which types of learning theory offer the best explanation.

Burns (1995) conceives of learning as a relatively permanent change in behavior with behavior including both observable activity and internal processes such as thinking, attitudes and emotions.

When we consider such definitions it is clear that one can understand learning in many different ways, which is why there are so many different theories, frameworks or models, each of which contributes to our understanding of adults as learners. Everyone who teaches or professes to teach has some sort of theory of learning. However teachers may be able to describe their theories in explicit terms or they may not, in which case we usually can deduce from their actions the theories that they are not yet able to verbalize.

Most people take it for granted that we learn from experience and let it go at that; they see little that is problematic about learning. Throughout human history, people have learned, in most cases without troubling themselves as to the nature of the process. Parents have taught children; expert workers have taught apprentices. Both children and apprentices learned, and those who taught them felt little need to a grasp of learning theory.

The theory that has been considered as useful for this study is the constructivist theory and is discussed below.

3.1 CONSTRUCTIVIST THEORY

Constructivist theory provides a useful frame of reference for this study. Cambourne (2002, p. 26) defines constructivist theory as a set of assumptions about learners and the learning process, as a philosophical view on how we come to understand or know, and as a theory of learning and teaching.

There are three theoretical assumptions that Cambourne (2002, p. 26) refers to about learners and their learning process, and they are:

- * *what is learned cannot be separated from the context in which it is learned.*

- * *the purpose or goals that the learner brings to the learning situation are central to what is learned.*

- * *knowledge and meaning are socially constructed through the processes of negotiation, evaluation, and transformation*

Cambourne (2002) argues that the constructivist theory rejects the idea that the ends justify the means. He argues that the ends of reading instruction are very much determined by the means employed to teach it. This means that the experiences and contexts in which learning to read is entrenched will be critical to each learner's understanding of, and ability to use, reading, writing, spelling or grammar. The emphasis should be on learners constructing their own knowledge in a context similar to the one which they would apply that knowledge. This ensures and encourages transfer and application of the skills they have learnt in the classroom to their everyday lives outside the classroom.

These assumptions are very true especially for adult learners and they are supported by many adult educators including myself. Adult learners bring to the classroom or a learning environment vast knowledge and experience. They learn best and quickly when what they are learning is based on their past or current experiences. This ensures and reinforces the understanding of the new. One of the well known and recited principles of adult learning is that one should start from the known then move to the unknown. This principle clearly supports these assumptions as the major theme in this theoretical framework; learning is an active process in which learners construct new ideas or concepts based upon their current or past knowledge.

Cambourne (2002) further states that these theoretical assumptions collectively reflect constructivist theory and they bring about a set of instructional principles that can be used to generate instructional practices that will support the teaching. As far as the teaching is

concerned, the educator should try and encourage learners to discover principles by themselves. The educator and learner should engage in an active dialogue. The task of the educator is to translate information to be learned into a format appropriate to the learner's current state of understanding. Curriculum should be organized in a spiral manner so that the learner continually builds upon what they have already learned (Cambourne, 2002).

To summarise, constructivist theory is based on the following principles: learning opportunities must be concerned with the experiences and contexts that make the learner willing and able to learn; learning opportunities must be structured so that it can be easily grasped by the learner; learning opportunities should be designed to facilitate and or fill in the gap that is going beyond the information given.

The focal point for this study is the use of *Asifunde!* materials. The content and presentation of both the *Asifunde!* learners' workbook and the educator's guide indicate that it is based largely on the principles of constructivist learning theory.

- themes on which the reading and writing exercises are based reflect practices and contexts from the lives of Zulu people living in KwaZulu Natal today
- developers of the materials have attempted to simulate real application of literacy skills in the *Asifunde!* exercises particularly in the second half of the book
- many exercises require learners to draw on their own experiences and perceptions
- educators are encouraged to allow learners to work through the material at their own pace

- educators are urged to help learners discover knowledge and reach conclusions for themselves by directing their thinking with questions rather than by telling them what they should learn.

3.2 WHOLE LANGUAGE APPROACH

There are a number of approaches to teaching reading, including analytic, synthetic and eclectic approaches. The authors of *Asifunde!* materials have stated that they have used two of these approaches, that is the analytic and synthetic approaches. They have stated that the analytic or whole language approach is central to the reading exercises while the synthetic approach is central to the writing exercises. The analytic approach is based on the top- down model, where the learner's attention is focused on meaning of sentences and pieces of text first. The texts used for reading aim to reflect learners' immediate life experience, and are set in contexts with which learners can easily and strongly identify with.

Bowman-Kruhm (2003) sees whole language (or analytic) as an approach, a philosophy, a framework, a theory or an orientation. He emphasises that it is not a programme for teaching.

The following are characteristics of the whole language approach as outlined by Bowman-Kruhm (2003). He states that the reader uses three cuing systems (graphic, syntactic, semantics).

He explains these cuing systems as follows.

Graphic- is printed visual display;

Syntactic- is the conventions and consistencies of the language structure and

Semantics- meaning or comprehension, including background information and personal previous experience.

He also states that reading is an interactive process which requires the learner to use his or her prior knowledge to make sense of text; materials must be authentic, real life, meaning-centred; writing and reading are equally important, and reading involves an array of reader's strategies such as predicting meaning and using metacognitive skills.

Lyster (2003) states that the whole language approach, sometimes called a top-down approach, views learning as a holistic process, as it starts with concepts or/and a unit of meaning like a sentence or a word. The focus is mainly on meaning. The sentences or words are later broken down into individual letters. Those who support this approach like Fordham et al (1995) say that it is easier to remember text that has meaning attached to it than learning single units with no meaning like syllables, letters etc. The fundamental tenet to this method is that a person learns to read by reading. Learning to read using this method requires exposure to a range of texts that use naturally occurring language from the very outset of reading instruction.

The synthetic approach stresses teaching of elements of words first and later combines them to form words. The synthetic approach used in the writing exercises in *Asifunde!* tries to ensure that learners pay attention to the smallest written elements of the same sentences and pieces of text they have read in the reading exercises with an emphasis on meaning. Thus writing is introduced letter by letter and sound by sound while reading is learnt via whole sentences and unit words (Land 2002b, p. 18). The authors of the *Asifunde!* materials state that the text used in the writing exercises, is the same or directly related to the texts used for reading exercises.

Chall (1983, p. 5) presents the stages of reading development and states that the understanding of how reading develops should help us understand the highly controversial issues of what to teach, when and by what methods. Chall (1983, pp. 15-24) differentiates between five stages. She identifies Stage 0 as a pre-reading stage that covers a greater period of time and covers a greater series of changes than any of the other stages. She identifies Stage 1 as initial reading or decoding stage and Stage 5 as construction and reconstruction.

The essential aspect of Stage 1 is learning the arbitrary set of letters and associating these with the corresponding parts of spoken words. At this stage, children and adults interiorize cognitive knowledge about reading such as what the letters are for, and how to know when a mistake is made. Biemiller cited in Chall (1983, p. 17) states that three phases exist within Stage 1. The first phase was characterised by word-substitution errors, most of which were semantically and synthetically adequate. The second phase was characterised by an increase in non-responding and by more errors that had a graphic resemblance to the printed word, with a loss of some of the semantic acceptability. In the third phase, there was a continued concern with graphic exactness but also a return to a greater semantic acceptability. Biemillier states that it was only when the children appeared to let go of the 'meaning' substitutions and worked instead on what the word looked and sounded like that they made substantial progress.

During Stage 2, reading is not for gaining new information, but confirming what is already basically familiar, the reader can concentrate attention on the printed words, usually the most common, high-frequency words. Stage 3 is characterised by reading for learning the new. When readers enter Stage 3, they start on the course of reading to learn the new. Because children's background knowledge, vocabulary, and cognitive abilities are still limited at this

stage, the first steps of Stage 3 reading usually best developed with materials and purposes that are clear, within one viewpoint and limited in technical complexities (Chall, 1983, p. 20). Chall (1983, p. 9) states that illiterate adults tend to follow largely the same course of development, although they have more success with some stages than with others.

The above findings of Chall and Biemiller run counter to the psycholinguistic theories that view true reading as reading for meaning. Chall's stages of reading development are more in keeping with synthetic approach than whole language approach. Chall (1983, pp. 31 - 32) states that psycholinguistic theories make little provision for the decoding stage (Stage 1) and seem to show little concern for the kind of accuracy required in technical and scientific reading (Stage 3). Psycholinguistic theory suggests that decoding retards reading for meaning and that relying on context for recognition of words and meanings is the ideal reading strategy at all times, including the initial stage. To a great extent these theories resemble the sight and sentence methods of the past and the whole language experience methods of the present.

Land (2002b, p. 19) states that it is well recognised that learners' response to the content of texts that are used to teach reading is a crucial element in the development of their reading skills. She argues that if learners have a strong positive reaction to the content of texts, they learn to read the texts rapidly and have little difficulty retaining what they have learnt. Therefore, a careful selection of the content of the materials to be used in each reading stage is very important.

Understanding the reading stages may add to our knowledge of what happens as the individual learns to read at an ever-increasing level of maturity. This will also have an implication for the type of materials used and how are they used at each reading stage.

When literacy instruction is based on the whole language method, easy reading books are central to the learning of reading from the very beginning of the process. Easy reading books are central to the acquisition of the core skills, both in methodological and ideological terms (Lyster, 2003, p. 29). Lyster also states that phonic and whole language methods are seldom used in their pure form and in practice an eclectic approach is often advocated by researchers and used by teachers.

This approach requires the educators to make informed choices about the nature of material that they will provide for their learners at what stage and how are they going to use them in the development of the literacy skills.

4. THE FOCUS OF THE STUDY AND THE KEY QUESTION

The purpose of this study is to investigate the use of the '*Asifunde!*' materials by learners and educators. The focus will be on how these materials are used by both the educators and learners in basic mother tongue literacy classes. The basic literacy skills taught in these classes are reading and writing, and the application of these skills in work, home and community environments.

This study will answer the following critical question:

How do educators and learners in ABE classes use the *Asifunde!* materials?

The following will be the sub- questions:

- Do educators mediate the content? If so, how?
- How much time do educators spend on each section/page/unit?

- To what extent do educators discuss the content and exercises with learners?
- What is the learners' response (interest/ extent of engagement/amount of discussion and enjoyment)?
- How does the level of the material match the learners' needs?
- How much communication is there between learners about the content of the material?

The study will be divided into six chapters as follows:

Chapter 1 introductory chapter that presents the rationale as well as the focus of the study and the key questions.

Chapter 2 a review of the literature, with the following areas of focus:

- what is literacy?
- literacy acquisition
- the position of language in literacy acquisition
- purpose of literacy
- literacy materials and their role in literacy acquisition
- approaches to teaching reading and writing
- learning to read and write
- materials and approaches
- educator as a mediator of learning

Chapter 3 discussion of the research design and methodology followed in the study

Chapter 4 an exploration of the *Asifunde!* materials

Chapter 5 presentation and discussion of the data collected and analysis

Chapter 6 main conclusions of the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. INTRODUCTION

The focus of the study is on how both the educators and learners in mother tongue literacy classes use the *Asifunde!* material. This is a study of literacy learning, which in this study is viewed as the study of reading and writing processes that learners use as they engage in interpreting text and producing text of their own.

It is therefore important for the literature review to explore the following topics, as they are pertinent to the study.

- What literacy is
- How literacy is acquired
- The purpose of literacy
- The role of materials in literacy acquisition
- The educator as a mediator of learning.

These topics are crucial to the study, and their exploration will assist in answering its critical questions that the study intends to answer.

2. WHAT IS LITERACY?

Internationally there is a general acceptance of the definition of literacy in the Declaration of Persepolis of 1975, which considers literacy to be portrayed not as just the process of learning the skills of reading and writing and arithmetic, but as a contribution to the liberation of man and his full development. Thus conceived, literacy creates the conditions for the acquisition of

a critical consciousness of society in which man lives and of its aims; it also stimulates initiatives and his participation in the creation of projects capable of acting upon the world, of transforming it and of defining the aims of an authentic human action: literacy is not an end in itself (Bataille, in Harley et al,1996, p. 16).

In South Africa, adult basic education began as the teaching of basic reading and writing skills to adults, which started with Western colonisation. At the time, the attainment of these skills at a very basic level was regarded as sufficient to constitute literacy, and few people developed these skills to any greater extent. As society has changed, so has the basic level of skills it demands. The idea of what people need to know and be able to do in order to be regarded as literate has become more extensive and demanding. The definition of literacy has naturally followed the same trend (Land 2001, p. 7). For example, very simple reading and writing skills were enough for people to be literate, but now in the twenty first century, skills like computer literacy are considered the basic skills. More technologically and scientifically developed nations also tend to show more advancement in literacy (Chall 1983, p. 7)

The South African National Department of Education for Adult Basic Education (ABE), in its policy document on Adult Basic Education and Training (1997), states that ABE should ensure that learners acquire basic education and training “that enables effective participation in socioeconomic and political processes to contribute to reconciliation and employment, and provide them with the foundations for acquiring the knowledge and skills needed for social and economic development, justice and equality.” As Silvia Scribner notes (Kintgen et al 1988, p. 72) the perception of literacy “has neither a static nor a universal essence.” As literacy practices vary in time and across communities and societies, so do the nature, and accepted benchmarks

and boundaries of what "being literate" is considered to be, since it exists only in the context of social literacy practices. The range of forms that literacy can take, as well as the wide variety of uses to which skills related to literacy can be put have given rise to what Scribner describes as a "definitional controversy", in which the question of "What is literacy?" gives rise to a "chorus of clashing answers"(Scribner in Kintgen et al 1988, p. 71).

