

**AN EXPLORATION OF THE TEACHING BELIEFS AND  
PRACTICES OF ADULT BASIC EDUCATION AND  
TRAINING TEACHERS OF READING**

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the School of Education**

**University of KwaZulu – Natal, Pietermaritzburg**

## Declarations

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I, Isabel Nomusa Nkosi, declare that

1. The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, and is my original work.
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Signed:.....

Isabel Nomusa Nkosi

As the candidate's supervisor I agree to the submission of the thesis

Signed:.....

Dr. Peter Rule, Supervisor

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## Abstract

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This case study examines the pedagogy of early reading in a South African Basic Education Centre. Existing literature shows that illiteracy among adults in South Africa is a great concern. The acquisition of reading competence in adults is under-researched in South Africa and previous research has tended to focus on literacy/reading in relation to health issues or the acquisition of reading in children. This study attempts to contribute to understanding poor reading conditions in adult classes by providing a description of beliefs and practices of three Adult Basic Education and Training teachers of reading. The study captures the beliefs and practices of the teachers of reading in ABET Level 1- 4 with respect to the teaching of reading in Zulu and English. Data is examined using constructivism and dialogic space as theoretical frameworks. Data was gathered from teacher interviews and classroom observations. The findings of this paper include that these teachers lack pedagogical knowledge to inform their practice and are often influenced by their own experience of being taught to read. The dominant instructional practice was a focus on pronunciation while reading aloud as opposed to text comprehension. Recommendations are made regarding the support that could be offered to the teachers of reading in this centre.

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## Acronyms and abbreviations

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ABET – Adult Basic Education and Training

ANA – Annual National Assessments

CAPS – Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement

DEAR – Drop Everything and Read

DoE – Department of Education

DTC – Dynamic Text Comprehension

HOD – Head of Department

JET – Joint Education Trust

MILL – Molteno Institute for Language and Literacy

SMS – Short message service

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UIS – UNESCO Institute for Statistics

ZPD – Zone of Proximal Development

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Background and Purpose

The study was carried out at a Public Adult Learning Centre in KwaZulu - Natal. The Adult Centre uses the premises of one of the rural primary schools in the afternoons when children have left. The name of the school and the Centre will remain anonymous in this study for confidentiality purposes. For the participants, pseudonyms will be used.

The purpose of this study is to provide an analysis of classroom practices with a focus on understanding teachers' beliefs and practices regarding teaching reading. The study seeks to investigate whether teachers follow the requisite method of instruction or, perhaps in a simpler description, do teachers do what they say they do in teaching reading? The study examined if what they say they do matches what actually happens and how we account for the relation between what they say and what they actually do. The study thus examined the relation between reading pedagogy theory and practice in this particular centre.

The interest of this study arose from my own observation of an undeveloped culture of reading amongst some adults that I have worked with. Being involved with a non-government organisation that works with teachers, I have observed that most teachers do not read unless they are reading for examinations in their studies or when engaged in something that will give them certification. Very few teachers that I have engaged with read for pleasure.

Studies that have been carried out have revealed that illiteracy is a problem among adults in South Africa. Research has revealed that there are 2-3 million adults who are illiterate in South Africa (Aitchison, 2004; Harley, 2006). The 2011 census results

revealed that 8,6% of persons aged 20 years and older have no schooling, 12,3% have some primary education while 4,6% managed to complete primary education and only 11,8% completed higher education (Statistics South Africa, 2012, p.34). Although these figures show improvement when compared to the 1996 census, illiteracy is still a problem among adults.

South African children are also performing poorly when it comes to reading and writing. A summary review of the reports of the broad – based systemic evaluations of Grade 3 and Grade 6 learners that took place from 2002 to 2007 in languages and maths (Department of Education (DoE), 2003; 2005) found that children were reading and writing well below the expected grade level. For the Grade 3s, the average score of reading and writing was 39% (DoE, 2003), and for the Grade 6s the average score was 35% (DoE, 2005). In the systemic evaluation that was conducted by the DoE and Joint Education Trust (JET) nationally in September/October 2007 with Grade 3 learners, the overall mean was 36% (DoE, 2007). The 2008 results show a modest improvement in Grade 3 of 6% but an overall result that is still below the 50% rate (DoE, 2008).

...the impact of poor reading achievement in the early years not only remains largely unmitigated throughout schooling but also affects adult illiteracy rates and academic achievement in institutions of higher education. (Verbeek, 2010, p. 2).

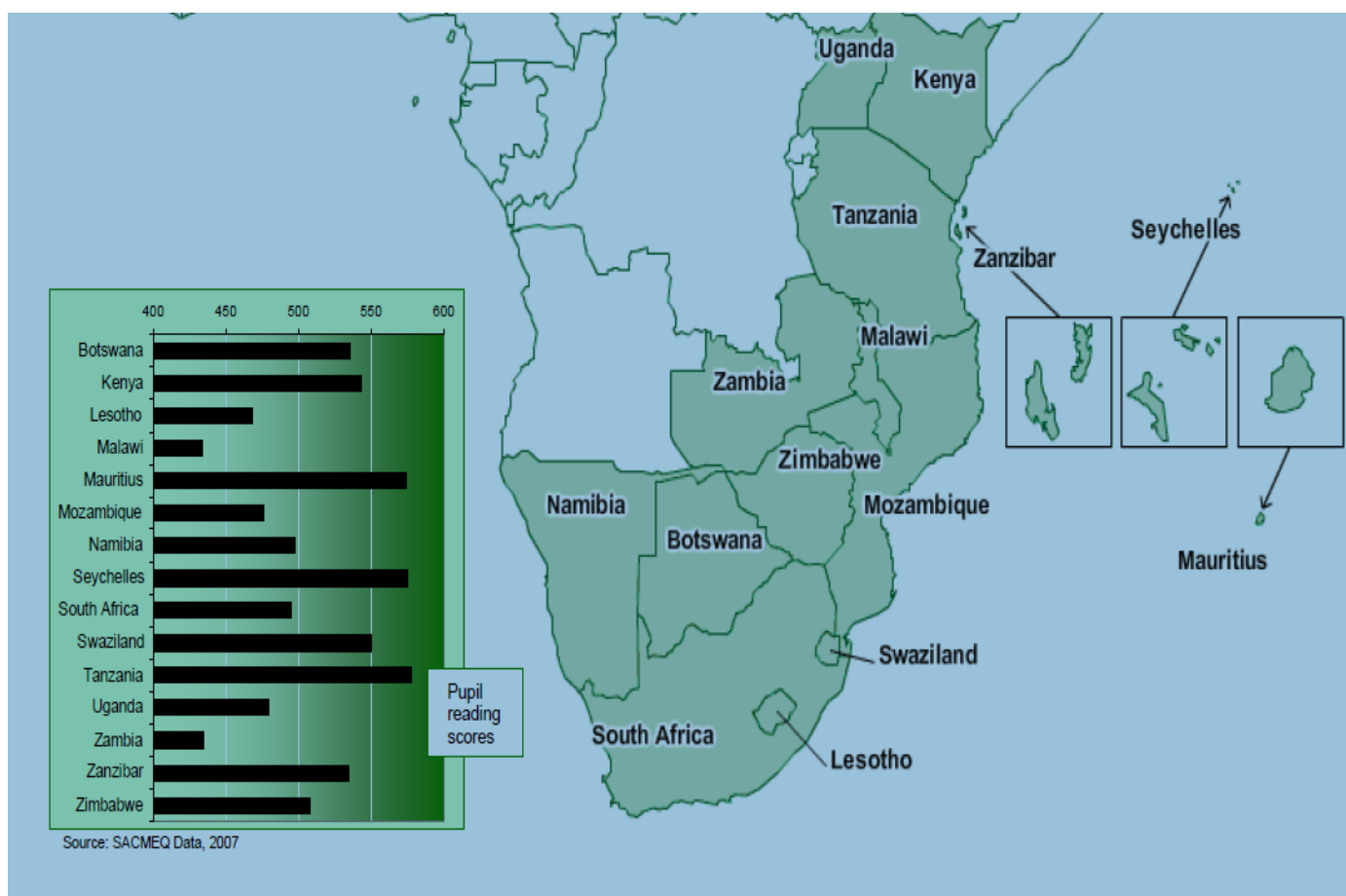
The speech by the Minister of Basic Education at Union Buildings on 28 June 2011 also indicated the poor performance in Language and Numeracy (Annual National Assesments). The national average performance for Grade 3 in Literacy stands at 35% and 28% in Numeracy. For Grade 6 the national average in languages was 28% and 30% in Mathematics (DoE, 2011, p. 27).

The 2012 results showed improvements from the 2011 ones. The Grade 3 Literacy was 52% and 41% for Mathematics; Grade 6 attained 43% for Home Language 36% for First Additional Language and 27% for Mathematics (there is drop of 3% from

2011). In Grade 9 the national performance in Home Language was 43% and 35% in First Additional Language. Grade 9 Mathematics was 13%. (DoE, 2012. ANA Report).

The SACMEQ tests, which test reading and numeracy in 15 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, also indicate that reading is a problem in South African schools.

**Figure 1: SACMEQ III results (test in 2007, reported on in 2010)**



[http://www.sacmeq.org/downloads/sacmeqIII/WD01\\_SACMEQ\\_III\\_Results\\_Pupil\\_Achievement.pdf](http://www.sacmeq.org/downloads/sacmeqIII/WD01_SACMEQ_III_Results_Pupil_Achievement.pdf)

The data shows that South Africa performs poorly, especially in comparison to other, significantly less resourced African countries. As the bar graph above indicates,

South Africa performs below a number of its poorer neighbours such as Swaziland, Zimbabwe and Namibia.

Though research in the South African context has been mainly done on children, child illiteracy contributes to the high levels of illiteracy in adults because these children grow up with a poor reading culture and become adults who do not read. Often premature school leavers having not mastered the reading skills leave the school system and this in turn increases illiteracy rates in South Africa. Under-achievement in literacy in both children and adults is mutually reinforcing failure (Aitchison & Harley, 2006, p. 2). There are worries that lack of literacy hinders employability, leads to social exclusion and poor health, and is correlated with crime and anti social behaviour (Papen, 2005, p. 7).

### **Context of the research project**

The study was part of a group project by Masters Students that sought to contribute to the promotion of a reading culture at a Primary School and the Adult Centre. My study was at the initial stage of this group research project where we were investigating the existing culture of reading in this school and adult centre. Some members of the group were working with children and others were working with the parents of some of the learners. The group study is a three-year action research project. My case study fell into the first year of the study and prepared the ground for an intervention in the second and third years.

### **The history of the site (from the unpublished document of the school)**

The school and the Adult Centre are on the same premises. The school was opened in 1957 and it had only two classrooms which exist even today. Twenty years later, in 1977 two more classrooms and a principal's office were added to the already existing buildings. Because of the high demand for education in the area from the 1980s, thirteen other classrooms have been added.

Townships around Pietermaritzburg were struck by a high level of political violence in the 1990s and some of the refugees from the townships went to settle in this area as it had been less affected by political turmoil. This influx in outsiders, however, led to this area being a target of violence too. In the midst of the violence five school children from this primary school were killed in crossfire while travelling to school.

In the post 1994 era, during the period of transformation, the KwaZulu-Natal Education Department gave attention to the needs of this primary school. In 1996, the school received its first supply of electricity. A year later, the Education Department appointed two Heads of Department to the school. From the year 2000 onwards the authorities have undertaken many projects to improve the infrastructure of the school. The latest of these was in 2008 when the Department of Public Works carried out R2.5 million of renovation works on the school.

The Adult Centre was initiated in 2005 by the Department of Education. Initially people with minimal teaching skills were required to teach at the Centre as it only catered for ABET Level 1 learners. This led to only local residents with minimal education being allowed to teach, qualified teachers were not granted this opportunity as they were considered as being over-qualified. Later on ABET Level 2 was introduced. The school now offers classes up to ABET Level 4 and qualified teachers are now required to teach at these levels.

Over the years, parents and members of the community have provided their support in the form of community work to clean and tidy the school, especially after the school vacations. The school was recently the recipient of a magnanimous donation of R80 000.00 from a local bus company towards the fencing of the school.

Over the past 52 years since its establishment, the principals who guided this establishment strived hard against all odds to provide learning for the children

residing in the local area. The school was officially opened by the MEC of the KZN Education Department on the 22 October 2009.

## **1.2 Rationale**

My rationale for this particular study focuses on three points, namely: the importance and relevance of the topic, my own interest and the gap in research that has been conducted on this topic.

The topic of this study is important and relevant because illiteracy among adults is a major problem facing our country today. The top priority in teaching adults must be to empower them with literacy skills so that they can contribute to the development of the country. The poor levels of literacy and reading in South Africa are a problem because they affect the development of the country as well as the economy. People who are illiterate are likely to be unemployable in better jobs because they do not have the necessary skills. These people tend to rely on government grants because they have no income for survival and it affects the economy of the country. Literacy reflects to social and economic development and improved quality of life.

Literacy data published by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) in 2007 shows that the lowest adult literacy rates are observed in Africa and South Asia (Huebler, 2008). The national literacy surveys suggest that South Africa is “headed for a national education crisis” (Bloch, 2009, p. 12), because we “barely produce literate and numerate children”.

Part of the motivation of doing this study comes from my own observations of people in everyday living. I have noticed that even among the literate people the reading culture is very poor. One would find literate people not being aware of what is happening in their own surroundings even when it is in the newspaper. Some of these people can afford the newspaper and they can read but they do not do so. Whenever a new policy is going to be introduced in any government department it is



first open to the public for comments; however, many do not use that opportunity and when the policy is approved we start complaining about the things we could have avoided. This is also seen in the generally low levels of attendance at public hearings.

My own experiences as a teacher and later a teacher trainer have given me a firsthand view of teacher behaviour. I am of the opinion that a strong majority of teachers are not proactive readers or do not read beyond that which is required of them. Reading is regarded as an activity only to be used for keeping learners busy while the teacher is doing something else.

In the schools that I have worked with as part of my employment I have noticed that there are very few schools that observe the Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) period. This is a 30 minute period that every school is expected to use to read for enjoyment. Everyone at school is expected to be reading at this time. Again, this seems to be in part because the reading culture is poor amongst the teachers and so the value of reading is not embraced. I have often been amongst teachers that do not even read the policy documents that the DoE sends to teachers. They have these documents lying in their schools and when one shows them the document at a workshop they will say they have never seen it meanwhile when you visit their schools you find that the document is there. I have also encountered schools that have books and class readers that are sealed and kept in cupboards throughout the entire year and as such are never utilized. People who are able to read do not read. My observation has motivated me in finding out how reading is taught to adults.

There is a gap in scholarship because the acquisition of reading competence in Adult Centers at foundational level in South Africa is under-researched. Verbeek (2010) conducted a study among teachers of children in a mainstream South African school. Gains (2010) also conducted a study where she looked at teacher's conceptualisations and enactments of early literacy pedagogy in South African grade one classrooms. Lyster (1992, p.103) also emphasised the fact that "... very little research and development of first language methodology has taken place". Also research that has been done on reading has tended to focus on poor

health conditions and poverty as contributors to illiteracy. Little research has been done in South Africa on this topic, especially at an adult basic education level.

This research has a contribution to make to the field of teaching reading in Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) classes at a Foundational level. The study provides details about what actually happens in ABET reading classes at this Adult Centre. The details provided could assist in understanding the teaching of reading to adults. The study has also a potential of helping teachers in reflecting on their own practices and improving on the areas where they feel that improvement is needed.

### **Research Question**

The study attempts to answer the following questions:

#### **❑ Main question**

What is the relation between the practices of teachers of reading to adults and their beliefs about reading?

#### **❑ Sub questions**

- What are teachers' beliefs about reading and the teaching of reading?
- What methods do teachers say they use in the teaching of reading?
- What methods do teachers actually use in the teaching of reading?
- To what extent do what teachers say they do match what they actually do? How do we account for the relation between their beliefs and practice in the teaching of reading?

### **1.3 Methodology**

My research is located within the interpretive paradigm. The study is a qualitative study and hence did not focus on data from large numbers of people. The approach that was used is a case study because my focus is on the three teachers who teach at a foundational level at this particular adult centre (Merriam, 1998). The Adult Centre has two teachers who are teaching Language in Level1 and 2. The other teacher teaches Technology Level 4.

Because I used a case study approach, this allowed me to use multiple techniques when gathering data (Maree, 2007; Rule & John, 2011). I primarily used interviews with teachers and also classroom observations of actual teaching. Because data from different sources was collected I used content analysis when analysing it. I looked for common themes from all the data that was gathered.

### **1.4 Outline of chapters**

Chapter 2 of this thesis provides a literature review and a description of the theoretical framework within which this paper is located. Literature was reviewed by focusing on relevant studies that have been conducted on reading and the teaching of reading. I have used three key themes for the literature review which include: defining reading; methods of teaching reading; and the challenges in teaching reading. Dialogic space and constructivism are adopted as key theoretical frameworks for this study.

Chapter 3 is about the methodology or the research design. In this chapter the details of the research design and implementation are presented. The study is presented as an interpretative, qualitative case study. The study is a case study because it studies one of the many Adult Basic Education and Training Centres in KwaZulu-Natal and also focuses on the three teachers of reading which form the cases of this study.

In Chapter 4 the research findings are analysed. Findings are presented in terms of research questions which guided the study and according to themes that emerged.

Chapter 5 is the concluding chapter. In this chapter the summary of findings and recommendations and suggestions for future studies are presented.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature review**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

The literature reviewed for this study focussed on four themes namely, constructivism and dialogic space which make up the theoretical framework for this study, definitions of reading, methods of teaching reading, and the various challenges when teaching reading. Constructivism and dialogic space were used in understanding and interrogating teachers' practices in classrooms. One of the research questions of this paper is to investigate real life classroom experiences. This theoretical framework was used to provide an analytical framework for understanding how teachers' construct their own teaching practices, their roles as teachers, the roles of the learners and the teaching of reading as a process. I tried to follow Buber's idea of "taking the other side" in understanding the teachers constructions of teaching from the "inside" (Buber, 1964, p.39). In understanding teachers' construction of their classroom practices this research attempts to address the research questions about beliefs about reading.

Defining reading is relevant to this study as this provides an opportunity to explore what other authors say about reading and how the concept of reading has developed over time. This study requires an answer to the question of methods that teachers use when teaching reading hence the consideration of methods that are used in teaching reading. The themes chosen for this literature review will assist in framing answers to the research questions of this study, as presented above. A detailed exploration will be provided in the next section of this chapter.

## **2.2 Theoretical Framework**

### **Constructivism**

In constructivist teaching there is a belief that learning occurs because learners are actively involved in a process of meaning and knowledge construction rather than passively receiving information. Learners are viewed as makers of knowledge and meaning. The most important contribution of the constructivist model to instruction is its focus on learners' active participation in constructing meaning rather than passive acquisition of composition skills and knowledge (Dixon-Krauss, 1996). This view of teaching fosters critical thinking and creates motivated and independent learners because, in order for learners to make sense of the learning content, they have to critically evaluate it and try to fit that content into their own thinking patterns. Constructivism draws on the developmental work of Piaget (1977) and Gray (1997).

Piaget (1896 – 1980) was a Swiss psychologist and philosopher who studied children's cognitive development stages. Piaget was interested in finding how it is that children come to know their world. His study involved his own children.

Piaget (1950) cited in (Sutherland, 1999, p. 287) saw learning "...as something occurring through being active in the construction of meaning, rather than being a passive recipient". He further explained that when learners encounter an experience or situation that is new to their current way of thinking, a point of disequilibrium or imbalance is created. Children need to alter their thinking to reach a point of equilibrium. Children can do this by making sense of the new information by associating it with what they already know thus assimilating into their existing knowledge. When they cannot do this, they accommodate the new information to their old thinking patterns by reorganising this new information to a higher level of thinking. This means that when we encounter something new, we have to reconcile it with our previous ideas and experience; we may even change what we believe or discard what is irrelevant in order to be active creators of our own knowledge. (Gray, 1997). Background information or schemata play a very important role in this view because one needs to understand what is new by referring to the schemata.

The Russian psychologist Vygotsky (1896 – 1934) is also a key source in constructivist thinking. In his study he investigated the roles of cultural mediation and personal communication in the development of the child. He observed how higher mental functions developed through these interactions also represented the shared knowledge of a culture. This process is known as internalization. In the classroom context the constructivist view of learning can mean a number of different teaching practices. For the teacher it means that s/he must encourage learners to use active techniques to create more knowledge and to reflect on how the new experience has changed their understanding. (Gray 1997). It is important for the teacher to understand the learners' pre-knowledge so that s/he guides the activity to address them and to build on them. This will lead learners to move towards their Zone of Proximal Development. Vygotsky (1978) in Dixon- Krauss (1996) explains the Zone of Proximal Development as "the gap between the child's level of actual development dependent on independent problem solving and her level of potential development determined by collaboration with more capable peers".

Sarah Gravett who is a Professor of Adult and Higher Education has written about constructivism and dialogue from a South African perspective. According to Gravett, constructivism claims that learning, including adult learning, is a process of constructing meaning. Learners are actively involved in the construction of meaning; they are not passive beings that respond to the stimuli (Gravett, 2003, p.19).

## **Dialogue**

I consider dialogue to be communication between two people. Dialogue can also take place within a person while s/he is engaged with hers or his thoughts. Rule (2009, p.6) mentions that Freire explains dialogue as a horizontal relationship between two persons. Dialogue comprises communication between subjects in a critical search or quest for something. According to Rule, Freire defines dialogue as

the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world and to transform it.

Bakhtin (1984) uses the term 'dialogue' to characterize a number of planes of human existence (Rule, 2009, p. 6). Dialogue is seen as not only taking the form of words but it also includes gestures, facial expressions, postures and the whole of body language. Bakhtin is quoted by Rule saying that: "In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds" (Rule, 2009, p. 6). Dialogue is both ontological and ethical in the sense that it reflects the way we are made up as humans and the way we should be. The dialogue is important in this study as it facilitates the construction of knowledge and meaning in the learners as they read texts. As the learners engage in this dialogue new meaning is created thus moving towards their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

The aim of the dialogue between the teacher and the learner must be to facilitate the learning process. This links with constructivism as learners must engage in the dialogue in order to construct meaning. Gravett (2003, p. 41) states that "the purpose of the dialogue is to break through, to examine and validate new insights." My interpretation of the new insights as mentioned by Gravett is that learners must construct and break through to new knowledge. Gravett further states that

The dialogic process implies cooperative and reciprocal inquiry through questions, responses, comments, reflective observations, redirections and building statements that form a continuous and developmental sequence. (Gravett, 2003, p.41).

This can be done in discussions between the teacher and the learners that might take place after being engaged in reading texts. This process is what will help the learner to move towards his/her Zone of Proximal Development.



The dialogue can also be amongst the learners where they interact with the text and try to relate it to their own context and share their understanding of the text. Another dialogue is between the learner and the text. This is where the learner uses his/her prior knowledge to make meaning of what is being read and also gain new insights. This is illustrated in Rosenblatt's definition of reading:

The reader brings to the text his/her past memories, thoughts and experiences and present personality, and together these crystallise into a new experience (Rosenblatt, 1994).

### **Dialogic space**

The term dialogic space refers to the physical, discursive and interpersonal environment where this dialogue is taking place. Rule (2004, p. 324) mentions the importance of dialogic spaces with regard to the learning of adults. These dialogic spaces, according to Rule, are social sites that enable a dialogue during learning. Relating to this study these sites can include the classroom where learners interact with one another or with the teacher and also with the texts; the minds of the learners could also be understood as dialogic spaces where a learner is debating, trying to reach conclusions about what s/he has been reading.