It has been clear from the competition among different definitions that there is no one single definition of literacy that is not controversial. It is fundamentally a social activity. Definitions have ranged from practices that can be learned in a few hours, such as the ability to write a short sentence or sign one's name, to practices that take years to become proficient in. Literacy is a continuum ranging from the first hesitant formation of the letters of one's name to the ability to read and write abstract texts (Land 2001, p. 61).

3. LITERACY ACQUISITION

Definitions and practices of literacy continually change over time in accordance with changing social and cultural conditions for the acquisition and use of literacy. This is even the case in those societies with long-standing traditions of reading and writing. While literacy can be viewed as an innate species behaviour, the abilities to read and write are acquired through culturally specific, formal and informal systems of pedagogy. Hence, literacy can be considered as a set of socially organised practices which make use of a symbol system and technology for producing and disseminating it (Luke 1988, p. 17).

Acquisition of literacy is arguably the most central and foundational project of education throughout the world. The means by which this is accomplished reveals as much about how

literacy is understood and valued, as it does about how literacy learners themselves are “constructed”¹ (Lyster 2003, p. 1). Programmes designed to teach literacy to adults have been initiated with the ultimate goal of developing participants. However, depending on whether adults are subjects of these literacy interventions, both the means and the ends differ in significant respects (Lyster, 2003). Therefore, practices of literacy and the material form of technology undergo historical evolution, as do attendant sets of educational practices for the teaching of literate competence (Luke, 1988).

To become literate through the acquisition of literacy skills is not a simple process. It can be inspired and encouraged or restricted and discouraged by factors like motivation of learners, the degree of skills and commitment of educators, the learning materials and the aims of the educators and providers of the literacy programmes (Land and Fotheringham, 1999). The acquisition of literacy skills needs to be understood and explained within the context of medium of instruction and language of learning.

3.1 POSITION OF LANGUAGE IN THE ACQUISITION OF LITERACY SKILLS

The majority of learners of all ages learn about print through the medium of their own language, usually referred to as mother tongue. Chall's assertion, based on thorough research, is that adults and children develop the ability to read their mother tongue in similar ways. There are sometimes debates about what mother tongue is and whether there is a difference between

¹ The term “constructed” is used as a metaphor to signify that the manner in which a text is written reflects and, to some extent, determines or creates the reader.

mother tongue and first language. Others believe that these are different as they explain that mother tongue is the language that one learns from one's parents and that first language is the language that one uses most as an adult even if it is different from the language used in early life. For the purpose of this study, mother tongue will refer to the language that one considers one's own.

Land and Fotheringham (1999) argue that initial literacy learning opportunities are most effective when they are in the mother tongue of the learners or at least in the language in which the literacy learners are orally fluent. Another point to consider is that there are no prerequisites for learning mother tongue literacy. It is the natural beginning of all education. The adult's existing knowledge and cognitive/linguistic strategies serve as a basis for the development of literacy skills (Cummins et al, 1986). This means that the knowledge that adults already have about the language which they speak and understand serves as the foundation for learning reading and writing. One of the principles in adult learning is that one should start from the known and move to the unknown. Therefore, the same principle applies to language learning in the sense that it is very difficult to engage in a new language in an unfamiliar medium. The learner has a little base for a great deal of new learning. Land and Fotheringham (1999, p. 44) state that progress in learning literacy in the mother tongue is usually quick and that learners are likely to have a sense of ongoing development of skills.

Lyster (2003) states that very often in the developing countries² where the dominant language is not the mother tongue of the majority of literacy learners, pragmatic consideration prevails.

Despite the compelling arguments for mother tongue instruction, the dominant language is used for reading instruction. She further states that this has implications for the provision of material in languages other than the dominant language as well as pedagogic decisions about reading methods.

It is common cause that initial literacy instruction is most effective in the mother tongue/first language of the learner or at least in a language in which literacy learner is orally fluent (Lyster 2003, p. 28). Lyster further states that evidence particularly relevant to the expressed needs of South African learners show that learners who learn literacy in their mother tongue, and then learn English gain greater English competence than learners who spend an equivalent amount of time in purely English literacy classes without having learnt mother tongue literacy.

The choice of language to acquire literacy skills is also closely associated with the purpose of literacy. Learners associate the literacy skills in English with success. Employers, especially when they are funding the programme, are interested in having their employees literate in English. Therefore, they would support the use of English, as it seems to be the quickest route to reach their goal of increased productivity (Land, 2001).

²These are sometimes referred to as the 'Third World' countries. One of the characteristics of the developing countries is that they are much poorer than industrialised countries and that they do not have large-scale industrialisation. Examples are China, India, Nigeria, Ghana. (McKay, 2000)

This has implications for the provision of reading materials. This means that there has not been sufficient reading material in all languages other than the dominant language. Lyster (2003, p. 28) states that it is difficult if not impossible to use whole language approach with learners who are not orally fluent in the language of instruction.

The next section will look at the purpose of literacy in greater details.

3.2. PURPOSES OF LITERACY

Luke (1988, p. 17) argues that practices of literacy instruction are based upon assumptions about the characteristics and development of literate competence, and they correlatively prescribe functions and uses of literacy in a given society. For example, if the purpose of literacy is on job skills and the maintenance of an industrial order, what literacy programmes will teach and what learners will learn will promote job skills. As a result the learners will use their acquired skills in seeking employment. Most debates are about approaches to teaching reading and writing and the language arts. Often what is unknown to participants is that, within such debates lies a stratum of normative assumptions not only about what counts as literacy but about the ultimate social purposes and political potential of literacy.

This is made clear in current debates about approaches to teaching reading, writing and the language arts for example whole language vs skills based approaches, phonics vs word-recognition methods (Luke 1988, p. 17).

Lyster (2003, p. 61) has identified three perspectives as purposes of literacy. They are, the development perspective, literacy as empowerment and the new literacy studies perspective.

She further states that these perspectives are not mutually exclusive and often have reciprocal effects on each other.

3.2.1 The development perspective

The role which literacy plays in development is a highly contested one. The fundamental debate revolves around the extent to which the attainment of literacy affects the development of individuals, societies, and countries. One view is that literacy is associated with development, but that factors other than literacy are primarily responsible for and crucial to development. The more dominant view is that literacy is directly, essentially and causally related to development.

Lyster (2003) argues that the term 'functional literacy'³ is directly associated with this perspective and that it is seldom used in relation to children's literacy but is ubiquitous in adult literacy work.

Lyster further states that the notion of functional literacy however persists as a shorthand for the idea that literacy skills acquired by adults should be directly utilised for pragmatic purposes. Criticisms of the functional perspective are that it is too prescriptive, that it is driven by national agendas rather than individual needs, that it is education for domestication and that it disadvantages adult learners by promoting a narrow and restricted version of literacy (Lyster 2003, pp. 61 - 62).

³This is a generic term to refer to the direct and practical application of literacy skill in the world outside of the structured learning situation.

3.2.2 Literacy for empowerment

Paulo Freire was central in promoting this conception of literacy throughout the world. Land (2001, p. 11) states literacy as power expresses the association of literacy with political empowerment and the ability to effect radical political change. In this perspective, literacy related skills are seen to be central to the development and implementation of political power, in that they give individuals and communities access to the discourse of power. Freire (1995, pp. 8 -15) state that 'reading the word' was considered meaningless without 'reading the world'. This came from the fact that 'conscientisation' is described as the process by which people within their communities discuss issues central to the lives as oppressed people and thereafter learn through reading and writing words, sentences and text related to their issues. In other words, reading just the words was not sufficient to empower people. They need to read about the issues that affect them.

Major criticisms of this perspective are that it does not result in the effective teaching and learning of reading and writing, that conscientisation does not necessarily result in action and that it is not applicable in all contexts.

3.2.3 The New Literacy Studies Perspective

The New Literacy Studies became increasingly prominent in the 1980s and sees many literacies rather than a single literacy. Street (1995) has identified two models of literacy: the autonomous model and the ideological model. The autonomous model of literacy, views literacy as a single, neutral and technical phenomenon. On the other hand the ideological model

sees literacy as essentially a set of social practices which take place in multiple, particular contexts and periods. Lyster (2003, p. 62) states that the New Literacy Studies is based on observations of 'real' literacy practices and events in 'real' contexts where 'real' documents/literacy artefacts such as forms, letters, accounts and records are used. Luke (1995) states that the focus of new literacy studies perspectives is on the development of critical literacy rather than what New Literacy advocates refer to as "basic skills".

A major criticism of this perspective is that it has resulted in such a broad conception of literacy that it has lost its central focus which should be reading and writing. It does not offer any viable alternative to mass basic education and that it plays down generic reading and writing skills (Lyster 2003, p. 63).

3.3 LITERACY MATERIALS AND THEIR ROLE IN LITERACY ACQUISITION

Deciding which curriculum material to use is one of the most important professional judgments that educators make. The recommendations of textbook adoption committees influence instruction for years to come, and the daily decisions educators make about which teaching modules or textbook chapters to use and how to use them, largely determine what and how well learners learn (Project 2061, 1989, p.1). Merely examining the topics covered by a textbook or a teaching unit is not sufficient to determine whether the material will actually help learners learn important ideas within those topics. What is needed is a process that will get below the surface by focussing intensely on precisely what ideas the materials aim at, and how the materials are used by educators and learners to help learners learn those ideas.

3.3.1 Types and Uses of Materials

Harley et al (1996, p. 357) state that, the term 'ABE material' is used to describe a variety of texts, books, newspapers, magazines, posters, tapes, and even radio and television programmes. Some are more accessible than others, cheaper, more numerous, or simply better known. These different kinds of materials have different uses, and different advantages. Romiszowski cited by Harley et al (1996, p. 357) makes a useful distinction between instructional media and informational media. He argues that instructional media require two-way communication between the transmitter and the receiver. This entails the use of two-way communication media or a combination of one-way media that effectively provides the necessary, two-way communication. Hence one -way media, such as television, may be used for instruction, if supported by the necessary feedback media.

This distinction suggests that instructional materials are only properly so described if they genuinely form part of an instructional interaction. Otherwise they are simply informational resources that may or may not be used by learners. They are further divided into those that are teacher-based and media-based instruction. Both types of instructions may use materials or media, but they use them in different ways.

In a teacher-based system the burden of instruction rests on the teacher. The stress is on the teacher teaching, and materials are used to supplement or aid what the teacher does (which is usually talking). Romiszowski further states that, the teacher remains the principal medium of instruction and the principal learning resource at the learner's disposal.

In a media-based system most of the instruction is taken over by various kinds of media resources like print, audio visual instructional material, computer-based instructions and others. The educator may still play important roles like ensuring the environment is suitable for the media to be used, but there is no direct delivery of instruction as with the teacher-based system.

The National Policy on Adult Basic Education and Training states that 'learning and support materials are tools that inform learning and enrich the teaching and learning encounter' (Directorate: ABET 1997, p. 36). Unfortunately this is not true of all learning and support materials since some are badly designed and inappropriate for the learners who use them. Poor materials hinder rather than help learning and frustrate learners rather than enrich their experience (Project 2061, 1989, p. 1). The same thing can be said for poor use of materials, and therefore in-depth studies on the use of materials such as this are valuable.

Rowntree (1997) supports the above statements by stating that materials alone are not enough for learning. Even the most exquisitely formed workbooks, videos, audio tapes, computer programmes and multimedia extravaganzas may turn out to be useless. He states that if learners do not get to hear about them or get them at the wrong time, or are not properly introduced to them or are given no encouragement and have no support if they run into difficulties, and are not assessed on what they might have learned, then we need hardly be surprised if they do not learn very much.

He further argues that materials-based learning systems are more dependent than most on the combined efforts of a variety of specialists. Whether or not educational materials are effective in practice, depends not only on the materials themselves but on other contributing factors. For

example, it will depend on what educators, learners and material developers are doing or how they are using the materials, whether the educators are using the materials the way they are intended to use it. In a material-based learning system, materials are of the essence.

Luke (1988) agrees with Rowntree (1997) when he states that all material has the potential to be autodidactic, because reading does not necessarily require mediation by any human subjects other than the learner/reader. It is didactic not only in its intent to teach particular ideological content, but it also entails the equally ideological superimposition of codes of readerships, of officially sanctioned and culturally acceptable behaviours with the technology of literacy.

The educator then acts as the medieval cleric does, mediating the 'word' by omitting, emphasising and reinforcing particular readings and by calling for specialised kinds of speaking and writing in response to the text/material.

This means that developers of material might have a specific purpose to achieve with their material but the text/material may be mediated by variables within the institutional context.

The educator will shape and constrain what learners learn to do with the text/material, deliberately setting out to engender particular attitudes and behaviours towards text/materials.

This therefore, establishes a hidden curriculum which may augment, enhance, complement and in some instances contradict the ideological messages expressed within the text/material.

There are different kinds of materials with different uses, and different advantages. The following are some types of materials as summarised by Galombik cited by Harley (et al,1996, p. 357).

Print will undoubtedly remain the major medium for many years to come. It is good for detail and has immediacy, permanency, is retrievable and is controlled absolutely by the reader allowing pacing, reference, repetition and revision. It is also reasonably cheap to produce.

Radio is good for information and discussion. It is not effective when some masses of detail, especially figures, are presented. When used in conjunction with print or objects it can be even more effective in meeting educational requirements. Its great advantage is its flexibility and capability to respond to immediate requirements. It is relatively cheap and widely accessible.

Audio cassettes are a much more flexible medium and under the control of the educator or the learner. The ephemeral quality of radio is overcome by the ability to stop and start the tape recorder, to re-listen and repeat. In combination with visual materials, audio-vision, it is an effective method of presenting learning materials.

Television programmes cover a wide spectrum in education and training. These materials have been used extensively for affective and didactic subjects but in their transmission mode suffer from the same ephemeral quality as radio programmes. Television is excellent for demonstration, case study, drama, field visits, illustrated lectures, processes and has been successfully used for direct teaching. There are, for example, excellent teaching series in mathematics and science.