### **Dialogic teaching**

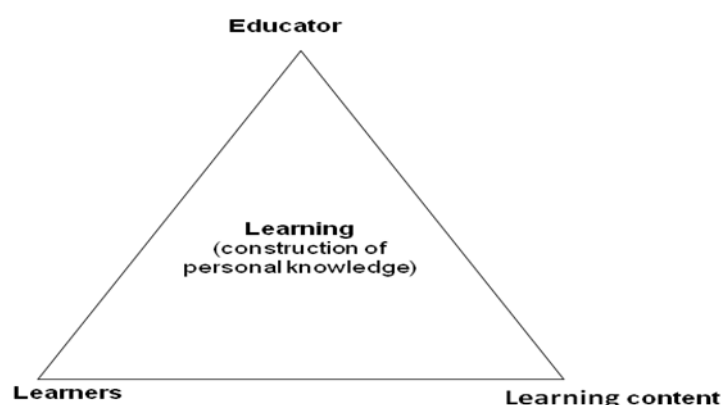
Based on the above, dialogic teaching is understood to be the kind of teaching where the participants in the learning process are allowed to engage in a dialogue. Gravett (2003, p.40) regards dialogic teaching as a respectful relationship with participants (teachers and learners) thinking, inquiring and reasoning together. This relationship requires mutual respect, trust and concern because, if one party betrays the trust of the other party, the communication process and openness will be hindered. During dialogical teaching, teachers become co-learners and learners become co-teachers. (Bartlett, 2008). Freire (1972) emphasised that "through the dialogue the teacher- of- the- student and the students of the teacher cease to exist. As a result a new term emerges teacher-student and student- teacher" (Cahn, 1997 quoted in Rule, 2004, p. 323). This emphasises the dialogue between the teacher

and the learner whereby the teacher must be open to learning from the learners. Buber (1964, p.39) terms this dialogue as the “inclusion” whereby one party must take the position of the other “going to the other side”. This process allows one to understand from the point of view of the other. When this happens there is communion between the participants in the dialogue.

Establishing a relationship of this nature is important because it strengthens the interaction between the participants: as you take the other person’s side, you might see things from his/her point of view. One learns to understand why the other person behaves or thinks in a particular way. The principle of taking the other side was applied while observing and interviewing teachers. It helped the researcher to understand some of their behaviour (this will be dealt in detail in the next chapter).

The view of dialogical teaching implies that the teacher and the learners inquire cooperatively. They work together and reason together about the learning content. Dialogic teaching is neither teacher-centred, learner-centred nor content-centred but it is learning-centred. It is centred on relations learning as a relation among educator, learners, content. (Gravett, 2003, p.41). All the participants are working together so that learning takes place. Ausubel, Novak and Hanesian (1978, p. 12) describe learning as “the long term acquisition and retention of the complex network of interrelated ideas characterising an organised body of knowledge that learners must incorporate into their cognitive structures.”

Gravett (2003, p. 41) represented the learning-centred teaching as follows:



The above diagram demonstrates that learning is the core element that the participants are aiming to achieve.

During dialogic teaching a special kind of relationship with special values needs to exist amongst the participants for learning to take place. The set of values that are assumed in this relationship will facilitate the process of learning. Burbules (1993, p.19) summarises this relationship as follows:

(It is) a kind of social relation that engages its participants. A successful dialogue involves a willing partnership and cooperation in the face of likely disagreements, confusion, failures and misunderstandings. Persisting in this process a relation of mutual respect, trust, and concern – and a part of the dialogic interchange often must relate to the establishment and maintenance of these bonds. The substance of this interpersonal relation is deeper, and more consistent, than any particular communicative form it might take.

Constructivism and dialogic teaching were used in this study in trying to understand classroom interactions that took place during classroom observations.

### **2.3 Meanings of reading**

I now focus on reading and its meanings as these themes are central to my study. There is a challenge in defining reading in isolation of literacy as it forms an

important part of literacy. In my discussion I will first present what literacy is and thereafter give the different meaning of readings as defined by various authors.

### **2.3.1 Literacy**

#### **What is Literacy?**

Defining literacy is not an easy task because literacy is an evolving concept. Literacy has evolved and grown in the light of new technologies and the widespread availability and accessibility of these technologies as the world is increasingly becoming a global village (Castells, 1996). Ralfe (2012, p. 50) acknowledges that defining literacy is a complex task because “literacy is not a fixed or unchanging concept.”

There is no single definition for what literacy is. Definitions are not neutral, but are part of discourses, which in turn make assumptions, set values and try to impose standards. (Papen, 2005, p. 15).

From the two quotations above we gather that literacy is changing and not static. There are factors that affect literacy and cause this change. Factors such as context, culture and politics affect the status of literacy. Politically, the appointment of people to senior positions depends on who is in power. People who are not competent hold positions where they are not functional and it affects development. Culturally, the traditional cultures are becoming weaker and education is becoming more and more westernised. Contextually, the schools in rural areas are not as resourced as the urban schools. Also in the context where there is high unemployment rate, the value of education is not highly esteemed. All these factors affect how literacy is understood and practised.

This chapter will at later stage examine how the definitions of literacy have changed over time and contextualise this in the light of this study. I have chosen the following definitions of literacy because they incorporate the aspects of reading which form the

focus of this research. Some of the definitions include demonstrations of how literacy has been used i.e. for political power.

In its narrow traditional sense, literacy can be described as the ability to read and write. (Harris and Hodges 1981, p.120).

A person 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 use these skills towards his own and the community's development. (Gray, 1966, p24)

A person is literate who can with understanding both read and write a short simple statement on his everyday life. (Gillette and Ryan 1983, p. 20)

Literacy has never been politically neutral. In many societies, literacy has been used as a means of maintaining power and control, whether by religious, government, bureaucratic or trading groups with vested interests. (Searle, 1999, p.7).

Barton and Hamilton (2000, p. 8) see literacy as "a set of social practices" which cannot be separated from the contexts, institutions, power relationships and cultural practices in which it is embedded. They also claim that there are many forms of literacy, giving rise to the term "multiliteracies". Cope and Kalantzis (2000, p. 5) define multiliteracies as

"...a word we choose because it describes two important arguments we might have with the emerging cultural, institutional, and global order. The first argument engages with the multiplicity of communication channels and media; the second with the increasing salience of cultural and linguistic diversity."

The term multiliteracies is an important one because of the development of electronics. For example, computers are widely used for communication and one must be computer literate in order to function as an effective member of society. Another important literacy that has emerged is that of cell phones where one is expected to be able to read and write a short message service (SMS) whether using Whatsapp or Facebook because it is cost effective.

In all the above definitions of literacy there is general agreement that literacy involves the ability to read and write. This agreement ends there and it does not tell us what is it that a person is able to read and write. Gray (1966) emphasised the functional aspects of literacy in helping a person to participate in his community while Searle (1999) brings in the political aspect of literacy where it is used for power and control. What is also clear is that literacy is all of the above and that while there is a continuum of skills that are being developed as the child moves through the educational system. These skills are not acquired in a linear fashion.

The paragraphs below focus on the three conceptualisations of literacy; namely functional, critical and liberal literacy. These are not straightforward definitions but they represent competing ideologies of literacy. They also differ in what they think the goals of literacy are.

### **Functional Literacy**

Gray's definition above describes literacy as a skill which is required for a broad range of activities associated with the individual's participation in society. Here the word "functional" does not only refer to the demands that the society place on its individual members but also includes individual reading and writing that serve individual needs and purposes. Baynham (1995, p. 8) notes that functional literacy is "a powerful construct in defining literacy in terms of its social purposes, the demands made on individuals within a given society, to function within that society, to participate and to achieve their own goals."

Rassool (1999, p. 6) draws attention to the close association in most variants of functional literacy with work-related tasks, with jobs and employability, and with demands of the economy. She suggests that the concept of functional literacy matches skills with quantifiable educational outcomes (which can be measured through adequate testing procedures) and with economic needs.

According to Harris and Hodges (1981, p. 125), functional literacy can be defined as "a level of competence in reading and writing essential for working and living."

The United States National Reading Centre provides the following definition of functional literacy:

A person is functionally literate when he has command of reading skills that permit him to go about his daily activities successfully on the job, or to move about society normally with comprehension of the usual printed expressions and messages he encounters. (Washington NRC, 1971 in Papen, 2005, p. 86).

The above definition also makes it clear that for a person to be considered functionally literate, s/he must possess the reading skills that enable her/him to perform her/his duties and also those of society. In my personal view I associate this view of literacy with ABET in the South African context. I say this because when adults learn and also when one looks at their curriculum, they are only taught those skills that will allow them to function as members of society, for example being able to fill a bank deposit slip. One of the range standards for ABET Level 1 document requires that “learners are able to produce a variety of text types: practical and social e.g. filling bank statements and forms” (DoE Language Standards ABET 1 – 3; Final Draft, January 1999).

### **Critical literacy**

The concept of critical literacy is associated with the work of John Dewey (1900 and 1916) and later Vygotsky (in Van der veer and Valsiner 1994) and later the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1972, 1985, 1988), whose ideas have influenced literacy debates and literacy policies all over the world. Critical literacy is associated with empowerment and social justice.

...an approach that invites learners to develop critical thought on a range of social issues for example, gender, sexual orientation, disability, race, culture, social class, religion and politics. (Ralfe, 2012, p. 6)

For Freire and Macedo (1987) critical literacy empowers the person to be able to know all that is happening around the world by being able to read. For Freire “reading the word” had no meaning if one was unable to “read the world”. (Freire, 1975; Freire, 1985). In Freire’s view, literacy involves learners’ critical reflection on their social environment and the position they take within it. Freire (1972, p. 31 – 32)

argued that “what is important is that the person learning words be concomitantly engaged in critical analysis of social framework within which men exist.” This view of literacy allows the learners to understand their world in terms of justice and injustice; power and oppression and they must be able to change it. Janks and Ivanic (1992, p. 305) refer to it as an “emancipatory discourse.” Hamilton (1996) in Papen (2005, p. 17) writes about literacy for emancipation as “a radical critique of elite culture, selective schooling, the state of religiously controlled curricula and existing unequal power relations among different social groups”. This means that critical literacy works towards achieving greater freedom and respect for all the people. Within this discourse, adult basic education addresses issues of power and representation by emphasising the need for social and political change to redress language-based inequalities. Issues of access to reading and writing are seen as issues of power, not just technical issues of language. Critical literacy is different from functional literacy in the sense that its primary purpose is not to help the individual to move up higher on the existing social ladder, but a radical critique of the dominant culture and the existing power between social groups. In the process of encouraging and developing critical thoughts in the learner, the teacher will develop as “a critical democratic educator who becomes more informed of the needs, conditions, speech habits, and perceptions of the students” (Shor, 2000, p. 9).

### **The liberal tradition of literacy**

The liberal tradition view of literacy sees literacy teaching as a welfare activity by the middle classes for disadvantaged sectors of society. It is informed by the humanist view of education that emphasises personal development and individual goals. Education is believed to be a right for all citizens. From this view of literacy, the printed word provides the means for challenging oppressors and conveying essential information. (Lyster, 2003, p.91). Adult education programmes that are informed by the liberal perspective will go beyond work related and functional skills and include more leisure orientated uses of reading and writing, including creative writing and access to literature. This view also does not limit its provision to the working population, but regards literacy for older people or for those who are not part of the workforce as an equally validity activity. In the classes where the liberal view of



literacy is high on the agenda, one will find learners engaged in long discussions about their lives and analysis of their positions in society (Lyster, 1992, p.104).

## **2. 3. 2 Reading**

### **What is reading?**

Reading seems to be a crucial aspect of literacy. Being able to read is of the utmost importance in being literate because one cannot understand what the text means without being able to read it. "Reading is the most important of the literacies, because recognition and understanding of texts is a prerequisite for educational success and empowerment."(Ralfe, 2012, p. 56). Reading consists of a number of different processes, like seeing, interpreting different symbols, and understanding (Lyster, 1992, p. 107).