Video cassettes can do all that is possible with television with the added advantage of being controlled for time and pacing by the educator or learner.

There are currently a great number of literacy courses available in South Africa, at different levels. Most of the courses cover ABET levels 1 - 4 and are offered by commercial training organisations. Some of these courses include workbooks, readers and teacher manuals.

Teacher manuals provide guidelines for teaching at particular levels. The readers play an important role in consolidating the reading skills which learners acquire in literacy learning.

The following is a list of isiZulu mother tongue literacy books and courses distributed by Natal ABE Support agency (NASA) (personal fax communication, 15 December 2003):

- **Sakha Izwe Lethu (Tutor guide)**
- **Sakha Izwe Lethu Funda Uziphilise**
- **Incwadi Yokufunda Ukubhala**
- **Umndeni WakwaNkosi**
- **UMkhize Odumile**
- **Ezweni**
- **Inkinga KaNompi NoThemba**
- **Ngezandla**
- **Ingane Ezalwa Umnewabo Kanina KaSipho**
- **UMahlase Uvakashela Edolobheni**
- **Amagugu Amaculo Nemilolozelo**

- **Imali Kamalume**
- **Izindaba ZikaNokuthula**

Other courses are *Breakthrough to Literacy and Fundani*. It is noticeable from the list of isiZulu mother tongue books provided above that there is lack of course materials in isiZulu. The list provides fifteen books of which only four are course materials and the other eleven are easy readers.

Land (2003, p. 93) states that South Africa has a strong publishing industry, but it is not development oriented. Illiteracy remains high, there is no growth of a reading culture, and resources for education of adults and children are both inadequate and under utilised. Publishers rely on the education sector, and the collapse of the textbook market in the 1990's cost the industry almost half its jobs.

She further states that the ABET sector is faring even worse than the education sector. She states that people who are in need of adult basic education tend to live a life characterised by abject poverty, and ABET organisations operate on very limited resources. Neither individual ABET learners nor ABET organisations can be expected to pay enough to publishers for ABET materials to support their publication, and therefore publishing endeavors for ABET are very thin (Land 2003, p. 111).

3.3.2 Post Literacy Materials

Harley et al (1996, p. 359) argue that the importance of print media for ABE lies not just in the form of courses, workbooks and manuals which are used to teach illiterate people how to read

and write, but also in 'post literacy' materials which consolidate these skills.

Lyster (2003, p. 64) states that the use of the term 'post literacy' itself indicates a particular conception of literacy, i.e. that is regarded as something which is basic, swiftly acquired, infinite and then supplemented. This is based on the argument that literacy is a perishable skill. Unless it is consolidated and reinforced it degenerates and eventually disappears altogether. For example, when someone does not use his or her skills, be they reading writing or even computer skills often enough, they will degenerate and perish. Therefore it is very important to use post literacy materials to encourage use of literacy skills so that they do not perish. Lyster further states that post literacy materials are provided only to learners that have learnt the core literacy skills (reading and writing). These post literacy materials are easy readers which help learners to practice their skills in their post literacy stage.

Even with the best political will and organisational capacity in the world, brief interventions in the form of mass literacy campaigns or intensive short literacy courses, are a waste of time unless they are actively followed up with what have come to be called 'post literacy' strategies (Harley et al 1996, p. 358). Dodds in Harley et al (1996, p. 358) states that the world is littered with histories of major national literacy campaigns which eventually made little impact because of their inability to provide post-literacy continuing reading and writing opportunities through which new literates incorporated their new skills into their way of life.

Land (2003, p. 117) states that there is a trend for schools to invest the resources they have available for books in textbooks rather than readers. She further states that this trend is also apparent in adult basic education where little is invested in books written to promote reading for

enjoyment. There is a perception that this sort of book is of less value than a technical textbook, and that spending money on simple fiction is frivolous.

This perception is also apparent in the ABET workplace learning programmes where they spend a lot of their budget for books on textbooks rather than readers. The importance of post literacy materials needs to be measured according to how much of the total budget of materials is spent on the readers. Land (2003, p. 111) states that since competence in reading is known to be essential for the effective use of textbooks, and for reading to learn, the development of this competence, as well as the fostering of pleasure in reading, should be of paramount importance.

Chall (1983, p. 19) states that campaigns to increase adult literacy fail after Stage 1 programmes because there are not enough readable materials available - materials that are familiar in their use of language and content for new literates to gain fluency in Stage 2. Nor is there a compelling need for the new literates to keep on reading.

4. READING AND WRITING

Lyster (1992b, p. 103) states that despite questions about the overall approach to literacy and other factors related to the wider context of such programmes, at some stage reading and writing must actually be taught. The educators have to teach: they must facilitate the cognitive processes which enable learners to translate written symbols into meanings.

4.1 APPROACHES TO TEACHING READING

Reading, writing and calculating involves different skills. These skills involved in reading are mainly those of recognising, decoding, and understanding what has been written by someone else. They also involve reacting to the information that has been read and making use of it.

The skills involved in writing are more demanding. Most people learn to read sooner and more easily than they learn to write. Learning to write involves mastering manual manipulation of a pen or pencil; remembering the exact form of a letter or character and recreating it; and transferring thoughts into signs, in order to write something down (Fordham et al, 1995, p. 138).

Approaches to teaching reading can be divided into two broad categories, bottom-up approaches and top-down approaches.

Bottom-up approaches, are the approaches that start with learning a single unit, such as a letter, character, or syllable, which is later combined with others, to build up words or sentences, the main focus is on recognising and decoding elements of text. Those who support this approach argue that learners need to be familiar with the elements of reading and writing before they start to write or read the text that is meaningful. This has been criticised as slowing down the readers in the long term. According to Fordham et al (1995), learners who pay attention to individual letters always see letters individually and never become fast and fluent readers.

Top-down approaches, (also known as whole language approaches) are those that start with learning to recognise a unit of meaning, such as a word or a sentence, which is later broken down into individual letters or characters, with the main focus on meaning. Those who support this approach believe that it is easier to recognise or remember things that have meaning. Fluent readers and writers do not focus on individual letters, they recognise words and groups of words and are

more likely to remember and understand those that are grouped in a way that actually says and means something (Fordham et al, 1995).

Lyster (1992b, p. 146) argues that different methods produce different kinds of results. For example, synthetic methods tend to produce readers who read more slowly and carefully and who focus their attention on accurate sound - letter correlation, while analytic methods tend to produce readers who read faster and for meaning, but who are not as accurate.

4.2 LEARNING TO READ

The two poles of the 'great debate' in reading instruction are the phonic approach, sometimes called a bottom-up approach on the one hand, and the whole language approach, sometimes called a top-down approach. The phonic approach views learning as the acquisition of a set of subskills in a predetermined sequence. The whole language approach views learning as a holistic process. The key differences between them indicate contrasting conceptions of how learning occurs as well as competing philosophical orientations.

Chall (1983, p. 7) argues that to read is not necessarily to read. She argues that reading development depends upon interaction between environmental factors and biological factors. Like reading instruction for children, the study of adult reading is characterised by many controversies. In both fields the same debates rage about the whole language approach versus the word recognition, decoding or phonic approach.

Reading is an enormously complex process involving perceptual, cognitive, affective and social factors. The complexity and importance of reading have resulted in inconclusive volumes of

research and in methodological debates which continue to rage.

One of the reasons for the lack of agreement regarding effective instructional methods is that literacy is not simply a neutral, homogenous, technical skill but is also ideological and related to the cultural contexts in which it occurs. The New Literacy Studies has played a pivotal role in challenging conventional notions of the meanings of literacy and emphasising the importance of the social uses and purposes of literacy.

The major debates regarding the most effective methods for teaching reading have focused on children. These debates have, to some extent, filtered through to the teaching of adults, but the adult literacy field as a whole has never had the financial and consequently intellectual resources at its disposal to engage with the debate on nearly the same scale as occurs in the primary education of children. The reasons for this are speculative: adult education is the poor stepchild of education; adults are not considered to be as important in terms of educational investment as children are because it is thought that the returns are much smaller; the consequences of methodological misjudgements are therefore much less serious than if they occurred with children (Lyster 2003, pp. 23-24).

Conway cited by Luke (1988) notes that individual differences in reading may be caused by diagnosable and remediable psycho-physiological causes, including:

1. poor visual perception and visual defects
2. lack of auditory acuity
3. lack of interest
4. emotional factors

5. lack of practice
6. poor sight vocabulary and limited word meaning vocabulary
7. lack of general information in the fields on which reading materials are based.

He further notes that the knowledge of root factors in reading failure is not in itself enough but the knowledge of development stages of reading abilities is also crucial. This is the case because some reading disabilities might arise from using methods and reading material suitable for a higher stage when the learner has not yet reached that stage. It is therefore important for educators to watch for particular symptoms associated with each stage and act accordingly.

Chall (1983, pp. 7-8) explains that each stage of reading development has its own tasks and crises. The reasons are many and the suggested solutions are varied. One of the suggested solutions is the use of challenging instructional materials. She argues that materials in reading have tended to focus on enjoyment and fun, presenting narrative fiction almost exclusively even during the middle and upper elementary grades. A developmental view of reading suggests the need for greater use of expository materials and of subject matter textbooks and literature in the teaching of reading. World knowledge and vocabulary, both developed through wide reading, are also essential for reading development. Thus education and reading are circular; the more the knowledge, the better the reading ; the better the skill and uses of reading , the better the knowledge. It is important to note that not all reading is learned during reading lessons. Much is learned from reading and writing in the subject areas and from independent reading of literature, magazines and newspapers.

4.3 APPROACHES TO TEACHING WRITING

Teaching learners to write has received far less attention from theorists and practitioners than reaching reading. It is also neglected when training educators. The basic assumption is that writing is a mechanical skill that can be tacked onto the core of a methodology and that educators will know how to teach it as long as they have learners' worksheets to guide them. There are two main approaches to teaching handwriting which parallel the synthetic and analytical approaches of teaching reading. These two approaches show that writing is not a mechanical skill but is an integral part of the method used to teach reading.

The Synthetic approach, is based on the bottom-up or synthetic model of the reading process. In this approach learners start writing by practising drawing the shapes that make up letters. They practice writing rows of curves and lines which are the basic shapes in our alphabet. They are taught to write their shapes from left to right, starting at the top of the first page in the book and working towards the bottom. Thus, while they practise these basic shapes, they also learn other important aspects of the writing system. Once they are competent, they learn to write single letters and learn the sound represented by each letter by drill, and practise letter combinations that make up syllables. Only then do they move onto whole words that are usually unrelated to one another, and finally to sentences and paragraphs. The rationale for getting learners to progress in their writing in this way is that they start with very simple and move to complex examples.

Process Writing parallels the analytic approach to teaching reading and is thus based on the top-down model. Heald-Taylor (1986) states clearly that process writing is an approach which

encourages English Second Language (ESL) youngsters to communicate their own written messages while simultaneously developing their literacy skills in speaking and reading rather than delaying involvement in the writing process. In this approach, children are invited to draw a picture of a scene that they want to describe and then write or make marks to present writing, about the scene which she then “reads” to the teacher. The teacher will write down the story from what the child says her writing represented. In this approach there is no constant error correction that might weigh down the enthusiasm of the learner. Progress towards real writing happens at a pace natural to each learner and in harmony with their progress of reading (Land and Fotheringham 1999, p. 38).

This approach is unlikely to suit adult learners who are learning mother tongue, as adult learners come to classes already competent in speaking, and their focus is on reading and writing. Adults who are learning mother tongue literacy might find it inappropriate or feel embarrassed to pretend to write because they are aware that they cannot write, whereas children enjoy pretending. Therefore, educators of adult learners might have to adjust the method, avoid the childish activities and make it more appropriate for adult learners.

4.4 LEARNING TO WRITE

There are a number of debates about teaching handwriting. The major debate is about how much emphasis to put on neatness and the formation of perfect letters. Lyster (1992b, p. 115) states that some theorists and educators argue that neatness and perfect letter formation cannot be over-emphasised as they lead to lifelong habits. Proponents of this argument would make a learner whom they considered to be writing badly practise producing perfectly shaped letters

until a high standard of neatness was achieved.

Lyster states that others argue that writing is good enough if it can be read easily and that speed, fluency and the process of letter formation should be emphasised rather than a perfect looking product. They argue that readers do not have a perfect shape in their minds but rather some concepts of what distinguishes one letter from others in the alphabet.

Lyster (1992b, p. 116) states that advocates of process writing believe that teaching learners how to form letters is more important than getting them to imitate perfectly shaped letters. The emphasis is on the process rather than the product. They also believe that handwriting should be used to consolidate spelling.

Another debate is whether to teach printing or cursive writing or both (Lyster 1992b, p. 116).

The most common position is that printing should be taught first and that cursive writing should be taught once printing is mastered. Those who support this position argue that it is easier for beginners to learn printing than cursive. They also claim that printing looks more like printed text in a book and this makes the link between reading and writing less complex for beginners. Those who advocate teaching cursive writing from the start claim that it is easy enough to learn; and that it overcomes the need to learning two kinds of writing, thereby speeding up the process of producing fluent writers.

5. MATERIALS AND APPROACHES

The learning materials required for literacy instruction based on the phonic method are workbooks or worksheets containing phonic exercises, as well as graded readers consisting of carefully controlled phonetically-based passages of text. These graded readers are sometimes

called basal readers or primers and they are the only books necessary for the implementation of this method. A pure phonic method does not need additional reading books during the initial phases of reading instructions. Easy Reading books do not have a role to play in the initial stages of learning to read. Only once the basic skills have been acquired by the learners, are they considered to be ready to read additional easy reading books.