Grabe (2009, p 14) rejects simple statements that attempt to define reading because, if one considers the different purposes of reading and the varying processes that are used by fluent readers, no single statement would be able to encapsulate the intricacy of reading. Grabe (2009, pp.14-16) understands reading as a complex combination of processes which include:

#### **2.3.2.1 A rapid and efficient process**

When we read we coordinate rapid and automatic word recognition, syntactic parsing, meaning formation, text comprehension building, inferencing, critical evaluation, and linkages to prior knowledge resources. We do this without effort and with all processes synchronising in time.

#### **2.3.2.2 A comprehending process**

When we read, we are trying to understand what the writer is saying. Reading is not the only comprehending process, listening is also a comprehending process. Reading is not equal to comprehension; comprehension is a more all-encompassing concept than reading. Comprehension should be the central goal for reading.

### **2.3.2.3 An interactive process**

Reading is an interactive process because there is an interaction between the reader and the author. The author is communicating information to the reader while the reader brings a wide range of background knowledge in order to comprehend that information. The reader interprets the information by referring it to what is already known.

### **2.3.2.4 A strategic process**

A number of the skills and processes used in reading require the reader to anticipate text information, select key information, organise and mentally summarise information, monitor comprehension and repair communication breakdown.

### **2.3.2.6 A flexible and purposeful process**

When reading, the reader process or interest shifts or comprehension is impeded, the reader adjusts reading process and goals. The flexibility demonstrated by fluent readers keeps the processes and purposes aligned with each other.

### **2.3.2.7 An evaluative process**

Evaluation happens in many ways during the reading process. We evaluate how well we are reading and we also evaluate the information that the author is communicating to the reader. The reader makes a decision as to how to respond to the information presented to him/her.

### **2.3.2.8 A linguistic process**

During the process of reading, the reader has to make the graphemic-phonemic connections, without recognising the words to be read and the structural phrases organising the words, and without having a reasonable store of linguistic (morphological, syntactic, and semantic) of the language of the text.

Definitions of reading in most cases correlate with the purpose of reading. The definitions of reading will be put in three categories namely; socio-cultural approaches, cognitive/psychological approaches and meaning construction

approaches. It should be borne in mind that these approaches developed over different times.

### **Socio-cultural approaches**

The socio-cultural approach to reading is of the view that reading is a social activity. For these approaches reading is believed to be for the empowerment of communities. Another aspect of socio-cultural approaches is that learners must be able to read those things that they come across in their environment (written language like logos and signs). This is also called environmental reading (Gray, 1963 in Lyster, 1992, p. 107). Below are some of the definitions of reading that support this view.

...reading is a social practice using the written text as a means for the construction and reconstruction of statements, messages, and meanings. Reading is actually done in the public and private spaces of everyday community, occupational and academic institutions. Reading is tied up in the politics and power relations of everyday life in literate cultures. (Luke and Freebody, 1997, p. 185).

...the ability to understand and use those written forms required by society and/or valued by the individual. Young readers can construct meaning from a variety of texts. They read to learn, to participate in communities of readers in schools and everyday life and for enjoyment. (Mullis, Kenedy, Martin and Sainbury, 2006, p. 3).

Wayman (1980) understood **reading** to be an emotional activity that has a potential to take the reader from where s/he is to the new world as new insights unfold.

In the above definitions it is evident that reading should be for the benefit of society. Learners must read and understand those texts that will equip them to be able to participate in the community.

This approach is relevant to the study because my view of education is that it should contribute to the development of the community. If people can read life becomes easier because they will be able to understand most of the notices that they come across without being assisted by anyone. If we look at the case of someone in the doctor's waiting rooms, s/he can get a lot of information about diseases while waiting

for the doctor. That person can go and talk about what she read with his/her family and it could change their lifestyle thus contributing to the elimination of diseases. I also assume that one of the reasons for adults to learn is that they can function in the affairs of the community, like politics. Reading as a social approach also helps in transmitting cultural values from one generation to the other. If we look at an African culture like Zulu culture, we have praise names and their origins. Very few people can tell their origins to the next generations. It helps if they are written down because they can be read by future generations.

### **Cognitive/psychological approaches**

The cognitive/psychological approaches hold the belief that reading is concerned with the thinking/psychological processes of the learner. From this perspective, reading should promote the cognitive skills of the learner. Reading becomes a “thoughtful process of anticipating, guessing, going back to check meaning, and engaging with text as a whole”. (Lyster, 1992, p.110). Authors who support this approach to reading are for the idea that reading for meaning should be taught early. I associate this with approach with the liberal view of literacy because if reading is for the emancipation of the learner, it is important that the learner understands the text that is being read. The cognitive approaches are discussed in detail in the section on the Dynamic Text Comprehension.

For Dechant (1970) when a reader reads texts, as s/he sees the word a message is sent to the brain where the words (which at that particular time are seen as graphic symbols) are assigned meaning.

According to Kennedy (1984, p. xiii), reading represents a unique challenge to anyone seriously interested in human thought processes. It is an activity that binds two people – reader and writer – to be more intimately joined than any other form of social encounter.

Kennedy (1984) focuses on the communication between the reader and the writer. The reader is receiving the thoughts of the writer through the text while the writer is

expressing them self in such a way that the reader is able to know him/her through the text.

Reading is a psychological guessing game. It is not about precise perception and identification of letters and words but about efficiently using cues to make appropriate guesses. It involves interaction between thought and language. (Weaver, 1994, p. 9).

Weaver refers to reading as a guessing game because, when approaching the text, the learner has words that s/he already knows in that particular text; however, there are words that remain unknown to the learner and hence the idea of a guessing game because the learner has to try and figure out the meaning of the words unknown. There might also be familiar words that are used in new and unfamiliar ways. It becomes much easier for her/him to guess the meaning of other words because of not only the context but also because of the words that they already knew.

In the above definitions, there is a strong emphasis on reading stimulating the thought processes of the learner. The learner must apply his/her thinking skills while reading in order to make meaning of the text. This can be done by contextualising the text to what is already known.

My view of this approach is that it links well with the theoretical framework of this study which is constructivism and dialogic space. As learners strive to shift in their Zone of Proximal Development they are using their thought processes while constructing new knowledge. This approach also encourages the dialogue between the reader and the writer through the text when the reader is establishing the intentions of the writer. This may even include Buber's (1964) idea of taking the position of the other, in other words "going to the other side". The reader might decide to be in the writer's shoes in order to understand the text from his point of view. In this regard the reader is being proactive and taking active steps to be a part of the process.

## **Meaning construction approaches**

This view is embedded in the two approaches that have been discussed above.

Reading is not only about pronouncing words which Frank Smith as quoted by Lyster (1992, p.109) called “barking at print”. This refers to reading words without understanding what the text is about. Reading is more than being able to pronounce words but understanding the meaning of the texts also important. The learner must make meaning of what s/he is reading about. The learner must understand the text and again, get actively involved. Lyster (1992, p. 103) emphasised the importance of teaching reading and writing in combination. Teachers need to facilitate the cognitive processes which enable learners to translate written symbols into meanings so that they make meaning of texts that they come across.

The authors from the perspective of meaning making believe that there are different ways of generating meaning from texts. Authors such as Rosenblatt (1994) believe that the schemata play a very important role in the construction of meaning. The reader has to make sense of the new information by referring it to what is already known.

Smith, Goodman and Meredith (1970) and Weaver (1994) believe that reading is a complex skill whereby meaning is constructed from graphic symbols and combinations of letters. The reader has to turn the written presentations of sounds into the spoken words.

In the definitions above and for the purposes of this paper, reading is viewed as the process of constructing meaning. The definitions relate to constructivism as discussed earlier in this chapter because the reader has to use the previous knowledge/ schemata in order to understand what the text is about. Learners need background knowledge, referred to as schemata (Howard, 1987; Carrel and Eisterhold (1983) to understand what they are decoding so they can properly comprehend and interpret texts that are presented to them. Schemata/background knowledge is described as “the information stored in our memory systems”, and reading comprehension is basically a combination of text input, appropriate cognitive processes, and the information that we already know. (Grabe, 2009, 74-75).

According to Howard (1987), and from the definition above, schemata play an important role in constituting our experiences. What we already know about the topic facilitates better comprehension of the new information. Schemata are acquired from birth and they continue to develop throughout our lives. The context of the text is also important according to definitions. Though these definitions emphasize meaning they also indicate that reading is activated by print. It is important for the reader to be able to translate the written words into meaningful language. Fluency also plays a critical role in the construction of meaning.

Fluency in reading is the ability to read rapidly with ease and accuracy, and to read with appropriate expression and phrasing. It involves a long incremental learning process, and text comprehension is an expected outcome of fluent reading (Grabe, 2009, p.291).

The three approaches (cognitive, socio-cultural and meaning construction) of understanding reading are important to this study because one of the critical outcomes of the Revised National Curriculum Statement requires that learners should be groomed and developed to be critical thinkers. It states that learners should be able to “identify and solve problems and make decisions using critical and creative thinking.” (DoE, 2002, p. 13). If learners cannot use their thinking skills and they do not understand what they are reading about they obviously cannot meet this outcome. Teachers of reading should also be working towards the achievement of these outcomes. The developmental outcome requires learners who are “...able to participate as responsible citizens in the life of local, national, and global communities.” (DoE, 2002, p. 13). If the curriculum requires such expertise from learners, it means that teachers should focus on all the approaches mentioned above. There is not one single approach that will help to produce learners that possess the skills required by the DoE curriculum but rather a balanced combination of the three is required.

### **Limitations of current approaches to reading**

The current approaches have a limitation of looking at the elements of reading as isolated aspects. Rapp & van der Broek (2005, p. 276) give the example of text comprehension in finding out how information is activated from background knowledge during reading. There is a hypothesis that the aspects of reading are in competition. This came out with a proposition of two types of mechanisms namely, memory-based perspective and a construction perspective.

### **Memory-based perspective**

In this mechanism each word, phrase, or concept that a reader processes triggers an automatic spread of activation to other, related words and concepts in memory related to the text read and background knowledge. The reader has little or no control over the information that is activated at any point during reading.

### **Constructionist perspective**

From this perspective, the reader's goals and strategies play a central role in the activation of information from memory. This view describes readers as actively striving to achieve understanding of the text, strategically activating information to satisfy their search for meaning.

Both types of processes (memory-base and constructionist) are necessary during the comprehension, but being studied separately they have been presented as competing accounts of the reading mechanism.

Another limitation is that some approaches are concerned with the process of reading while others are concerned with the product of reading. This exclusive focus on either the process or the product ignores the fact that the two must be closely connected. All that happens during must be the foundation for what the reader retains afterward. Another reason is that when readers read they do not wait until reading is complete to start their mental representations.

The recent approaches have considered processes in the examples above as complementary and mutually supportive. They also include both the process and the



product and their interrelations in a single account. Recent approaches to reading are discussed below.

### **Dynamic Text Comprehension (DTC) Framework**

More recent approaches to reading have begun to emphasise the relation between, and integration of, elements in the reading process. The DTC focuses on multiple factors and their interactions during reading. This model addresses the limitations above by integrating multiple factors (concept activation, inference construction, individual differences, text properties, characteristics of memory representations) and their interactions in a single framework. It also attempts to account for the dynamic fluctuations in activation of concepts during moment-by-moment comprehension of the entire text. The DTC takes into consideration both the processes and the products of comprehension.

### **The Landscape model of reading**

Rapp and van der Broek (2005, p. 277; see also Grabe, 2009, p. 94) give the landscape model of reading as the illustration of the DTC framework.

The Landscape model incorporates multiple cognitive and textual factors influencing comprehension and is intended to capture cognitive activity during reading as well as the mental representation that is gradually over the course of the reading experience. (Rapp & van der Broek, 2005, p. 277)

This model tries to explain what happens when the reader reads. This model claims that the reader proceeds through the text in cycles. Each cycle corresponds to a sentence or a clause. In each cycle there is a fluctuation of concepts which is facilitated by

- i) the text input in the current cycle
- ii) the residual information from the preceding cycle
- iii) the memory presentations constructed from the text read and
- iv) the reader's prior knowledge.