On the other hand, when literacy instruction is based on the whole language method, easy reading books are central to the learning of reading from the very beginning of the process.

There is not the same linear or staged approach that occurs with the phonic method. Advocates of whole language approach sometimes use the term 'real books' approach to distinguish from approaches which use basal readers.

6. EDUCATOR AS MEDIATOR OF LEARNING

An educator's goal is to ensure that individual learners acquire skills, knowledge and new understanding. The goals of educators observed in this study are to ensure that learners acquire literacy skills in their mother tongue.

According to the norms and standards document (DoE, 2000: p13), an educator will mediate learning in a manner that is sensitive to the diverse needs of learners, including those with barriers to learning, construct learning environments that are appropriately contextualised and inspirational, and communicate effectively, showing recognition of and respect for the differences of others. In addition, an educator will demonstrate sound knowledge of subject content and various principles, strategies and resources appropriate to teaching in the South African context.

This means that the role of an educator as mediator of learning between himself/herself and learners is that of providing help to learners who have difficulties and to enable them to understand the content of the subject. In other words, as a mediator, an educator puts subject matter into context by establishing favourable conditions for learning. She/he also uses different strategies to clarify subject matter and communicate the necessary knowledge to learners who in turn make meaning or construct diverse understanding. Therefore as a mediator of learning, the educator does not merely transfer knowledge to learners, but establishes conditions in classroom practices that enable learners to acquire new understanding and skill.

An educator as a mediator also selects sequences and paces the learning in a manner sensitive to the differing needs of the learners. The educator's role is more of a coach or facilitator, rather than that of an instructor.

7. CONCLUSION

Definition and practices of literacy continually change over time in accordance with changing social and cultural conditions for the acquisition and use of literacy. Literacy acquisition is the central and foundational project of education throughout the world. Therefore, it can be understood and explained within the context of medium of instruction, purpose of literacy, approaches used, materials used and how they are used.

Firstly, literacy needs to be understood and explained within the context of the medium of instruction and language of learning. The adult's existing knowledge and cognitive/linguistic strategies serve as a basis for the development of literacy skills. Therefore, this emphasises the point that those literacy skills need to be acquired in the learner's mother tongue as it is the natural beginning of all education. In South Africa about 7 million illiterate adults speak one

of the vernacular languages as their mother tongue, but very little research and development of first language methodology and material in African languages has taken place. In the little research that has been done the emphasis has been on English as a second language. This might be because curriculum and material developers in literacy organisations have tended in the past to be English speaking, and therefore have concentrated in their language of expertise.

Secondly, the purpose of literacy also has a significant role to play in literacy acquisition. It has been stated earlier that practices of literacy instruction are based upon assumptions about the characteristics and development of literate competence, and they correlatively prescribe functions and uses of literacy in societies.

Lyster (2003) states that evidence relating to the expressed needs of South African learners shows that learners who learn literacy in their mother tongue, and then learn English, gain greater English competence than learners who spend an equivalent amount of time in purely English literacy classes without having learnt mother tongue literacy. Therefore there is a vital role for *Asifunde!* materials since they are designed for use by adults who are working to develop basic literacy skills in their mother tongue.

The next chapter will focus on the discussion of the research design and methodology followed in the study.

CHAPTER 3

THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. INTRODUCTION

In this research I have adopted a qualitative research approach. The choice of the qualitative approach is based on the following observations by Schumacher (2001):

- Qualitative researchers believe that reality is a social construction, that is, individuals or groups derive or ascribe meanings to specific entities, such as events, persons, processes or objects. The use of materials by educators and learners, which is the focus of this study, clearly depends on the way learners and educators perceive, interpret and experience this material.
- Most qualitative research depends on multi-method strategies to collect data. This strategy allows for collection and corroboration of the data obtained from any single strategy. The use of interviews, observations and document analysis will enhance the validity of the study.
- This research approach allowed me to be ‘immersed’ in the situation and phenomena studied. Schumacher (2001) states that this will allow the researcher to assume interactive social roles in which they record observations and interactions with participants. Classroom visits conducted prior to the observations and the interviews ensured that the researcher become part of the class and to some extent became a participant in the classroom.

Qualitative techniques collect data primarily in the form of words rather than numbers. This study provides a detailed narrative description, analysis and interpretation of phenomena.

2. SAMPLE

A sample of two sites within KwaZulu Natal area was used for data collection. They are both workplace learning sites. They are Msunduzi and uMngeni Municipality previously known as Pietermaritzburg and Howick respectively. Non-probability sampling was used, with the researcher targeting a particular group, in full knowledge that it does not represent the wider population (Cohen et al, 2001) and that generalization is restricted to the characteristics of the subjects (McMillan, 2001). However, the researcher selected the learning groups and ABE learners to be included in the sample on the basis of her judgement and of their typicality. Firstly, both learning groups are offered in the workplace within the sphere of local government.

Secondly, the learners are all adult and work as labourers. Thirdly they are illiterate, the majority have never been part of a formal education and a few attended two years of schooling when they were children. Lastly, learners are at the same level, that is ABE level 1. As far as these factors go, the learners selected typify most South African ABE learners in workplace literacy programmes.

To sum up, the researcher selected a sample that suited her specific needs (Cohen et al, 2001). This approach is commonly used by qualitative researchers who are interested in selecting cases that are 'informatively rich' (McMillan, 2001). Therefore, the information yielded by this study can be generalised to other cases (groups or individuals) who share similar characteristics.

2.1 ETHICAL ISSUES

For ethical reasons, a number of precautions were observed as this is important for these are very critical to the research design.

Firstly, permission to use the two Municipalities as sites for the research was sought by sending letters to the Corporate Services Managers of each Municipality. In the Msunduzi Municipality this was followed by presentations to the Human Resources Committee, Local Labour Forum and Executive Committee. These are the committees that are responsible for the human resources as well as training and development of all employees and are representatives of councillors, management, learner representative and the Skills development facilitator.

Secondly, negotiations were entered into between the researcher, learners as well as the educators to arrange to interview and observe their lessons. Learners asked many questions about whether the data would affect their jobs in any way.

Thirdly, permission to record all interviews was obtained from the learners and educators prior to the interviews and observations and the interviewees were all assured that the information would under no circumstances be used for any purpose other than for this research.

3. SPECIFIC METHOD USED

The data was collected using the following different types of techniques:

- semi-structured interviews
- classroom observations
- and document analysis of placement tests and learners' work.

The reason for the use of the above variety of techniques in data collection is to provide checks and balances. This enhances the validity and reliability of the research by comparing findings of one instrument with findings from another instruments. It also ensures authenticity of the research.

Both the trial interview schedule and the observations checklist were designed and piloted with a group of learners who are part of the Project Gateway street children programme. The main purpose of these trials was to ensure that there were no ambiguous questions or repetition of questions. On the basis of the trials no questions were excluded, but some were rephrased. This was because during the trial interviews and the observations some interviewees seemed not to understand some of the questions, and some of the items on the trial observation checklist were not clearly observable.

3.1 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

The study used semi-structured interviews because they are conducted in a fairly open framework which gives an opportunity for two way communication. This method also gives the researcher an opportunity to probe further with the purpose of gaining more information.

A total of twelve participants were interviewed, two educators and ten learners. All interviews were conducted in Zulu, and tape recorded and transcribed to analyse common themes from descriptions of experiences. In order to avoid errors of mistranslation, the translation was checked against the recorded data. Recorded data provides an accurate and relatively complete record.

Each educator was interviewed three times, once before the very first observation, once after the second observation and once after the last observation. Learners were interviewed once, after the first observation. Interviews after observations were conducted to clarify and explore what had been observed. This information helped with the enhancement of validity and reliability of the research. Each interview took between an hour to an hour and a half. Both the educator and the learners were quite relaxed and responded freely to all questions asked. The interviews with the learners were conducted in the presence of the educator, but they seemed relaxed and answered all questions with ease.

3.2 CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

Observation is another technique that was used in data collection for this research. It is fundamental to most qualitative research. McMillan (2001) describes it as direct, eyewitness accounts of everyday social action and settings recorded in the form of field notes. They yield detailed descriptions of events, people, actions, and objects in settings. Observations provided an opportunity for the researcher to verify what the educators mentioned in the interviews, and to see the learning and teaching in action. The major problem with this technique, was the difficulty associated with capturing all the details of actions and interactions, and as a result the researcher relied on prolonged observations where both sites were observed four times.

The main purpose of classroom observations was to record educators' and learners' actions and interactions, and how they use the materials in the classroom, including the level and type of participation by learners, and observation of their accumulated written work.

3.3 DOCUMENTARY ANALYSIS

The other tool that was used is documentary analysis. These materials can be objects and symbols of a current or past event, group, person, or organisation. These objects are tangible entities that reveal social processes, meanings, and values. The objects that were collected and analysed in this study were learners' written work and the educators' guide. The interest was on how these were used in the classroom, and what philosophy and theories are embedded in them. At the Msunduzi Municipality only learners' workbooks were analysed and at Umngeni Municipality these were observed during classroom observations. Because of the nature of the *Asifunde!* materials, there were no lesson plans prepared by the educators and therefore no analysis of it.

4. HOW DATA WAS ANALYSED

It is sometimes difficult to know what the researcher did during the phase of data analysis and to understand how their findings evolved out of the data that was collected or constructed. Thus it is then necessary to explain the process that was used in analyzing data.

This study followed a qualitative research approach that used observations, interviews and artifacts. The data collected was analysed using the following process:

- **Transcription**

This refers to recording of data from the interviews and observations. This data was transcribed into a word processing package, highlighting non-verbal communication and

how it can be interpreted in addition to the words recorded. This activity also helped in evaluating the interview techniques.

After each transcription, the researcher listened to the tape and checked transcriptions to ensure their accuracy.

- **Organizing data**

After the transcript the data was organized into easily retrievable sections. Each interview was given a code and all narrative data was numbered using paragraph numbers so that any unit of text the researcher used could be traced back to its original context. All the learners' work was coded and secure files were created to link code numbers to the original informants.

- **Coding**

The information was then collated according to:

- Learning Sites
- Administration
- Learners Progress
- Use of *Asifunde!* materials by Educators
- Use of *Asifunde!* materials by Learners
- Level of Material
- Application of Skills

All the data obtained was searched for material that could be coded under each of the headings.

In order to ensure reliability and validity of the study, the researcher used triangulation.

Triangulation means gathering and analyzing data from more than one source to gain a fuller perspective on the situation under investigation. In this study triangulation was the comparison of data gained from observations, interviews and documents.

CHAPTER 4

***ASIFUNDE!* MATERIALS**

1. BACKGROUND

The authors of *Asifunde!* materials state that:

Asifunde! was conceived of in response to the call for a National Literacy Campaign by the Minister of Education, Kader Asmal in 1999, to eradicate illiteracy amongst adults. In response, the South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE) accessed funds from the British organisation Department for International Development (DFID). The Centre for Adult Education (CAE) at the University of Natal was contracted to develop and disseminate basic literacy⁴ materials for adults, the training of educators in the use of these materials, and the evaluation of their efficacy in groups of adult learners selected from the organisations who are the first to use them (Land 2002a, p.1).

⁴UNESCO defined a literate person as "a person who is literate when he has acquired the essential knowledge and skills which enable him to engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning in his group and community and whose attainments in reading, writing and arithmetic make it possible for him to continue to use these skills towards his own and the community's development.

2. PEDAGOGICAL RATIONALE

The authors of *Asifunde!* materials state that:

Asifunde! is a literacy course developed specifically for adults who have not had educational opportunities in the past. Its emphasis is on reading and writing mother tongue, as well as practical skills. It also gives learners the chance to practise speaking English as it has a section on English towards the end of the book. Books are available in isiZulu and Northern Sotho and consist of a learners' workbook, an educator's guide, tests, a manual for educators as well as for project co-ordinators. These materials are supplemented by a set of ten readers and administration forms (Land 2002b, p. 19).

2.1 THE LEARNER'S WORKBOOK

The developers of the material state that the intention of the learner's workbook is to provide a workbook for learners to work through at their own pace and to develop their reading and writing skills to a point where they can use these newly developed literacy skills in a range of situations inside and outside the classroom (Land 2002a, p. 2). The learner's workbook includes exercises that simulate the application of literacy and numeracy skills in a range of everyday contexts such as reading notices, writing letters, completing forms, comparing prices and resisting being coerced into signing a detrimental agreement.

The developers argue that it is well recognised that learners' response to the content of texts that are used to teach reading is a crucial element in the development of their reading skills.

Therefore, if learners have a strong positive reaction to the content of texts they learn to read

then learners will have little difficulty retaining what they have learnt. It is then, for this reason that the content of *Asifunde!* materials are organised into chosen themes like 'Celebration in the Community' and 'Organising a petition'.

The use of these themes that are relevant to the learners' daily situations assist in bridging the gap between what learners gain in class and their application of these skills to real life contexts. Bridging the gap has been a major concern for ABET educators and learners. Therefore, the developers of the *Asifunde!* materials hope that they will help learners close this gap. For example, the second part of the book revolve around fictional heroine. She is a learner who uses her new literacy skills that she has acquired in the literacy class in a variety of real situations like reading her child's school report and taking minutes in a meeting. The developers of *Asifunde!* materials hope that in reading about this fictional heroine and doing exercises that simulate application of literacy skills, learners will mirror her use of literacy skills in reality and will be encouraged to identify contexts in their own life experience where they can apply their literacy skills as they acquire them. Then, in this way, the transfer of literacy skills from the learning situation to real life is facilitated. Whether this transfer does take place is yet another issue to be researched.

Land (2002a, p. 2) states that in the final section of the Learner's Workbook, there are examples of practical, useful and simple English dialogues that offer an opportunity for learners to practice English for use in practical situations. This section on English is used as an introduction to English, where learners practice and gain confidence in starting to speak English in a nonthreatening environment. The developers are aware that the inclusion of the English section might not seem practically useful because it is so limited. However, they argue that its

inclusion is strategically useful because of learners' ardent desire to learn English. They state that for many learners, the inclusion of the English section at the end of the book is a goal of great significance and a satisfying end to the book. It will be very interesting to hear what learners and educators have to say about this section on English and also to assess whether it is of any use.

2.2 THE EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

The educator's guide does not assume expertise on the part of educators. It is more than a guide, as it offers very useful information on issues relating to teaching adults. The very first page talks about learners, their expectations and their relationships with their educators. The authors of these materials claim that young educators naturally respect their older learners, and learners feel comfortable in asking them for help or letting them know what they do not understand. I do not believe that this is true, as I have observed that some adult learners feel embarrassed to be taught by young teachers, more especially if the educators are the same age as their children.

The guide also provides information on the skills covered as well as the different methods used for learning reading and writing skills. The methods used for teaching numeracy skills are clearly explained. The guide offers step by step instructions for every page in the learners' workbook. It is very detailed and very prescriptive. This might be perceived differently by different educators depending on their experiences and expectations. I think those educators with more experience might feel the guide is too detailed and prescriptive. Even for new or less experienced educators, it might be perceived as limiting or restricting their creativity. It will be very interesting to know whether the educators use the guide or not and also how they perceive it.

2.3 THE EASY READERS

The Zulu easy readers used with the *Asifunde!* materials are not new, as they were all in existence before the start of the *Asifunde!* project. They have been available as easy to read books for Zulu readers for the last few years. However, there were very few easy to read books in Northern Sotho. Therefore, six other readers were developed specifically for this project by the New Readers Project. There is also a dual language book that is published by the CAE that forms part of the easy readers pack. It is available in English/Zulu and English/Northern Sotho version.

3. SUMMARY OF EVALUATIONS

There are a number of evaluations conducted on the *Asifunde!* materials by various individuals and organisations like Mfeka (2003) and Enable (2002) but none of them have been published. These evaluations are based on observations as well as on comments provided by educators at project meetings. The focus of these evaluations has been on attendance, progress of learners, contents in the workbook, interaction between educators and learners as well as practical teaching in the classroom.

The following is a summary of positive comments mentioned in the evaluation report by Enable Educators (4 June 2002):

- the educators find that the materials are easy to understand and to use in the classroom
- the educators express a preference for the *Asifunde!* materials over the

Fundani Zulu Level 1 materials

- learners enjoy the pictures and the characters because they can identify with the characters and their situations: "they are like us" is a representative comment
- the lay out is user friendly
- the activities are interesting
- learners like the authentic materials such as calendars and application forms
- there is enough space to write and many opportunities to practice writing
- learners are beginning to apply their skills in real life situations, eg. signing forms at the clinic; being able to read their names on hospital cards.

Land (2002a, p. 1) claims that follow up research indicated that the most successful of the themes in the workbook is '*Celebration in the community*', and that they as developers have decided to extend this theme when they develop the second edition of the workbook. These positive comments are in agreement with the intentions of the developers discussed earlier under pedagogical rationale, where they argue that the content is crucial in the retention of what has been learnt as well as the transfer of skills to real life situation. The information gathered from these evaluations seems not to be adequate to make generalisations about the success of the materials and a further detailed study would be useful.

One major negative comment or area of concern that is apparent in the evaluation reports (Enable Educator 2002, Mfeka, 2003), is the ability of educators to accommodate beginner learners. Although the educator's manual contains useful tips which aid the educator on how to handle beginner learners, they find it difficult to implement this successfully in practice.

It has been clearly stated in these evaluations that the effective use of these materials depends on how educators handle the different levels and paces of learners. It is also clear that from these evaluations there is a need for a comprehensive study on these materials that will focus on the use in relation to the pedagogical rationale mentioned above.

CHAPTER 5

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

1. INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the use of the *Asifunde!* materials by learners and educators. The focus is on how these materials are used in class and how the basic literacy skills taught in the classroom are applied at work and in the community environment.

The study is based on classroom observations of educators and learners. Two sites were used in the study and they were both workplace learning sites.

This analysis of the data collected is mainly qualitative and whenever possible exact words of either learners or educators are quoted.

2. BACKGROUND

All the information collected for this study is qualitative. It was collected through structured interviews and through classroom observations. The interviews were between the interviewer and the group of learners and also between the interviewer and the educators. The interviews with learners and educator took between an hour to an hour and a half each. In the classroom observations, four lessons were observed and each observation lasted between four to six hours.

Both the educator and the learners were quite comfortable during the classroom observation and the interviews, perhaps because in her role as the Human Resources Development Manager, the

researcher is known to both the learners and the educators. The researcher had visited and talked to the learners and the educators informally prior to conducting the research. As a result, during the interviews, the interviewees were relaxed and comfortable, and readily made comments and expressed their opinions.

The information will be provided in the following broad categories:

1. discussion of information from interviews and observations
2. use of material by educators and learners
3. application or transfer of skills
4. learner's progress

3. INFORMATION GAINED FROM INTERVIEWS AND OBSERVATIONS

3.1 LEARNING SITES

The two sites used in this study are both workplace learning sites. Workplace learning sites are characterised as learning sites that offer education and training to the employees who have less than a complete primary education in their place of work. These education and training programmes are in most cases offered during working hours.

They are both Municipalities within the province of KwaZulu Natal. They are Msunduzi Municipality which serves Pietermaritzburg and uMngeni Municipality which serves Howick. The environment of both these learning sites is very similar.

Firstly, they both offer ABE to their employees only and they provide lessons during working hours. Secondly, the educators are qualified ABE facilitators who studied through the University of South Africa (UNISA). Thirdly, classes are offered weekly between four to six hours per lesson.

3.1.1 The Msunduzi Municipality

The Msunduzi Municipality ABE programme started in September 1994. At the time the classes were held four days a week for two hours a day. Currently each group attends for six hours per session, once a week. Each session is divided into two, the first four hours is dedicated to communication and the last two hours is either for life skills or numeracy depending on the levels.

The educator from the Msunduzi Municipality has been facilitating for 18 years in various organizations, communities and in the church. She has been facilitating for the Municipality for 9 years, specialising in mother tongue ABE levels 1 and 2. She is a qualified ABE facilitator with an ABE diploma from the University of South Africa. In her 9 years of facilitating she has used a variety of material including *Breakthrough to Literacy*, *Fundani* to name a few. She has been using *Asifunde!* materials from October 2002.

Learners from Msunduzi Municipality are predominantly men. There are seven men and one woman. During the four observations at this learning site the number of learners ranged from six to seven for each lesson. The educator indicated that the attendance varies between seven to eight and absenteeism is often because of excessive use of alcohol.

The majority of the learners have been with Msunduzi Municipality for about 20 years and the most recent joined the organization in 1999. The learner with the longest service was employed in 1972. All learners are from within the Msunduzi boundaries. Some live in townships like Ashdown, Imbali, Northdale and others are from the rural areas like Table Mountain and Kwa-NoShezi.

Learners indicated during interviews that they did not know a thing '*Sasingazi lutho*' before they joined the ABE programme. These learners are among the 4,5 million people of South Africa that have never had any education (<http://www.statssa.gov.za>)

3.1.2 The uMngeni Municipality

The uMngeni Municipality's ABE programme started in 2002. Classes are held three times a week for two hours a day. Currently each session is dedicated to either numeracy or communication. There are two part time educators. The educator observed and interviewed for this study has been facilitating since the inception of the programme in 2002. It was her first time to work as a facilitator since she obtained her ABE certificate through UNISA. Since she started facilitating, she has used the *SANLI* and *Breakthrough to Literacy* materials. She told the researcher that she started using *Asifunde!* materials from November 2003, although they received the *Asifunde!* materials in April 2003.

Learners in this municipality are not different from the uMsunduzi municipality, in that they are predominantly men. According to the attendance register there are four learners in the class, three men and a woman. The educator indicated that the small size of the class is due to poor

co-ordination of the ABE programme by the municipality. The educator stated that there are a lot of potential learners who have not been released by their supervisors to join the ABE programme and that the municipality has not done anything to ensure that all employees who are supposed to attend classes are released by their supervisors. She emphasised that the main reason is that there is no co-ordinator of the programme as is the case at uMsunduzi municipality. The educator also mentioned that the attendance at the classes is very poor and has never reached 100% since the programme was introduced in 2002. This was confirmed by the attendance registers which revealed that there are only four learners in the class, and that there are always less than four learners at each session. The educator stated that the high rate of absenteeism is often because of excessive use of alcohol. The situation is worse before and after pay day, that is the 25th of every month. In many instances there is only one learner or no one at all, a couple of days before and a week after pay day.

Classes are held at a hall in the city centre of Howick. There are a couple of old chairs and tables that the educator has found among the furniture that is stored in the hall. The educator also uses a small piece of a chalkboard that she has to hold with one hand when writing otherwise it will fall. The educator indicated that she got the chalkboard from one of the schools in Sobantu where she lives. There is no storage place, therefore the educator has to take her materials from Pietermaritzburg to Howick and back to Pietermaritzburg three times a week. If she leaves them in the classroom she thinks they could be either damaged or stolen.

The learners have been with the Municipality for about 20 years. Learners are from areas like Howick, Mpophomeni and Merrivale. The learners indicated during the interviews that they did

not know anything when they joined the ABE programme in 2002. They further stated that they are grateful to the Municipality for affording them the opportunity to learn how to read and write. More appreciated is the fact that they do not have to pay even a cent for attending the classes. One of the learners said the following in Zulu:

“Hawu imfundo yamahhala”

this translates as **“Free education”**.

3.2 ADMINISTRATION

3.2.1 The Msunduzi Municipality

The Msunduzi Municipality has no proper system of classroom administration. It was evident during the observation and interviews that the educator at this learning site does not keep complete and comprehensive records, like attendance registers, academic records, assessment results, progress reports and so on.

The educator has no records of attendance, she has neglected this completely. In the four observations that I completed, she did not even once produce a copy of the attendance register. During the interview the educator stated that she records attendance when she gets back to her office, but does not bring the attendance registers to class. She stated that it is easy for her to remember as they are less than 10 learners at each session. I asked to see the attendance registers so that I could verify the learners' attendance patterns, but they were not presented to me. It seems that there was no accurate and regular attendance register being kept.

Regarding the assessment results, the educator indicated during the interview that because these learners were previously assessed using the old Independent Examinations Board (IEB) ABE examinations and not *Asifunde!* test, she did not think it was necessary to do another assessment when they started with *Asifunde!* With regard to the learners who started in 2002, they all had no previous schooling and therefore she felt that they needed to start from level 1 and hence they were not formally assessed.

It was also noticeable from the learners' workbooks that there was no indication that the educator checks the learners' work or gives them feedback on the work that they have completed outside the classroom. There were several mistakes that were noticeable, for example, spelling mistakes, and there were no signs that the educator did bring to the attention of the learner that they had made those mistakes. During the classroom observation, she was walking around checking and assisting those that needed assistance or were not clear on certain issues and the most common areas of assistance were on pronunciation and understanding of instructions. It was remarkable the way the educator handled these situations. She let the learners assist each other and asked them to read aloud and thereafter asked them questions that would clarify what they needed or expected to do as per instruction. For example, on page 104, a learner had a problem in understanding the instruction that she should address the envelope. The educator referred her back to page 103 and asked what she had just completed. A learner replied that she had completed writing a letter to the teacher. The discussion went on about what happens with the letter writing. Therefore, the learner realised that she should address the envelope for the letter. After that discussion between the educator and the learner, they both read the instruction and the learner managed to read and therefore do the activity as instructed.

3.2.2 The uMngeni Municipality

UMngeni Municipality has no record keeping system in place. It was evident from the observations and interviews that the educator does not keep academic records, assessment results and progress reports. She only keeps the attendance register because it is a requirement for processing her monthly claim forms. The other reason that I think allows the educator not to keep such records is that it is not a requirement by the Municipality as there is no monitoring system on their ABE programme as it has been indicated before by the educator that the programme is not properly co-ordinated by the Municipality. She also added that it is difficult for her to keep all records as there is no place to keep them in the class.

The educator indicated during the interviews that learners were assessed by the educators from Msunduzi Municipality in 1998 and had not received any ABE since then. She is not aware of the tool that was used for the assessments. Thereafter, there have been no other assessments done and learners were put into their levels based on the assessment results of 1998. This therefore means that the *Asifunde!* assessment test has not been used or utilised. Personally, I think that they should have been reassessed before starting classes in 2002, because I would argue that some would be at a different level than where they were six years ago. Some might be at a higher level through informal learning from their engagement with their children, work or other life experiences. Lyster (2003) argues that literacy skills perish when they are not used often. Therefore, depending on how often they use their literacy skills they might be at a lower level.

Personally, I feel that the environment in which the classes are held, is not conducive to effective learning and certainly not convenient for learning. This might be a contributing factor

to the high rate of absenteeism. This confirms what the educator stated about the lack of coordination of the programme. The management is not concerned about the conditions of where the classes are held, nor materials that are used and not even the progress that the learners are making. This might be a contributing factor to the fact that the supervisors do not release their employees to partake in the ABE classes.

3.3 LEARNERS' PROGRESS

The educators indicated that the learners are progressing very well, although they are not progressing at the same rate. In uMngeni Municipality, it is very difficult to get information about the learners' progress because they have not done much to record learners' progress.

3.3.1 The Msunduzi Municipality

At the Msunduzi Municipality, the educator stated that the learners have progressed since the beginning of the use of the *Asifunde!* materials, but the progress is different for different learners. Some learners are slow in reading and this affects their writing. She stated that she thinks that it is because the writing exercises are based on what they have read, therefore if they do not understand what they have read, then they are bound to have difficulties with writing. On the other hand those who read fluently and fast with comprehension of meaning, write well.