The Landscape model incorporates multiple factors simultaneously. During the first reading cycle, the patterns of activation result in memory representations that are continually updated with each cycle that follows. The Landscape model is dynamic because it describes the cognitive processes in comprehension throughout the

duration of the reading of a text; it also captures the interactive effects of multiple factors and it argues that at each cycle the memory presentations created at preceding cycles become the source of activation and they influence the activation of subsequent patterns. In this model the traditional distinction between process and product is replaced by a recursive interaction between the two.

The Landscape model describes the text comprehension by integrating multiple processes. The memory-based and constructionist processes are described by two mechanisms. The first mechanism is the cohort activation whereby when a concept is activated during reading, other concepts associated with it are also activated. Cohorts are either prior-knowledge or are constructed during reading as concepts. The other mechanism is coherence-based retrieval whereby information is retrieved with specific aim of meeting a reader's standards for coherence.

### **2. 3. 3 Teaching reading**

A significant portion of the literature that has been produced on the reading process is based on reading in the English language. There are a number of reasons for this, such as very little research and development of vernacular language methodology has taken place and also because English is seen as the language of education, power and work (Lyster, 1992, p. 103; Welch 2012, p.4). In discussing the section on reading teaching the views will be mostly based in English and, where possible, examples from Zulu will be used.

The teaching of reading requires the teaching of different skills such as: recognition; decoding, and understanding what the writer has written. The reader also needs to be able to react to what has been read and to make use of it. In order to be able to do this it is important for the reader to understand the text. Fordham, Holland and Millican (1995, p. 58) lay down some factors that need to be taken into account by literacy programmes. Some of these factors will be discussed below:

- i) The importance of the letter name and the letter sound relationship. This is important in the sense that in a language like English sometimes the letter

name and the letter sound are different. An example to illustrate this is to take the letter “c” and use it in “coin” or “clean” where it has a “k” sound but then the same letter “c” used in words such as “cement” or “censorship” no longer has the “k” sound. This has the high potential to confuse the students if they learn the letter names or alphabet before learning the letter sounds.

- ii) The changes that happen to letters when used with other letters. In the case of letter “g” when used before letter “h” there is hardly any sound as in “high” but then the use of the same “g” in “hug” for example requires the strong and audible sounding of the letter.
- iii) The relationship between individual words and meanings. In some languages such as Zulu some words just add a prefix or suffix to make plurals or indicate gender or the diminutive form of a word. In Zulu if you want to show the diminutive form of “indoda” (man) you only add the suffix ‘na’ and it becomes “indodana” which translates to a boy or young man while to indicate the female form, the suffix ‘kazi’ is added such that “indodakazi” is formed to mean a daughter .

There are opposing views in how reading is taught. These views also relate to how people understand the process of reading. “The way literacy is taught is partly a question of technique and a question of ideology” (Lyster, 1992, p. 104). If one regards literacy to be a tool for empowerment and liberation purposes such as challenging oppression, the focus of those lessons will be to engage learners in lengthy discussions whereby they discuss their lives and their roles in society. Whereas if one regards literacy as a tool for promoting gender inequality they will focus on lessons that train females to be submissive.

One view suggests that reading proceeds from the smallest to the largest units, and that the accurate and linear identification of letters, sounds and words are a necessary precursor to understanding the meaning of what is read. Another view suggests that reading proceeds in a more holistic way and emphasises the making

of meaning as the goal of reading. The last view is the combination of the above two views as it recognises the identification of the word and the sub-word elements of text as well as paying attention to meaning.

Verbeek (2010, p.15) developed the following table to highlight the terminology associated with each approach:

<b>Meaning comes after letter and word identification</b>	<b>Reading is a meaning-making activity</b>	<b>Both meaning and letter/word identification are important</b>
Bottom-up Part-whole(part to whole) Decoding Word bound approaches Code-oriented Inside-out  Phonics oriented Sounding out Whole word Look-and-say	Top-down Whole-part(whole to part) Holistic Whole language Meaning-oriented Outside-in	Balanced Integrated Whole-part-whole Dual route Eclectic Interactive

In linking the above views of reading with the definitions of reading, I will go back to Section 2 where the various meanings of reading were discussed. In the above table the first column suggests that reading is about decoding skills or bottom-up processes. Lyster (1992, p.118) called these methods the synthetic methods. The focus is on letter, syllable, and word and sentence recognition. These elements are then synthesised to form words.

When looking at the definitions of reading discussed above, these are the ones that support this view:

Reading is about turning written representations of sounds into the spoken word. The printed word is not directly meaningful, but designates the sound of the spoken word. In order to get the meaning of printed words, the reader must literally or figuratively hear the spoken word that print represents. (Weaver, 1994, p.9).

Reading is about getting meaning from certain combinations of letters. If the learner knows what each letter stands for, s/he can read. (Weaver, 1994, p. 9).

The middle column in the table above emphasises the importance of understanding what is read. Lyster (1992, p. 127) called these methods analytic or global methods. In these methods words, phrases, sentences and stories are used to teach reading. Lyster says that when a certain number of words or sentences have been taught, they are then broken down into their components (syllables or letters).

Writers like Carrell and Eisterhold (1983), Matjila and Pretorius (2004) and others hold that comprehension involves the top-down processes in understanding the meaning of the passage as a whole unit. The following definitions support this view:

Reading is a psychological guessing game. It is not about precise perception and identification of letters and words but about efficiently using cues to make appropriate guesses. It involves interaction between thought and language. (Weaver, 1994, p. 9).

Reading is an emotional thing. Real reading involves transporting the reader to a brand new world, singing dancing, and flying. (Wayman, 1980).

My view of teaching reading is that for the learner to effectively comprehend what is being read s/he needs both the low order decoding skills, known as bottom-up processing, and high order or top-down processes which facilitates interpretation of the text. This kind of teaching is called the “interactive compensatory model” (Grabe, 2009, p.96; Urquhart & Weir, 1998, p.45). It is called compensatory because the approaches compensate each other. When the bottom-up becomes less efficient, the top – down takes over to allow comprehension to continue. The following

discussion will get into more details about each approach and give my view on each approach.

### **Meaning comes after letter and word identification (bottom-up)**

The bottom-up approaches emphasise decoding. The bottom-up approaches begin by learning letters, sounds and syllables. Verbeek (2010, p. 15) sees reading from this perspective

...as essentially a perceptual process in which readers translate written letters into sounds, which are thought to be interpreted by the brain as oral language. Once words are pronounced, meaning is presumed to take care of itself.

Weaver (1994, p. 9) states that from this perspective “reading is generally seen to consist of the exact, detailed, sequential, perception and identification of letters, words, spelling patterns and larger language units”. According to Lyster (1992, p. 118-126) these are grouped into three categories namely;

- Alphabetic methods
- Phonic methods
- Syllabic methods

### **Alphabetic methods**

The methods under this category start by teaching the letter names of the alphabet in the sequence that they appear in the alphabet. Once learners are able to combine letters into various groups and combinations, they are then introduced to words. As mentioned earlier, sometimes the letter name and the letter sound do not always correspond and this poses a challenge. This method also encourages reading texts without actually understanding.

## Phonic methods

The phonic methods begin by teaching vowels using letter sounds instead of letter names. Consonants are then taught by following the same procedure. The consonants are then combined with vowels to form words. This leads to sentences which then lead to paragraphs, or longer groups of sentences and consequently results in reading books. This method is good in teaching word recognition skills. Learners who have been taught in this approach are also good in spelling because they are able to break down words into letters. In using the phonic approach people often start by matching the letters of the alphabet with pictures to form an alphabet picture. The idea behind this is that the learner will easily remember the letter and its sound if it goes with the picture as this appeals to the visual nature of memory.

Below is an alphabet picture of letter 'a '



I find myself supporting this approach because it attaches a symbol to the letter which in turn brings meaning to the reader and forms a mental picture. The challenge could be that it becomes too difficult to find a relevant picture for every letter of the alphabet and this could lead to forcing the letter-word relationship. If pictures are not relevant, it might bring more confusion to the learner.

Most Zulu teachers that I have come across use the phonic approach and this is also a reflection of my own experience of how I learnt to read. After teaching vowels teachers introduce consonants which they later blend with vowels. After teaching the monographs teachers proceed to digraphs and then on to trigraphs. It is only after learning these sounds that learners are introduced to words, sentences and then paragraphs.

The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for Isizulu Home Language in the Foundation Phase (Department of Basic Education, 2011, p. 26) is supportive of this approach. According to this CAPS document. Grade R learners are expected to learn the letter names of the letters of the alphabet. In Grade 1 learners are required to learn monographs and are introduced to of digraphs. It is in Grade 2 that digraphs are completed and then they move to trigraphs.

According to my experience in working with both teachers and learners, I have seen that this method limits the learners in terms of what to read. Learners take too long in being able to read books because they come across sounds that they have not learnt and as such are not able to deal with. In reality there are very few books that are written in this structure – in Zulu I have seen only one book i.e. Masihambisane series (Shuter & Shooter) that is written in this way.

Another disadvantage of the phonic approach is that one finds it difficult to sound out consonants without vowels. This relates to a previously mentioned point that the sound of a letter is often determined by the other letters that it is surrounded by, in other words the environment.

### **Syllabic methods**

Syllables are taught as the foundation for which new words are built on. This helps in overcoming the problem of sounding out consonants which is a negative of the phonic methods. Learners sound out the syllables and they become familiar with producing the sound.

My view in using the top down approach is that spending a lot of time in teaching the letter names is of no value because sometimes in languages such as English and



Zulu, and in fact many other languages, there is no distinct relationship between letter names and letter sounds. It is perhaps a better idea to spend more time in teaching letter sounds because that is what learners will need to know when reading.

### **Meaning- driven theories (top down approaches)**

The top-down approaches emphasize focusing on meaning. This approach begins by looking at the bigger picture and begins to narrow it to its smaller units. Learners using this approach begin by learning to read before learning to write. Lyster (1992, p. 127 – 136) laid down two categories of the analytic approaches namely:

- The word method
- The sentence method

#### **The word method**

This is sometimes called the look-and-say because whole words are taught in a meaningful context by looking and saying them aloud. This is good in teaching sight words because these words cannot be sounded out phonetically. Word recognition skills are promoted by this method because the reader is encouraged to read the word as a whole instead of breaking it into syllables and letters. Only once the words are learnt, they are then broken down and analyzed into syllables and letters.

#### **The sentence method**

This method is based on the assumption that when a learner thinks and speaks s/he uses sentences. It starts by introducing whole sentences which are then broken down into words and then into syllables and letters. The language experience method is part of the sentence method. This method begins with the use of the picture which is relevant to the learner's lives such as a family picture. A key sentence is extracted from the picture and then the sentence method is followed.

At first when learners see the text either the word or the sentence, they use their decoding skills. They try to break down the word into its syllables and letters. At this stage, learners are not yet reading for meaning as yet. 'Reading is seen as cyclical rather than linear processes which all contribute to comprehension' (Verbeek, 2010, p. 20).

In using the top down approach learners are introduced to a set of vocabulary at certain intervals. The CAPS document for English First Additional Language in the Foundation Phase supports this approach. The CAPS requires that (Department of Basic Education, 2011, p. 22) by the end of Grade 1 learners must understand 700-1000 words which is increased to 1000-2000 words in Grade 2 and 1500-2500 in Grade 3. The CAPS documents promote the use of repetition and the look and say approaches as teaching methods.

Paulo Freire encouraged the use of this top down approach in teaching literacy. He developed 'generative words' –these are the words he felt had a particular cultural or social significance for the group such as 'poverty, homelessness or fear' (Fordham et al, 1995, p. 66-67). These words are used to generate a discussion. Sometimes a picture is shown to the learners and they discuss what is seen. During the discussion the teacher uses questions to lead learners to pre-prepared key sentence which is targeted in that particular lesson. The sentence is then written down on the board and this sentence is later broken down to words, then to syllables and then to letters. (Fordham et al, 1995, p. 67).