Hence they are divided into three ability groups. The first group, consisted of three learners. These learners wrote the ABE level 1 isiZulu communication with IEB in November 2003 examination and they all passed with 'Credit' after 12 months (approximately 252 hours) working with the *Asifunde!* materials. They have just started with page 135, where they are

introduced to English dialogues that offer them an opportunity to practice English. One of these learners expressed his excitement during an interview by saying:

“Sekuzophela ukuthi umlungu afike akwitize akwitize, ungezwa lutho. Umane uhleke ubala”

This can be translated into English to mean the following:

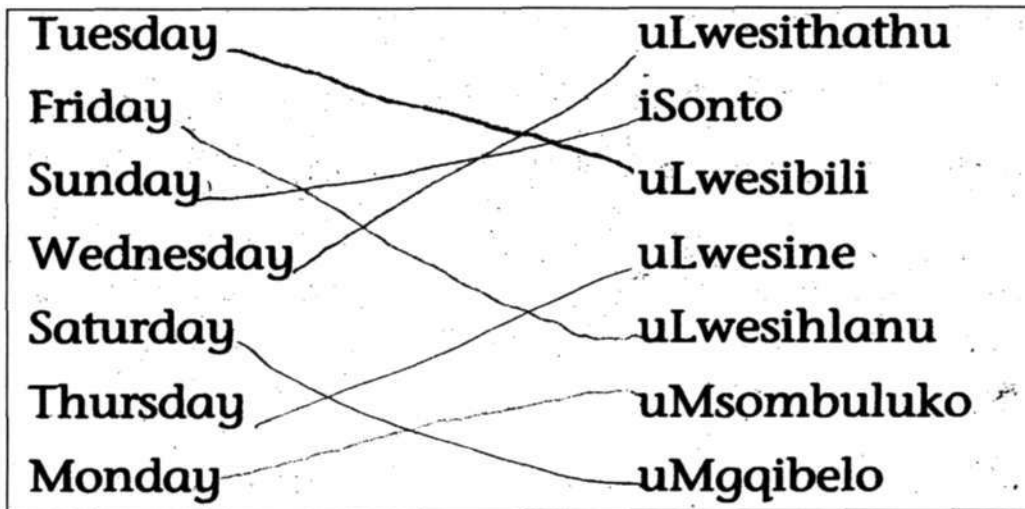
‘ It is going to come to an end that a white person will speak English unintelligibly to me, and because of lack of understanding I will just smile’.

The second group consisted of two learners who were almost on the same pages. One learner is on page 67 and the other is on page 68. The last group consisted of two learners. One is on page 86 while the other is on page 103.

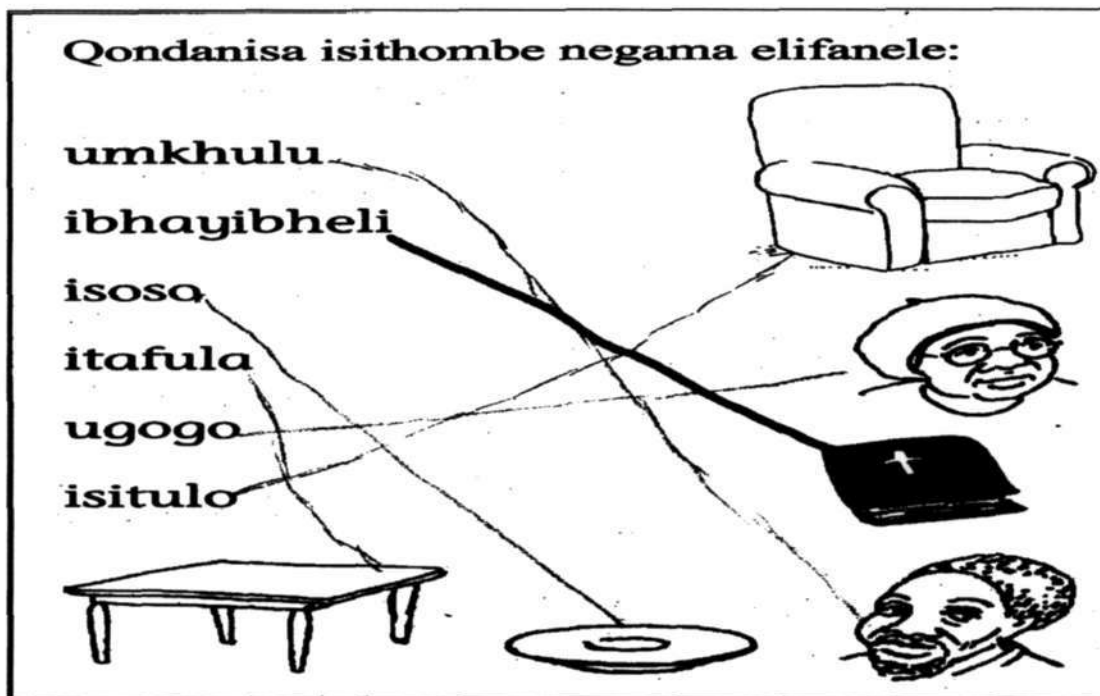
All learners indicated that they could not read or write Zulu when they started classes. One learner stated in Zulu and said:

“Ngangingazi nolunci ngisho no ‘a, e, be, nce’ - “I knew nothing not even ‘a, b, c’

It is clear that learners have progressed a great deal. This is confirmed by what I have observed. Looking at their workbooks one can see an improvement especially in their writing. When they started their hand writing was crooked and they could not draw a straight line but now their lines are much straighter than before which means that their letter formation has improved. The following are examples indicating the improvement in the lines.



(Extract from the book of Mr A Ndaba, a learner at Msunduzi Municipality, 2003)



(Extract from the book of Mr A Ndaba, a learner at Msunduzi Municipality, 2003)

In the above examples of the activity that appears second shows the crooked lines and it is found on page 9 of the learner’s workbook which is at the beginning of their learning and then the one that appears first above is from page 59 and it illustrates improved pencil control writing. What

is remarkable is that other learners have rewritten all the exercises that had crooked handwriting that they had previously written. In cases where the instruction was to draw a line, they have used rulers to make sure that the lines are straight. This suggests that there is an improvement in their letter formation and they are aware of what the letters or lines should look like.

Their reading has also improved and with reference to the stages of reading by Chall, I would say that they fall between Stage 2 and Stage 3 with the majority on Stage 3 where they are reading to learn the new. It is at this stage, Stage 3, that the materials used are very important. Lyster (2003, p. 64) states that post literacy materials are provided only to learners that have learnt the core literacy skills (reading and writing) and they help learners to practise their skills in their post literacy stage. Chall (1983, p. 19) also argues that attempts to increase adult literacy fail after Stage 1 because there are not enough readable materials available. She states that these materials must be familiar in use of language and content for the new literates to gain fluency.

Learners using *Asifunde!* materials said that reading is interesting because they are reading about the things that relate to their lives like advantages and disadvantages of using a bank for savings. The same applies to writing, because it is based on what they have read and it is easy to identify spelling mistakes because you can always refer back to what has been read.

I observed that significantly, the learner with the longest service with the Municipality, and who has been with ABE since its inception was not progressing very well. The educator indicated in the interview that this learner cannot do more than one activity in the class. If he has done one activity then he will battle with the next one until it is the end of the lesson. This might be because this learner has a learning disability that is related to reading and writing or it might be because of normal interpersonal differences. During the role play by the first group that has

started the English dialogue, the educator asked this slow learner to join in the dialogue and he was significantly better than the other learners who are ahead of him.

On the other hand the learner with the shortest service is ahead of the rest of the group yet she started ABE in 2002 and her mother tongue is Sotho but she is orally competent in both isiZulu and Sotho. It is very difficult to conclude whether it is the *Asifunde!* material, age, gender or learning disabilities that are causing these differences in the progress of the learners, or whether these differences are to be expected within the normal range.

3.4 USE OF *ASIFUNDE!* MATERIALS BY EDUCATORS

3.4.1 The Msunduzi Municipality

The educator from the Msunduzi Municipality does not make use of the educator guide. She does not even bring it to the classroom. Instead she follows from the learner's workbook. Although she gives instructions as per the educator's guide in most instances, she does not refer to it during her lessons nor even bring it to the classroom. The educator indicated that she does not use the educator guide because it is easy to go according to the learner's workbook and, in her opinion there is no difference in instruction. This seems not to be true as in some instances, because she does not bring an educators guide, she misses opportunities where learners need to be discussing and assisting each other as per instructions in the educator guide, which do not appear on the learner's workbook. As a result not much discussion or interaction between the learners is initiated by this educator. In most instances where there is discussion between learners themselves it is out of the learners seeking assistance from each other. For example, when the one learner needs clarity on the activity or when he does not know how to read or

pronounce a certain word, the educator will read the word aloud and ask the learner to read after her. In other instances she asks other learners to assist each other. The assistance from other learners will in most instances not include any form of discussion on the content of the material, but just the provision of the answer.

When this does happen the educator does not discourage it but lets the learners assist each other. Although this act should be commended, one must be careful of its negative effects. My observation in this particular case is that, in most instances the learners end up with similar answers. They are all eager to complete their tasks and therefore the easy way out with anyone who is stuck, is to tell them what to write or what the word is that he/she cannot read. For example, on page 74 of the learner's workbook, learners are expected to discuss the questions and thereafter each learner should write his/her answers on his/her own. The educator in giving instructions said that learners should read individually then answer the questions below. Some learners did and others decided to help each other and they ended up with the same answers. This is one of the opportunities where a discussion between the learners could be encouraged. Had she referred to the educator guide, this would have given her step by step instructions.

My conclusion is that because she has been a facilitator for a long period of time she feels that she does not need an educator guide to facilitate but will use her own style and experience. This to some extent affects the way the material is used. To some extent it is not used as the developers intend it to be used. This indicates that the theory behind the material is not well understood by the educator.

In her facilitation there have not been any instances where she used a board or any other resources other than moving from one group to the next.

3.4.2 The uMngeni Municipality

The educator uses both the educator's guide and the learner's workbook. She refers to the educator guide when she gives instructions and she uses the learner's workbook for illustrations. For example, when she reads a sentence, she opens the relevant page and holds the workbook facing learners and read from it pointing at each and every word. She does this for every reading activity that has to be done.

The educator indicated that the educator's guide has been very helpful for her because it explains step by step what she needs to do in the classroom. She also mentioned that she does not do any lesson preparation because the guide is very detailed and it does not require the educator to bring any extra resources to the classroom. Therefore, it is very good for her situation and it gives her all the support she needs as she does not get any from the Municipality. Since she has to carry all learners workbooks and other materials there will be too many things to carry or bring to the classroom.

The most remarkable thing that I observed is that although the educator is following the educator's guide word for word and page by page, she has an ability to add some creative variation to the instructions on the educator's guide. For example, she uses the board to demonstrate what the learners need to do in their activities before allowing them to do it in their workbooks. She also allows learners to practice the activities on the board. During the interviews, she explained that she does so, to ensure that all learners understand the instructions and that everyone knows what is expected of them. This is a very effective way of handling instructions more especially in small groups, where learners are comfortable with each other and

are at the same level of understanding. I feel this might not work with bigger groups that have different abilities. Learners might feel embarrassed more especially if they are not comfortable with writing on the board.

Another remarkable observation is that, when they discuss what each activity entails, she gives learners pointers or clues as to the things that they should expect. For example, in one of the activities where learners are expected to underline a certain vowel, the educator said to them:

“Ingathi ababaningi o ‘a’ kuleli gama”

this translates as;

“It seems that there are not many “a” in this word’

This I interpreted as giving a clue to the learners as to the number of vowels ‘a’ that they have to underline and that they should not spend too much time looking for them because they are a few.

There is also a lot of discussion in the classroom and most of these discussions are between the educator and the learners and are initiated by the educator. The educator has also demonstrated creativity with these discussions. She discusses the pictures with the learners in great detail and writes all the sentences on the board.

She goes into details about relating each sentence in the workbook to their real life situation.

For example, on page 12 of the learners workbook, she spent a lot of time discussing each of the pictures. For example, picture 1 on the next page:



Abadala bayathanda ukufunda

(Extract from *Asifunde!* learner's workbook, p.12, 2003)

She initiated a discussion around this sentence. The discussion raised issues about reading everywhere and making everyone aware about learners attending ABE classes. The importance of doing that is to instill the culture of learning within their families and their colleagues and the community at large. She also mentioned that this might also help them because if people know that they like reading they might also assist them with providing them with extra reading materials and other things.

Another example is picture 2 on the next page:

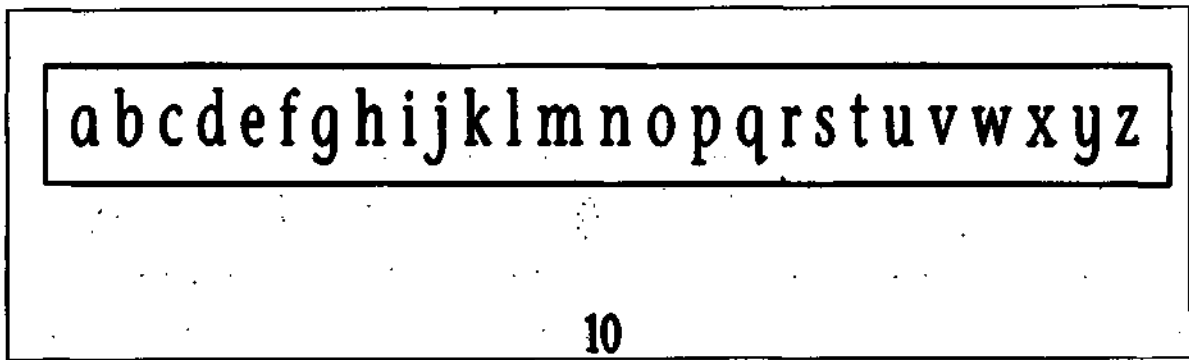


Nogogo bayawathanda amabhuku

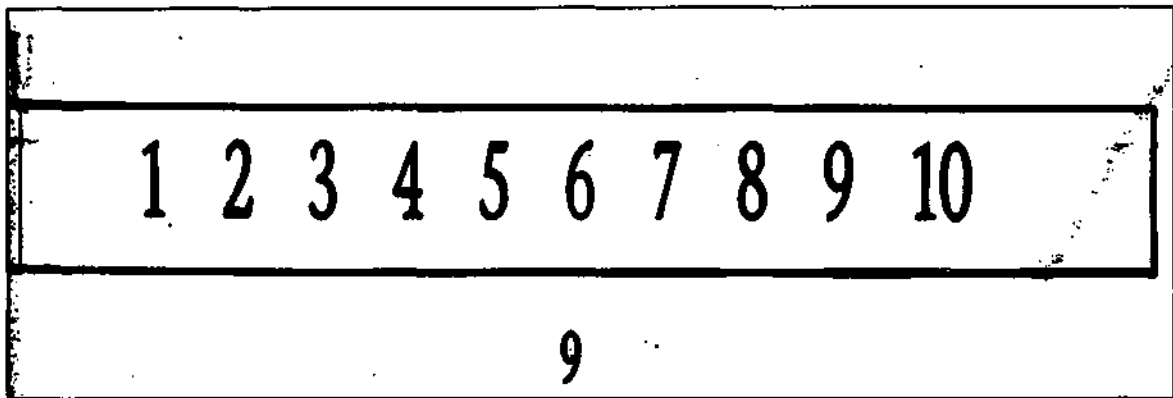
(Extract from *Asifunde!* learner's workbook, p. 12, 2003)

This is another example of her creativity with the extension of discussion beyond what is mentioned in the educator's guide. She extended the discussion about the things that appear on the picture like calendar, bible, stove, glasses. She mentioned that because grannies love books they also bought glasses so that they can read without any problems. Having said that she also brings to their attention that not everyone needs glasses but only those with eyesight problems.

Another example of where the educator uses her creativity is on activities where there are letters of the alphabets or numbers at the bottom of the page. The following extract that appears on the next page is one of them:



(Extract from *Asifunde!* learner's workbook, p. 10, 2003)



(Extract from *Asifunde!* learner's workbook, p. 9, 2003)

In the educator guide it states that learners are expected to find each of the letters of alphabets but the educator extended the exercise by asking the learners to find and circle each of the letters of alphabets that they were working with in that activity.

In another activity, she explains the point that all the words in the activity are of the things that are in the pictures. One learner responded by saying:

“Kuhle ukufunda ngezithombe”

meaning:

“It is nice to learn through pictures”

My conclusion is that although the educator is dependent on the educator's guide, she also uses her creativity to encourage discussion and mediation with the material and also to relate it to the learner's daily lives. This really works well as it encourages more discussion in the classroom. With her use of the chalk board and pre-teaching tactics before each activity it ensures that learners are at ease with the written activities.

Another observation is that the learners are still at the very beginning of the book that is page 12 and they have started in November 2003. The educator indicated that the major reason for this is that they closed classes in December and reopened early February 2004. Another reason from my observations is the lengthy discussions on each activity and the absenteeism rate. When learners have missed classes, the educator will ensure that they go back to all those activities that the particular learner(s) have missed.

3.5 USE OF *ASIFUNDE!* MATERIALS BY LEARNERS

3.5.1 The Msunduzi Municipality

The learners seem to be using the learner's guide at every lesson and for 60% of the time they also complete some tasks outside the classroom. The learners indicated that the material is very interesting and easy to use and follow.

An observation is that learners only do those activities that interest them. This casual approach results in there being no sequence and because the educator does not keep records it becomes difficult to know who was on which page. Going through the learners workbooks I observed that there are certain tasks that are not completed. For example, some learners had uncompleted

pages in their previous work and they stated that if they find it difficult they skip to the next section that they feel comfortable with. In other instances, when the educator is explaining an activity to someone else and it happens to be an activity that they still need to do, they skip and move to that activity. Reasons that they give for doing so is that they will forget what to do if they do not do it there and then.

The writing ability of those learners who skip written exercises, is characterized by spelling mistakes and also lack of understanding of what they have read.

The example below, is an extract of work from one of the learners who skip written exercises.

Bhala igama elisho ubuningi:	
imali	<u>izimali</u>
itiye	<u>izimaliye</u>
isitokofela	<u>izisisitokofela</u>
unyaka	_____
ibhange	_____
inhlango	_____

(Extract from the workbook of Mr B. Mdunge, a learner at Msunduzi Municipality, 2003)

This is because in *Asifunde!*'s written exercises understanding and meaning of the content is reinforced and enhanced. Therefore a learner may not fully understand what he or she has read if the written activities are not done since they give an opportunity to reinforce understanding of the content.

Written activities that these learners feel most comfortable with is the gap fill, comparison, ticking the right answer, matching left and right, circling the correct answer. These are characterised by short answers and no writing at all. The most unpopular written exercises are those where they have to write more than one word or long sentences.

The extract below is an example.

Bhala noma miphi imisho oyithandayo ufake la magama:

1. imali ijabaghathe abangani
2. ebhange _____
3. ukukhokha _____
4. qaphela _____

(Extract from the workbook of Mr L Nyembe, a learner at Msunduzi Municipality, 2003)

Another observation is that comprehension skills of those who are consistent and complete all their written exercises have improved more than those of learners who do not complete exercise. It is difficult to know the causal direction here, and to say whether they are good at writing because they do the exercises, or do these exercises because they can manage the writing task.







The educator does not seem to mind this as she did not make any attempts to rectify this problem, and it seems as if it has been going on for a long period of time. My opinion is that

this has a negative impact in the learners' writing progress. The material is designed so that there is a balance between reading and writing. When learners skip some writing activities they end up with fewer writing exercises, which might not be enough to ensure competence in writing.

In most cases the writing of those who consistently do writing activities, has improved and in my opinion, I attribute this to the number of writing exercises they are engaged in. The material is designed so that the writing is a follow up to or directly related to what they have learnt, to ensure that the importance of reading and writing skills are taught at the same time and same level.

It is evident from the way the learners read that they use the whole language approach.

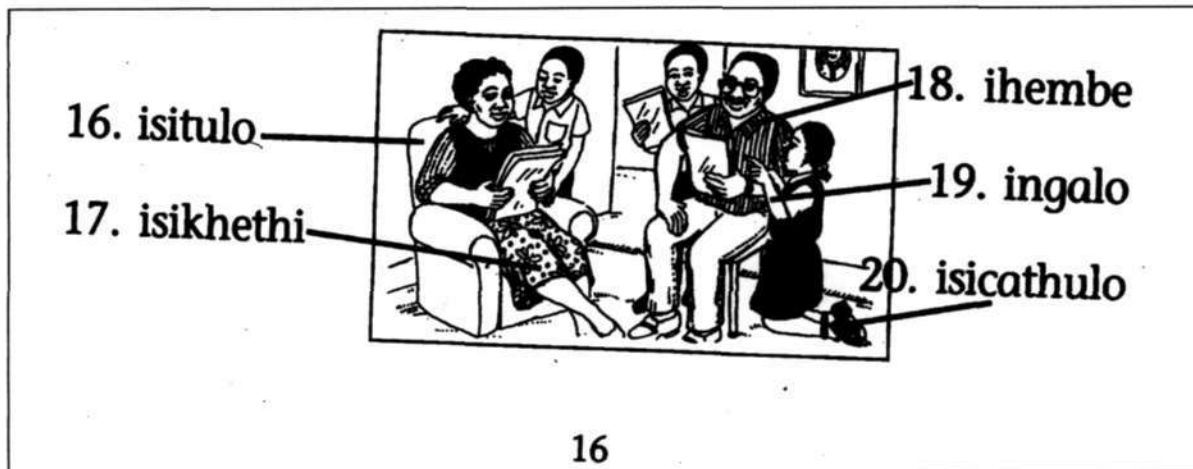
Bowman- Kruhm (2003) states that a reader uses three cuing systems, namely graphic, systematic and semantics as characteristics readers using whole word strategies. For example, learners in this class use the graphics like visuals or pictures in the book to make sense of what they are reading. For example, one learner refers to the exercise on page 17, that it is one of her favorite exercises.

8.		<u>ibhayibheli</u>	18.		<u>ibembe</u>
9.		<u>ikhalenda</u>	19.		<u>ingalo</u>
10.		<u>itshali</u>	20.		<u>isicathulo</u>

17

(Extract from the workbook of Mrs M Mdunge, a learner at Msunduzi Municipality, 2003)

She stated that she enjoyed it because the pictures were there to guide her and also assisted her in making links between the picture and the words on the previous page, page 16.



(Extract from *Asifunde!* learner's workbook, p.16, 2003)

Even the educator emphasized that the learners use graphics to make sense of the meaning and the link between them and the words. It has been very interesting to observe learners' decoding strategies in their reading as well as writing. They read syllable by syllable and when they are not sure about a syllable they will try out the consonant that begins the syllable with different vowels regardless of what they see in print. When they strike a syllable that seems to them to be possibly correct, then they go back and read the whole word. For example, when they read the following word "**Abashayeli**" and maybe are not sure how to pronounce the third syllable "**sha**". They will take the syllable and combine with all vowels, saying 'sha, she, shi, sho, shu' with their understanding of how the vowels follow each other. I think they have memorised the sounds, they will then look at the shape of the vowel and match it in their minds to the sequence of vowels and then get the correct pronunciation.

They do this even with writing activities, where they will sound the different syllables out before they write them down. This seems to be their own way of ensuring that they get the spelling right but confirming their pronunciation before writing. I have observed this among all other learners in the Msunduzi Municipality groups. The educator was asked whether they were taught this way and she responded by saying that is how they do it and she does not know why. My speculation is that they might have observed others maybe their children learning this way, or it reflects their previous experiences of their school years.

This seems to be the trend for all learners in the classroom. With reference to the approach to reading one would conclude that when they do this these learners are using synthetic methods. They read very slowly and tend to focus their attention on accurate sound - letter correlation. This is not in accordance with the aim of the developers of *Asifunde!* materials. Their aim has been to use analytic method for reading exercises but it seems that the use of the synthetic approach in writing exercises has an influence on reading as well.

They also use semantics which refers to meaning comprehension, including background information and personal experience. For instance in the class when they were reading page 68 of the learner's workbook where they are expected to talk about things they can find in the newspaper, one learner said that he was reading the paper the day before, and referred to these things he saw in the paper. Another example is, when one group was doing exercises on page 111, they started by debating what should be in the speech bubbles. The three decided that these two people should greet each other. Later, when they were on the last activity on same page 111, using their comprehension skills they realised that the speech bubbles should not be about greeting because this did not link to the activity as it refers to the two people quarreling.

This emphasizes the use of semantics in the whole language approach and that reading is an interactive process which requires the learner to use his or her prior knowledge to make sense of the text. Using the graphic on the previous page 110, they realized that the conversation was about prices.

This is further supported or reinforced by the type of material. Learners mentioned in the interviews that they like the *Asifunde!* material because of its authenticity in that it relates very well to their real life. They indicated that the topics or the issues raised in the workbook like saving money through stockvels and banks, the importance of ABE, and the reading of school reports are all important issues and they find themselves in these situations in their daily lives.

This makes it so much easier to transfer what they learn in the classroom to their daily lives.

3.5.2 The uMngeni Municipality

At the uMngeni Municipality the learners use the materials as instructed in the learner's workbook and the educator ensures that all activities are done and she checks them every session. The learners do not do any activities outside the classroom as the educator collects all the workbooks and take them home with her. The reason stated is that learners will lose them and they cannot leave them in the classroom for security reasons.

3.6 LEVEL OF MATERIAL

Learners and the educators expressed satisfaction as to the match between the level of learners and the material. They mentioned during the interviews that it is better than other materials they have used that focus or emphasise on teaching 'a,e,i,o,u' vowels in isolation. With *Asifunde!*

material learners are taught letter by letter but in the context of a meaningful sentence. The educator gave an example of the activities found on pages 3, 8, 10 and 11 of the learner's workbook. The approach used on these pages is synthetic and it is used in writing exercise to ensure that learners pay attention to the smallest written elements of the same sentences and pieces of text they have read in the reading exercises.

In the relation to the use of mother tongue, they were all happy to mention that the use of their mother tongue, isiZulu, in these material aided their acquisition of basic literacy skills. They are looking forward to learning English as the other group has already started with the part of the workbook that offers English. Learners who have completed their mother tongue portion mentioned that they find it easier to learn to read English now that they are competent in reading and writing their mother tongue. One learner stated that as much as she is in a hurry to learn English, she thinks she needs to be competent in reading and writing isiZulu as this will assist her to help her children at school. She added that because their mother tongue is not Zulu, this gives her an opportunity to assist her family with reading and writing isiZulu.

This supports the argument that initial literacy is most effective in the mother tongue of the learners or at least in a language in which the literacy learners are orally fluent.

3.7 APPLICATION OF SKILLS

The learners indicated that they use skills that they learn from the material outside the classroom. Three of the learners gave examples of where and when they utilise them. One learner has been mentioned in the previous section, where she assists other members of her family with reading and writing isiZulu.