Freire stressed that reading is more than understanding written language. It is for understanding the social, economic, and political situations in which learners find themselves and the causes behind those situations. This links with the concept of critical literacy discussed in the section, 'What is literacy?' in this chapter. I also see this paradigm to be somewhat constructivist because what learners learn is

specifically linked to the context that they find themselves in. The generative words (as referred to by Freire) that learners use in the learning process come from the context where learners live and from what they are surrounded by and also most exposed to. Meaning and knowledge are also socially constructed through the process of collaboration, negotiation, evaluation and transformation (Cambourne, 2002, p. 26-29).

In summarizing what is meant by the top-down approaches I will take from Verbeek's summary:

In essence the top-down approaches to reading pedagogy advocate that, since reading is essentially a meaning-making activity, teaching should proceed from whole to part and that the child should first be introduced to whole sentences and paragraphs (in the context of natural and meaningful text), and learn from this about the smaller units of language such as words, letters and sounds (Verbeek, 2010, p.23).

I support this approach to teaching reading because the learners are allowed and in fact are encouraged to bring their experiences, in accordance with Fordham et al, (1995, p. 53) who stress the importance of basing lessons on things that children know and also not ignoring the adult's existing experiences. The above writers also state that 'adults learn more successfully when the learning is relevant to their lives: when they can see the need for it and recognize how they will use it.' (Fordham et al, 1995, p.53). In this way, the value of education and literacy is increased but is also made tangible. Linking this with what Freire says about reading as quoted above, that it is for 'understanding the social, political and economic situations in which learners find them.' (Freire in Fordham et al, 1995, p. 53). This approach selects reading material (words and sentences) to be taught from the context that learners are faced with. While learning to read these learners will see that the texts relate to their contexts and they will be motivated to learn.

Land (2011) refers to the psycholinguistic grain size theory which proposes that "phonological awareness of syllabic and intra-syllabic structure has a strong

influence on the development and practise of reading skills” (Land, 2011, p.51) Zulu is considered an orthographically consistent language because the sounds that letters make are always the same while English is considered an orthographically inconsistent language because a letter does not always represent the same sound e.g. c in cent; c in cup.

In teaching orthographically consistent languages e.g. Zulu it could be expected that readers apply the fine grain size theory which focuses on breaking words into smaller parts because, if a learner reads one letter wrongly in a word, it changes the whole meaning. English readers would use a large grain size theory which focuses on meaning without breaking words into smaller parts. Because of Zulu being an orthographically consistent language, Land (2011, p.51) assumed that Zulu mother tongue readers would have fewer regressions and fixations when reading in that language. The findings of the study revealed that fixations and regressions do not depend on the language being read but they depend on the reading pattern of the reader. The results had almost the same number of fixations and regressions whether the reader was reading Zulu or English. It is important for teachers to know the different approaches for teaching reading and the rationale behind each method as this will inform the way they teach reading. This will also help me in understanding the approaches used with regard to different languages

### **Balanced/mixed methods to teaching reading**

The teaching methods discussed above must not be regarded in isolation. Lyster (1992, p. 104) states that it is not practically possible to have a single method of teaching literacy. The method that one uses mainly depends on the skills and techniques that are available and is also largely dependent on the ideology that the teacher carries.

The way literacy is taught also depends on how learners are viewed and also what understanding the teacher has about literacy, this could also be considered the

teacher's philosophy. Lyster also called the methods under this category the eclectic methods. The approaches under this category focus on both the top-down and the bottom-up approaches. Sometimes this is called an interactive model and its emphasis is on dynamic interaction between meaning and decoding (Lyster, 1992, p. 111). These approaches are very important in teaching reading because

...being able to comprehend a passage effectively uses both the low order decoding skills, known as bottom-up processing, and high order or top-down processing which facilitates interpretation of the text. (Ralfe, 2012, p. 57).

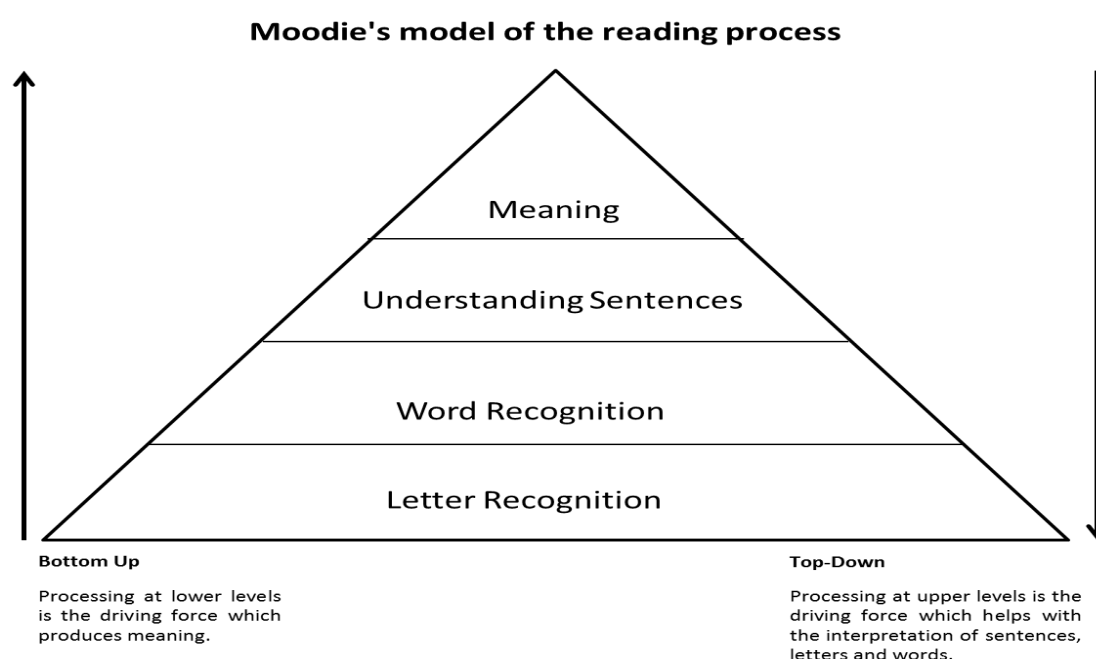
Also referring to interactive compensatory model as discussed before, the use of both a bottom-up and a top-down approach is recommended as they compensate each other.

In the early years of schooling most teachers focus on the development of both bottom-up and top-down processes. Flanagan (1995) encourages the development of decoding skills through the use of: flash cards; basic, simple graded readers and also the instruction in phonics. Through the use of these materials learners will develop the skills of attacking words and also word recognition. Once the learners are proficient in decoding then the focus must shift to comprehension.

For learners to be proficient readers they must be exposed to a lot of reading materials in order for fluency to develop learners must read frequently and independently. Fluency helps learners in developing strategies like skimming, scanning, previewing and critical comprehension. They need to read aloud to somebody who is more proficient than them. This is for the more proficient reader to assist the less proficient reader by correcting the mistakes that are made thus moving them to a better level of reading. Teachers can best use this opportunity to listen to their learners reading and spot mistakes that they make in terms of pronunciation. This also provides teachers with an opportunity to identify students that are struggling or have reading challenges which can then be attended to during the remedial teaching period.

When learners are able to read fluently with comprehension they must be encouraged to read silently.

Teachers also need to assist learners with the development of vocabulary by discussing new words and checking comprehension (Flanagan, 1995). In developing top-down approaches learners should be encouraged to talk about books. They must talk about titles and pictures and also be encouraged to use their prediction skills in guessing what the content of the book is. This process will make learners refer back to their background knowledge about the text. This will also stimulate the comprehension process.



The level of process shown above, taken from Moodie (1996, p. 10) represents only a very simplified summary of the complex processes which go on during reading.

Moodie's pyramid above is an attempt to make the reading process simpler in that it shows both the top-down and the bottom-up approaches.

Before the teacher can decide which method to use with a learner it is important to understand the stage that particular child is at in terms of reading. Moltano Institute

for Language and Literacy (MILL) (2010, p. 13 -13) and DoE (2008, p. 9-11, Teaching Reading in Early Grades) identified the following five reading levels:

### **Level 1: The pre- reader**

This is when the learner is called a young reader. S/he is looking at pictures and pretending to read. The learner at this stage is not focusing on the written text but only on pictures.

### **Level 2: The emergent reader**

The learner at this stage is aware of text in the environment. S/he is able to recognize road signs, names of shops and garages. He can also identify with logos of products like Omo, Aunt Caroline rice etc. He is also able to associate some words with text. He also recognizes his name and can sometimes write it. This learner knows some letter names and sound (phonemes).

### **Level 3: The early reader**

The learner at this level is able to recognize letters and sounds and is able to read simple texts and books in the environment. The learner likes to use the reading aloud strategy whether reading to himself or for somebody to listen. He still reads word by word.

### **Level 4: The developing reader/ early fluent reader**

The reader at this stage still looks for pictures when reading texts. This is to give meaning to the text. The reader can now run his eyes and read ahead instead of reading word by word.

## **Level 5: The independent reader**

This is frequently referred to as a fluent reader. He can use cues to read unknown words. He no longer relies on illustrations to read texts and can read chapters in books.

The teacher's job is to move the learner from the pre-reading stage to being an independent reader. This links with the Zone of Proximal Development as explained earlier in this chapter. The learner will be assisted by the teacher to move from where s/he is to the new level. In order for the teacher to successfully move the learner to the Zone of Proximal Development, the following components of reading need to be specifically taught every day. (MILL, 2010, p. 13; DoE, 2008, p. 11 Teaching Reading in the Early Grades).

- Phonemic awareness
- Word recognition
- Comprehension
- Vocabulary
- Fluency

### **Phonemic awareness**

Phonemic awareness is the ability to discriminate between the sounds in spoken words. It means being able to notice what is the sound made by each letter or letters as they appear together.

### **Word recognition**

This component requires two elements which are; phonics and sight words. Phonics is the ability to make a link between the sound and the letter. Phonics instruction teaches children the relationship between the letters of written language and



individual sounds of spoken language. It means breaking down words into syllables and letters (decoding).

In reading sight words one needs to use the look and say approach because words cannot be decoded or sounded phonically. One needs to be able to look at the shapes of the words and read them. Examples of sight words are you, because, me etc.

## **Comprehension**

Comprehension is the ability to understand what one is reading about. Teachers need to check if learners are “barking at print” or they understand what the text is about.

The Department of Education (Teaching Reading in the Early Grades, 2008, p. 14 – 15) specify the following as ways of developing comprehension.

- Activate the reader’s prior knowledge. At a foundational level the teacher helps the learners to do this by asking questions that will link the new information with what the learner already knows. This is what Piaget calls ‘schemata’.
- Read aloud to learners. The teacher must read aloud and then a discussion about the text must ensue.
- Help the learners to use clues and illustrations in and around the text. These clues include talking about the cover page, unknown words, drawing attention to illustrations etc. When learners are able to use clues then reading becomes a ‘guessing game’ (Weaver, 1994, p. 9). It is a guessing game in the sense that these clues help them to guess the meaning of the words/text that they are not familiar with.

- Develop reader's decoding skills. The teacher must teach learners that when they approach an unfamiliar word they must try to de-code it. They need to sound the beginning part of the word and see if a familiar word springs to mind. Writers like (Howard, 1987; Carrel and Eisterhold, 1983) linked decoding with schemata as they argued that learners need the schemata in order to understand what they are decoding. This will help them to properly comprehend the text.
- Develop fluency. The belief is that once learners can read fluently they can work out the meaning of the word by reading the whole phrase.
- Increase vocabulary. It is also assumed that learners develop their vocabulary by reading and by listening to someone else reading to them.
- Develop learners' ability to apply high- order thinking skills such as evaluating, analysing and interpreting. The teacher needs to ask different types of questions that will require learners to think about and process information using high – order thinking skills.

These ways of developing comprehension link with meaning construction approaches that were discussed in this chapter. In these approaches teachers need to facilitate the cognitive processes which enable learners to translate written symbols into meanings

## **Vocabulary**

Vocabulary refers to the amount of words that one can use.

## **Fluency**

Fluency in reading refers to the ability to read texts smoothly, accurately and with understanding. (DoE, 2008, p. 17). MILL (2010, p. 15) sees fluency as being able “to scan and read accurately and automatically with appropriate speed, pronunciation, expression and use of punctuation to make sense of whatever is read”.

This links to Moodie's pyramid of the reading process, the reading levels and the components of reading. This link will be used in understanding the classroom practices of the teachers when analyzing the data in chapter 4.

In the two bottom stages of the reading process pyramid (letter recognition and word recognition) is the emergent and the early reader. The emergent reader is able to recognize some words in the environment and is able to recognize their own name. He/she can also recognize some letter names and sounds. This learner is currently working with the phonemic awareness and the word recognition component of reading.

The early reader is able to recognize letters and can read simple texts. Reading of simple texts implies that the learner is being able to recognize words. This learner is busy working with the phonemic awareness and the word recognition component of reading.

The developing reader is moving in the three stages namely letter recognition, word recognition and understanding sentences. The reader at this stage can recognize letters and words and is using pictures to make meaning. He combines words into phrases rather than reading word for word. At this stage the learner is working towards achieving the comprehension component.

The independent reader has mastered all the stages. If we look at the DoE definition of fluency above, it becomes clear that this learner is able to read without there being any problems.

As the learner moves in all these stages their vocabulary is constantly increasing and being expanded.

### **2. 3. 4 Challenges in teaching reading**

Teaching reading is a challenging task as it dependant on a number of factors in order for it to be successful. The factors that are hindrances in teaching reading will be discussed in this section.

The training that teachers receive in terms of teaching reading can contribute positively or negatively in how learners read. If teachers are not well trained obviously they will not produce good readers. Bell and Lindamood (1992, p. 242 – 259) conducted a study that proved that instructional techniques traditionally used with children with learning disabilities are adaptable in teaching adults with learning disabilities. The discussion about challenges might be based on challenges in the mainstream but the same is expected in adult learners. In most rural schools one finds that under qualified/unqualified teachers are employed because qualified teachers do not want to work in remote areas (Hoover, 1946, p.381). Sometimes the employment of these teachers is as a result of the requirements of the DoE. The 'Norms and Standards' specify the pupil-teacher ratio and the employed teachers sometimes cannot teach the subjects that are offered in that particular school. Schools end up employing unqualified teachers who are paid by their Governing Bodies. Because these teachers do not possess enough skills to be able to teach reading they do not take learners through the reading readiness stage properly. They just 'plunge the learners into the actual reading process before they are ready for it' (Hoover, 1946, p.381). For teachers to be successful in teaching reading they need to be patient and take learners through the reading readiness stage. If learners do not receive proper foundation while learning to read it will affect their reading progress throughout their lives. They might develop hostile attitudes towards reading and also have ineffective reading habits. Teachers will be faced with a difficult task of changing these attitudes.

Language is also thought to be a subject that can be taught by anyone at a school who can speak it. When doing subject allocation they tend to focus on finding

specialists for other subjects except Language. A teacher who has no interest or does not qualify to teach it ends up teaching it.

The selection of materials that are suitable for the learners is also a challenge. Teachers sometimes select material that is too difficult or too easy for the learners. In my experience of working with teachers I have noticed that they do not consider the reading age of the learners. They just give them same reading material without looking at their reading age. If they consider the reading age aspect they will be able to cater for individual differences. This means that teachers will not rigidly adhere to the readers that are prescribed for that particular grade. If the teacher rigidly adheres to the readers of that given grade level it frustrates the learner whose reading experiences are not adequate to keep him abreast of the class. This frustration will cause the learner to develop a hostile attitude towards reading.

The availability of reading resources is also a challenge in teaching reading. In some schools there are no books at all. If teachers are to teach reading they have to write the story on the board and learners have to read from there. The lack of resources is also a crisis in South Africa. The crisis at Limpopo is good evidence of this where schools halfway through the year did not receive books (Nkosi, in Mail & Guardian 22 June 2012). Also when one visits schools you find that the workbooks that were promised to schools are either not enough or not there. The promise was that every child will have his/her own workbook. In some schools they have wrong ones i.e. schools doing English First Additional Language they are supplied with English Home Language Workbooks. These workbooks are not useful for them.

The methods that teachers employ while teaching reading are sometimes the causes of the challenges that we see in teaching reading. My experience has been that most teachers teach reading in the same way that they learnt to read. One finds that a teacher puts too much emphasis on the mechanism of reading and ignores the content of reading and the meaning of this content. In this case you find that learners

can read the words but cannot tell another person what they are reading about. Learners cannot read for meaning, they are just barking at print.

Teachers sometimes leave the faulty reading habits that they see in learners and do not correct them as soon as learners make them. As learners develop in their reading attempts, these faulty habits also develop. They later become the child's way of reading. These habits include things like, excessive head movements, vocalisation and pointing at words while reading. These are stages that a learner needs to pass through in the reading process, once learners dwell on them they become faulty reading habits for that learner.

It is obvious that a child's earliest reading attempts will lay either a firm or weak foundation for his later reading skill. The importance of establishing good habits of reading and eradicating undesirable habits as soon as they show themselves is paramount. (Hoover, 1946, p.382).

From my observation I have seen that the background where learners come from might also be a contributing factor to learners' failure of reading. A learner who is from a background where there is no culture of reading is likely to have no interest in reading. The environment must be stimulating for the learner to perform better in reading. The learner needs to be exposed to a variety of books and also see other people reading in order to instil the culture of reading. Some learners only come into contact with books in their classrooms. Some of the books are for particular subjects and they are not designed for reading for enjoyment. The learners only read for assessment purpose. There are no community libraries where reading can be reinforced. This is the reason why in most cases middle class learners have an advantage at school than the low class learners. For the middle class learners reading is an extension of their home environments rather than something opposing it.

In concluding this section I will borrow from Lyster (1992, p. 105). Though this book was published in 1992, the challenges that she identifies are still relevant at this age.

She gave the constraints under which most existing adult literacy programmes in South Africa operate:

- Teacher training is generally extremely short (1-2 weeks).
- Teacher follow-up and support is limited and non-existence.
- Teachers tend to have less than a Standard 10 education.
- Learners usually attend classes only twice a week.
- Learners are usually tired after a hard day's work.
- Levels of learners' abilities tend to be mixed.
- There is very little suitable literature to develop learners' reading skills outside the classes.
- Learners generally have very little access or exposure to print.

(Lyster, 1992, p.105).

### **2.3.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have discussed the theoretical framework of this study which was used to understand and interrogate teachers' practices in classrooms. Reading has also been explored by looking at the meanings of reading, teaching of reading and challenges in reading. Having a better understanding of reading is a crucial element of this study as it will assist in understanding teachers' practices in their classrooms.

## Chapter 3

### Research Design/Methodology

#### 3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to give details of research design, including methods of collecting and analysing data. The research design is described as

... a plan or strategy which moves from the underlying philosophical assumptions to specifying the selection of respondents, the data gathering techniques to be used and the data analysis to be done.( Maree, 2007, p. 70)

Maree distinguishes six types of qualitative research designs of which my study is a case study that is embedded in the first phase of a larger, multi-year action research study. The case study aims to establish the basis for an intervention in improving the culture of reading in the school and adult centre.

Maree (2007, p.74) advises that to successfully undertake action research the researcher must have an understanding of the context as well as possible solutions to the problem.

Section 3.2 gives the setting of the research. Section 3.3 discusses the paradigm, the style and the approach that is used in this study. Section 3.4 is about the methods of collecting data and how they were analysed. Section 3.5 discusses the site and sampling, providing a brief discussion on how the site and the participants were chosen. Section 3.6 considers the issues of my own positionality. Section 3.7 addresses issues of trustworthiness and Section 3.8 is about ethics.

#### 3.2 Setting

The study explored the methods that are used by ABET teachers at a particular Centre in rural KwaZulu-Natal. A reminder that for the purpose of anonymity the name of the school and its district have been withheld. It explored teachers' beliefs about reading and if teachers do what they say they do when teaching reading. Though there are many Adult Centres of Education in KwaZulu-Natal, this study



focuses on one. As described in Chapter 1, the ABET Centre uses the premises of the primary school in the afternoons after the children have left. The school is about 20km from the urban area. Unemployment is a serious challenge in this area. People survive on mainly rural subsistence economy. Many residents from this area commute daily to town for employment and shopping which is expensive.

### **3.3 Paradigm**

A paradigm is a worldview or framework of beliefs and values within which the researcher works. In simpler language, the paradigm tells us what the reality is like (ontology), what the relationship is between the researcher and that reality (epistemology) and what methods can be used to study the reality (methodology). (Punch, 2009, p. 16). The study is located in the interpretive paradigm. Interpretivist approaches to research have the intention of understanding the world of human experience (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p. 36). This suggests that reality is socially constructed (Martens, 2005, p.12). The researcher using the interpretive paradigm relies on the participant's views on the phenomenon that is being studied (Cresswell, 2003, p. 8). This means that participants' background and experiences have considerable impact on the research. The study provided an opportunity of getting educators' views on the methods that they use and also their beliefs about reading. Their experiences and background on how they themselves learnt and were taught to read were also taken into account.

### **Style**

The research study is in a qualitative style. The common focus within the qualitative style is the interest in human subjectivity (Babbie & Mouton, 1988). As a means of trying to understand the world in which we live, qualitative approaches try to connect and broaden the power of language and expression (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). People who support this design believe that the world consists of people with their own assumptions, intentions, attitudes, beliefs and values, thus the way of knowing

reality is by exploring the experiences of others regarding a specific phenomenon (Maree, 2007, p.55).

A qualitative study involves a process whereby the researcher tries to understand a social or human problem by using words in reporting the information from the participants. This will enable the researcher to get a holistic picture of the phenomenon under investigation. The phenomenon must be studied in its own natural setting. (Cresswell, 1994).

The researcher tried to adhere to this definition because an inquiry was done into how reading is taught since reading is a social problem in our country (based on studies conducted that were presented in Chapter 1). In presenting the findings, the detailed views of participants were reported and they were interviewed and observed in their natural settings i.e. their classrooms. Interviewing the participant in his/her natural setting is echoed by Denzin and Lincoln (1994) when they mention that qualitative researchers study things as they occur or exist in their natural settings, attempting to make sense or interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them. In finding out about the teachers' beliefs about reading I was actually finding out what meanings they themselves bring to reading. Qualitative research is also about the nature of the data and how it is analysed. It focuses on symbols (such as words, pictures, actions) and their meanings, as opposed to numbers and measurement as in quantitative research.

## **Approach**

The approach that was used was case study because my focus was on a particular adult centre (Merriam, 1998). The study is comprised of three cases, which were the three teachers who constituted the units of analysis. The focus within these cases was reading, their beliefs about reading and how they teach reading. According to Bromley (1990, p. 302) a case study "is a systematic inquiry into an event or a set of related events which aims to describe and explain the phenomenon of interest". Rule

and John (2011, p. 4) describe a case study as “a systematic and in-depth investigation of a particular instance in its context in order to generate knowledge”. This definition fits well with this study because I did an in-depth investigation of the beliefs about reading and the methods used when teaching reading to adults at this particular Centre by the three teachers who form the cases of the study. “Case studies can provide rich insights into particular situations, events, organizations, classrooms or even persons” (Rule & John, 2011, p. 1). This case study sought to provide rich insights about the teachers’ beliefs and teaching methods used in adult classes at this adult centre. Hancock and Algozzine (2006, p.15) mention the importance of studying the phenomenon in its natural context bounded by space and time. I think that this contributes in the researcher getting reliable data because the participants are examined in the environment that they are familiar with. For this study teachers were observed during their teaching periods in their classes.