She mentions that

'Sengibhala kangcono kabi ngoba nabantwana bami babuye bangisize nami la ngibona khona ngibasize'

Translation

'My writing has improved because my children teach me and where I can I teach them too'

Another learner stated that she can recognise her name from the attendance register at work and can tick herself present instead of waiting for her supervisor to do so on her behalf. Another learner stated that he has been motivating other employees to join ABE classes because he thinks it is important and the characters in the book also emphasise the importance of being literate.

Almost all learners in class have expressed the usefulness and the appropriateness of the numeracy exercises and specifically the lesson on measurements as these activities are needed at home or work. They also emphasised the appropriateness of the content that they have found through the book. Another reference was made to a reader that deals with trees and gardens as most of them have small farms and they requested that more readers of this nature be supplied so that they can read further.

The work of Ashton - Warner in New Zealand has shown that when learners have a positive reaction to the content of the texts they will have little difficulty in retaining what they have learnt (Land and Fortheringham 1999, p. 173). According to the learners' perceptions it appears that the materials have succeeded in closing the gap between what learners gain in class and the application of those skill to real life context. A further study in this regard is recommended.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

1. INTRODUCTION

As indicated in chapter 1, the purpose of the study is to investigate the use of the "*Asifunde!*" materials by learner and educators. The focus was how the study answers the following questions.

- Do educators mediate the content? If so how?
- How much time do educators spend on each section/page/unit?
- To what extent do educators discuss the content and exercises with learners?
- What is the learner's response (interest/extent of engagement/amount of discussion and enjoyment)?
- How does the level of the material match the learners' needs?
- How much communication is there between learners about the content of the material?

The study shows that the materials are used differently by educators and learners and that they are not always used the way that they are intended to be used by their developers. Even though that is the case the outcome is positive. The major reasons for the different uses is the lack of understanding by the educators of the pedagogical rationale.

2. MAIN CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY

2.1 USE OF MATERIAL BY EDUCATORS

It has been clear from educators in both sites uMngeni and Msunduzi Municipality that they are very much dependent on the materials. The dependency is different from one educator to the next. For example, in the case of Msunduzi Municipality the educator seems to think she knows the educator's guide to an extent that she does not refer to it at all in the classroom. The negative effect of this is that she misses opportunities were she could have initiated discussion with learners. As a result of this, the only discussion that take place in the classroom is always between learners and often initiated by them.

In classes at the uMngeni Municipality most of the discussion in the classroom is initiated by the educator and the discussions are often between the educator and the learners. There is not much discussion between the learners themselves and that is because of the high rate of absenteeism. There are often fewer than three learners in each class. The educator follows the educator's guide religiously but uses her creativity to mediate with the material.

The educator from Msunduzi Municipality places emphasis on reading and understanding and very little on writing whereas the educator from uMngeni Municipality places more emphasis on understanding the content and relating it to the learners' experiences and then reading and writing.

2.2 USE OF *ASIFUNDE!* MATERIALS BY LEARNERS

Learners love these materials. They use them often and have indicated that they find them useful at work and in the private and personal everyday lives. They are also comfortable with the level of these materials. They use to their advantage the graphics in the material. The graphics make it easier for the learners to follow and understand the content and also assist when it comes to the written activities. Learners at uMngeni Municipality have not done many of the written activities but with the few that they have done they have reported that the graphics have been of assistance.

3 FINDINGS OF THIS STUDY IN RELATION TO THE PEDAGOGICAL RATIONALE

3.1 THE LEARNER'S WORKBOOK

The developers argue that it is well recognised that learners' response to the content of texts that are used to teach reading is a crucial element in the development of their reading skills. It has been shown clearly by this study that the content of the *Asifunde!* material is targeted at adult learners, it is interesting and relates to learners' needs and experiences and hence aids in the understanding of the content. My observation in conducting this study is that even if this is the case it also has some negative implications. In the case of Msunduzi Municipality, learners demonstrated the opposite. Since the *Asifunde!* material are relevant to the learners and have been consciously developed to reflect learners' everyday lives and experiences. This has therefore shifted the focus from purely reading and writing which is the main purpose of these

materials to that of reading for pleasure. Learners became absorbed and interested in the content of what they are reading and start talking about the content and do not do any reading. They tend not to focus at the expense of acquiring the reading skills. Instead of paying attention on how to read and write, they start talking about the content.

This has therefore resulted in the avoidance of written activities and ultimately slowed down the progress in reading for some of the learners. Learners are skipping written activities so that they can read the next unit. These learners are characterised by slow reading, poor spelling but have excellent engagement with the content. They relate very well to the content of the material.

The developers of *Asifunde!* materials also hope to bridge the gap between what learners gain in the class and their application of these skills to real life context by including a fictional heroine in the second part of the book. The study shows that the transfer of skills from the classroom to the learners' real life situation happens as some learners assist their family members with reading and writing. One learner can recognise her name from the attendance register at work and can tick herself present without any assistance from her supervisor. The majority of learners are transferring the numeracy skills learnt especially the measurement skills either to work or home. Although this is the case it seems that there is a lot that they bring from home that affects the way learners use the materials. The study shows that some learners do bring to the classroom what they learn from outside the classroom, either from work or from home. This is very good as it promotes the transfer of skills from either side, classroom to home/work and home/work to classroom.

The learners are very excited about learning to read English now that they are competent in reading and writing their mother tongue. This confirms what the developers of the materials had as their intention: to introduce English in a nonthreatening environment. The other learners who have not yet started English are looking forward to it but they are also aware that they need to be competent in their mother tongue as this will give them an opportunity to assist their family with reading and writing isiZulu.

3.2 THE EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

The educator's guide offers step by step instructions for every page in the learner's workbook. The study reveals that not all educators use the educator's guide. The experienced educator at Msunduzi thinks she knows it and does not refer to it at all and this has its negative implications as discussed in the previous chapter. The less experienced educator at uMngeni follows the guide as it is but still uses her creativity. This has both positive and negative implications. The positive implication is that because of her creativity she extends her lessons to cover more than what is expected from the educator's guide. The negative implication is that because of her extended lessons it then takes longer than expected to deal with a unit/section in the book. This therefore slows down the pace of the learners, but at the same time it accommodates beginner learners which has been a concern raised by the evaluation reports of Enable (2002) and Mfeka (2003). These two educators perceive the educator's guide differently. One thinks it is prescriptive and the other thinks it is very good and allows her to grow in the field of ABE.

3.3 THE EASY READERS

The study shows that both educators are not encouraging and using readers as much as they should. They do not seem to understand the relevance of them in relation to teaching and learning to read. This could be one of the ways to shift the focus of learners from the content of the workbooks to focus on the skill of reading.

The importance of readers will have to be emphasised. This is supported by Land's assertion (2003, p. 111) that since competence in reading is known to be essential for the effective use of textbooks, and for reading to learn, the development of this competence, as well as the fostering of pleasure in reading, should be of paramount importance.

There is a perception that this sort of book is of less value. This is very clear from the amount spent on books other than easy readers. Land (2003, p. 117) states that spending money on simple fiction is perceived as frivolous.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

My overall conclusion is that the effective use of the *Asifunde!* materials depends entirely on the understanding of the methodology or the theory that informs them. I would therefore like to make the following five recommendations to the developers of the materials:

- that all educators be trained in pedagogical rationale of the materials.
- the educator's guide be revised to accommodate both experienced and inexperienced educators and to allow space for educator's creativity.

- that there needs to be clarity for both educators and learners on the main focus or purpose of these materials namely reading and writing.
- that the importance of the use of the easy readers be emphasised to educators. It would be helpful to have an educators' guide on how and when to use easy readers in the classroom.
- that longer writing exercises towards the end of the book before English lessons be included by the developers or the educators to give learners practice in essay type activities that will require learners to be creative and use the written language.

The activities could be about the most common issues such as the following:

- * Economy
- * Democracy
- * Language/culture
- * Education
- * Social (this could be left up to the educator to decide on which social issues the learners would feel most comfortable writing about).

5. CONCLUSION

As mentioned in chapter 1, the content and presentation of *Asifunde!* material is based on an educational philosophy known as constructivism. Constructivism is a theory of how learners construct knowledge from experience. This knowledge is unique to each individual and is built upon prior experience and idea. Constructivism asserts that knowledge resides in individuals and cannot be transferred intact from the head of an educator to the heads of learners. The learner tries to make sense of what is taught by trying to integrate and interpret it in terms of his or her

experience. Through this process, knowledge is constructed in the mind of the learner according to his or her current reality.

The constructivist educator acts as a learning facilitator, posing problems and monitoring student exploration. He/she facilitates the direction of enquiry taken by the learner and promotes new patterns of thinking.

The constructivists recognize that knowledge is firmly embedded in culture and it is difficult to separate the two and make knowledge objective. Learners come from a rich array of different backgrounds, cultures, languages, expectations and ways of thinking. This means that when a learner is presented with new information and it contradicts existing ideas, he/she may try to accommodate both interpretations, rather than change deeply held beliefs. Unless it is clear what views the learner holds in relation to the content being learnt, learning can actually help learners construct faulty ideas. This poses a special challenge to the development of pedagogically sound learning content and activities, because learners and educators are separated culturally.

The *Asifunde!* material indicates that the content and presentation of both the learners workbook and the educators guide is based largely on the principles of constructivist learning theory .

- themes on which the reading and writing exercises are based reflect practices and contexts from the lives of Zulu people living in KwaZulu Natal today
- developers of the materials have attempted to simulate real application of literacy skills in the *Asifunde!* exercises particularly in the second half of the book
- many exercises require learners to draw on their own experiences and perceptions

- educators are encouraged to allow learners to work through the material at their own pace
- educators are urged to help learners discover knowledge and reach conclusions for themselves by directing their thinking with questions rather than by telling them what they should learn.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

NAME OF OBSERVER:

NAME OF PRACTITIONER (FACILITATOR):

DATE OF OBSERVATION:

CLASS OBSERVED:

DURATION OF OBSERVATION:

NUMBER OF LEARNERS:

STRONGLY EVIDENT =1

EVIDENT = 2

NOT EVIDENT = 3

MEDIATOR OF LEARNING		COMMENT
1. Prepares thoroughly by referring to the educator's guide.		
2. Teaches in a manner that encourages the development of life skills (critical thinking etc).		
3. Sensitive to the diverse needs of learners.		
4. Manages different kinds of classroom learning (individual, small groups and whole class teaching).		
5. Creates an atmosphere where learners are actively involved in the learning process.		
6. Keeps complete and comprehensive learner academic records using <i>Asifunde!</i> recording system.		
7. Keeps accurate and regular attendance registers.		
8. Has knowledge of approach/ theory that informs the <i>Asifunde!</i> materials.		
9. Follows educator's guide.		
10. Uses other additional material.		
11. Uses <i>Asifunde!</i> materials continuously.		
12. Additional competencies		

LEARNER		COMMENT
13. Uses the cuing systems (graphic, syntactic & semantics).		
14. Uses his or her prior knowledge to make sense.		
15. Uses reading strategies (predicting, skimming, scanning).		
16. Reading whole words as opposed to letter by letter.		
17. Communicates with the educator.		
18. Communicates with other learners.		
19. Has understanding of and ability to use effective study methods.		
20. Additional competencies.		

M INSTRUCTION	1	2 3
21. Reading and writing is taught at the same level.		
22. Reading and writing focuses on meaning.		
23. Writing text is related to the text used for reading.		
24. There is positive response to the content of text.		
25. Additional observations		

APPENDIX 2

LEARNER'S INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

SECTION 1 - GENERAL/PERSONAL INFORMATION

1. What is your work?
2. When did you join this company ?
3. Where do you stay?
4. Do you have school going age children?
5. Are you a member of a community organisation? If yes, what is your portfolio?

SECTION 2 - ABET

6. What is your level of Education ?
7. Why do you attend ABET classes ?
8. What do you like or dislike about the ABET class ?
9. When did you join the classes ?
10. What can u do now from what you have learnt in class that you could not do before ?

SECTION 3 - MATERIALS

11. What materials do you use in ABET classes ?
12. How often do you use these materials ?
13. How do you use them ?
14. Do you use them outside the classroom ?
15. What do you like /dislike about the use of materials ?

SECTION 4 - LITERACY PRACTICE/APPLICATION

16. How well can you read/write ?
17. How often do you read /write ?
18. When do you read/write ?
19. Do you read in public ?
20. What do you read ?

APPENDIX 3

EDUCATOR'S INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

SECTION 1 - ABET EXPERIENCE

1. How long have you been facilitating?
2. What ABET levels have you facilitated?
3. How long have you been facilitating at this organisation?
4. Have you received any formal training in ABET? Where and when?
5. What is your level of education?

SECTION 2 - MATERIALS

6. What materials are you using or have you used?
7. What materials are you using in this particular class?
8. How often do you use these materials?
9. What is your perception of *Asifunde!* materials?
10. How do learners respond to the *Asifunde!* material?
11. What discussion does the *Asifunde!* Material stimulate during the lessons?
12. What problems do you encounter in the use of *Asifunde!* materials?
13. Approximately how much time do you spend on each section/page/unit of the *Asifunde!* material?
14. To what extent do you stick/use the educator guide?

SECTION 3 - GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT LEARNERS

15. When did learners start attending ABE?
16. What was their entrance literacy level?
17. How often are classes held?
18. How regular is learners attendance?
19. What are the reasons for non attendance?

SECTION 4 - USE/RESPONSE TO *ASIFUNDE!* MATERIALS

20. How does the level of the *Asifunde!* material match the learners' needs?
21. How do learners use *Asifunde!* materials?
22. How often do learners use *Asifunde!* materials?
23. Do learners use the *Asifunde!* materials outside the classroom?

SECTION 5 - LEARNER'S PROGRESS

24. How are learners progressing?
25. How far have they gone in the workbook?
26. What skills have learners developed since they started using the materials?
27. What can they do now that they could not do before?
28. Do they use skills gained outside the classroom?