Case studying includes sources of evidence like direct observation of the events being studied and interviews of persons involved in the events (Yin, 2009, p.98). I used the case study design because it has the scope to deal with a full variety of evidence – documents, interviews and observations (Yin, 2009, p. 99; Rule & John, 2011, p. 63). One of the advantages of using case studies is that they are manageable because the researcher is not dealing with large amounts of data (Yin, 2009; Rule & John, 2011; Hancock & Algozzine 2006). It makes it easier for the researcher to study a single case rather than doing a large scale study which requires significantly more resources and time. My study might also be understood as an educational case study because I tried to understand educational actions (Stenhouse, 1995) which are of course the teaching methods and reading itself.

This study reflects the strength of a single case study as stated by Rule & John (2011, p. 7). I was able to examine this case in depth because my attention was only on this case as opposed to having to stretch my attention wide to cover other cases. Another benefit of having only one school to focus on was that I was able to access the school easily. Though there are also other teachers in this centre but my study is

on those who teach reading. My focus was on the teaching of reading. I also focused on three teachers because I wanted to get a holistic view from different people about the teaching of reading at this centre.

The limitations of a single case study as stated by Rule and John (2011, p. 110-111) also apply in this study. The findings of this study cannot be generalised to other cases. All the findings are specifically for this case but they may shed light on other similar cases thus providing a certain level of transferability. Also there is no comparative dimension within this study. The small number of participants selected was due to the fact that they were the only teachers who taught reading at the particular centre that had been selected. Although a teacher may have taught a technical subject such as Technology, there is some reading involved in his lessons. Of course if a particular teacher was sick, the number of lessons that could be observed was reduced. Instead of him being observed twice, he was only observed once.

### **3.4 Data collection methods**

A key strength of the case study method is the use of multiple sources and techniques in the gathering process (Maree, 2010; Rule & John, 2011). Yin (2009, p. 116) called this use of multiple sources “data triangulation”. Following from this, I used classroom interviews and observations. I gathered data that allowed me to answer the research questions and all of the data is qualitative.

Two female participants were interviewed thrice and observed twice while one male participant was interviewed twice and observed once. For purposes of clarity while protecting anonymity, I will use pseudonyms. Female participant one will be referred to as Thandi while female participant two will be referred to as Nonhle. The sole male participant will be referred to as Sipho.

I started by interviewing the participants individually. Interviewing is the most popular method in qualitative research (Cohen et al, 2007). An interview is a process whereby the researcher asks questions and the participant responds. The aim of conducting the interviews was to get into the participants' shoes and see the world in the way that they see it. I used semi-structured interview questions which meant that questions were prepared in advance to initiate the discussion. These questions were often followed by further questions which arose spontaneously from the discussions (Rule & John, 2011, p. 65). This type of interview was preferred because it allowed the opportunity to ask for clarification in case it was needed at the time the need arose. This required paying careful attention to what the participants were saying in order to identify new trends and themes in the discussion (Maree, 2007, p. 87). The aim of interviewing the participants was to find out from the teachers about the methods that they use in teaching reading and to get their views on why they use the methods they say they use. I was also interested in finding out what their beliefs or philosophies about reading were.

The interview before the lesson (See appendix 1: Interview schedule before the lesson observation) focussed on four aspects namely; background of the participant which meant asking participants question about their own schooling and how they themselves learnt to read, participants understanding and experience of reading. Questions included trying to establish what reading means to the teacher, how they understand reading as a process and asking for a description of a typical lesson plan that focused on reading. The interview after the lesson observation focussed on seeking clarity about the lesson. (See Appendix 2: Interview Schedule after lesson observation).

A voice recorder was used during the interviewing process because recording the answers in writing was going to be time consuming and distracting. Permission for using the voice recorder was granted by the participants through the signing of consent forms (See Appendix 3: Consent forms). The recordings were listened to after the actual interviews had taken place. While listening to the recordings I also

made transcripts of the interviews. There were also interviews conducted at the end of lesson observations. These were to clear any misconceptions that might have been formed within the researcher while observing the lesson and also to get more clarity on teachers' practices. The interviews took place in the participants' classes. I wanted the participants to feel comfortable by being in an environment that was not threatening to them. The interviews lasted about one hour each.

In one of the interviews there was problem with audibility when I listened to it from the voice recorder. This led to difficulty in transcribing the interview and I had to go back to do another interview with the participant.

Classroom observations followed once initial interviews were completed.

"Observation is the systematic process of recording the behavioural patterns of participants, objects and occurrences without necessarily questioning or communicating with them" (Maree, 2007, p.83-84). During the observations I compared the teachers' beliefs and theory with what actually happens. Observing educational action such as a lesson being taught or a group of adult learners in discussion can provide useful data for the case studies (Rule & John, 2011, p. 67). Lesson observation gave me the opportunity to experience what Cohen et al. (2007, p. 79) calls "a sense of being there".

Observation as a data gathering technique requires the researcher to know exactly what is to be observed by linking the focus of his/her observation to the research question (Maree, 2007, p. 84). I designed a classroom observation schedule, (See Appendix 4: Lesson Observation Schedule) that assisted me in what to look for and tried not to fall into the trap of being subjective and focusing on a particular event instead of observing the lesson in its entirety. The observation sheet was in the form of running records because I wanted to capture the action in the context. The classroom observations were semi-structured. This means that there was an observation schedule that was prepared before going to the classroom but it also

allowed for the recording of things that came up during observations which were not initially in the observation schedule. The observation sheet allowed me to capture things that I thought of before going to the classroom and also things that I had not thought about beforehand but identified as important when I observed them.

The important aspects in the classroom observation schedule were configuration of lesson, major focus of lesson, special foci of reading activities, materials, teacher actions and learner actions. These themes were for capturing data that was necessary in answering the research questions. My role in using this technique was being an observer and I focussed on observing the classroom interactions. The importance of observing participants in their natural environments was adhered to. The reason for doing classroom observations was to establish if the educators' espoused beliefs about reading and their accounts of their teaching matched their practice.

I planned to conduct two observations per participant but there was an unexpected circumstance with the one participant. He had a stroke after the first set of observations and was placed on sick leave until the end of the data collection stage. Data analysed was based on two observations per participant for the other participants (Thandi and Nonhle) and one for him (Sipho).

In concluding the data collection section I will present the sequence of data collection activities in the table below. It shows the number, date of interviews and observations per participant.

**Table 1: Summary of data collection**

	<b>Sipho</b>	<b>Thandi</b>	<b>Nonhle</b>
<b>Interview 1</b>	14 June 2011	21 June 2011	21 June 2011
<b>Observation 1</b>	28 July 2011	9 July 2011	15 September 2011
<b>Interview 2</b>	28 July 2011	9 July 2011	15 September 2011
<b>Observation 2</b>	—	28 August 2012	20 August 2012
<b>Interview 3</b>	—	28 August 2012	20 August 2012
<b>Interview 4</b>	—	—	29 August 2012

It should be noted that Sipho was interviewed twice and observed once because of sickness. Nonhle had three interviews as a result of the first one not being audible.

## **Data Analysis**

During the stage of data analysis I was aiming at making sense or examining meaningful and symbolic data collected.

Qualitative data analysis tries to establish how participants make meaning of a specific phenomenon by analysing their perceptions, attitudes, understanding, knowledge, values, feelings and experiences in an attempt to approximate their construction of the phenomenon. (Maree, 2007, p.99).

Data were analysed using qualitative methodology after both interviews and observations were completed. I listened to the voice recorder a number of times before starting to write the transcripts. When analysing the transcripts I referred back to my field notes. In analysing the data my goal was to summarise what I had heard and saw in terms of common words, phrases, themes or patterns that helped me in



understanding and interpreting that which emerged (Maree, 2007). I interpreted and made sense of what was in the data. Because I was looking at this data from different angles, this required me to use content analysis.

Content analysis takes texts and analyses, reduces and interrogates them into summary form through the use of both pre-existing categories and emergent themes in order to generate or test theory. (Cohen et al. 2007, p. 476).

Content analysis is a systematic approach to qualitative data analysis that identifies and summarises message content (Neuendorf, 2002). I identified common themes from the interviews and observations. In analysing transcripts I used codes and consolidated them into categories. "Coding and categorizing are systematic, comprehensive and cumulative, gradually building understanding or explanations". (Simons, 2009, p.121).

Simons (2009) describes coding as "the breaking down of data into segments and assigns a label to each". I started assigning labels against pieces of the data so that became meaningful. I used the same colours in all three transcripts where participants were saying the same things and developed common themes from all the interviews. After coding I made sense of data by reducing observational and interview data to themes and then categorised data according to the following themes: learning to read, teaching reading, teachers' understandings and beliefs about reading, teaching materials, reading that teachers do, and teachers' role when teaching reading. These themes were informed by my research questions. When the data was arranged according to themes, I used concept mapping. According to Simons (2009, p. 122) concept maps "are a means of representing knowledge visually and mapping links between related concepts in making sense of the data."

### **3.5 Site and sampling**

Qualitative research is generally based on non-probability and purposive sampling. Purposive sampling occurs when participants are selected because they are deemed to be the ones who hold the data that is required to answer the research questions. I used stratified purposive sampling for this study to select my participants. According to Patton (1990) this means selecting participants according to pre-selected criteria relevant to a particular research question. In this case I chose educators who teach reading at a foundational level in this Centre.

The site was chosen based on convenience sampling because it was easy to access the Centre. Another reason for choosing this Centre is that my research project is the first stage of a group project that seeks to develop a reading culture at this school and adult centre. Some members of the group would be working with children and others with parents. The school was convenient because it has a school and adult centre at one location.

### **3.6 Researcher Positionality**

My own positionality might have affected this research. As stated above when discussing the research style of this study, qualitative research is subjective and it acknowledges the important role of the researcher in the collecting and analysing of data. My positionality has positive aspects as well as potentially negative ones. I may not have been neutral when conducting this research. I am currently employed at an organisation that promotes the teaching of literacy in schools. I might have brought my pre-conceived ideas and experiences about reading into this research. My own experience in literacy gave me insight, guiding me with regards to what to ask in interviews and what to observe in lessons. Though I have my own beliefs about reading and how it is taught, in this study I listened to what the teachers said and also captured what I observed during their lessons.

Another instance where I felt my positionality affected this research was during interviewing one of the participants. I saw positionality in terms of power relations. As a researcher and experienced literacy practitioner, I was in a position of power in relation to the teacher. I think she saw me as superior to her because she is an unqualified teacher. She felt very nervous and confused though I tried to make her feel at ease. I diverted the focus of my interview and talked about other general news. When I saw that she was comfortable in talking to me I came back to the questions I intended to ask.

### **3.7 Trustworthiness**

Case study researchers are advised to collect data from more than one source, using more than one method for the purpose of triangulation (Rule and John, 2011, p. 109). In adhering to trustworthiness and dependability of this study I used interviews and observations to collect data and check if what I observed was linked to what transpired from interviews. In some cases interviews did not match with observations and that required me to go back and check with the participant the reason/s for the mismatch.

After each observation/interview I did member checking with the participants whereby I asked questions to verify if my understanding was actually what happened. As mentioned above, the questions for the interviews were prepared in advance, to make sure that they ascertained or established what they were intended to find out. During the interviewing process I tried to be unbiased as far as I could by listening to the participants in what they said and not seeking answers that told me what I wanted to hear (something that would support my preconceived notion) (Cohen et al., 2007). This was very difficult with one of the participants who required frequent prompts.

### 3.8 Ethical Issues

Ethical issues refer to the researcher doing the right things throughout the research process. It is important that the researcher carries himself/herself in a professional way as s/he will be collecting data from people and sometimes about people. Field research has been described by Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 265) as “an act of betrayal, no matter how well intentioned or well integrated the researcher. One makes public the private and leaves the locals to take the consequences”. Planning for research must therefore consider how one will deal with such ethical issues.

Ethics flow from a system of moral principles embraced by society or a specific community. They reflect the norms and rules of acceptable behaviour. (Rule & John, 2011, p. 111).

Bell (2000) gives the advice of gaining access early, with fully informed consent and indicating the possible benefits of the research. Informed consent is defined by Diener and Crandal (1978) as “the procedures in which individuals choose to participate in an investigation after being informed of facts that would be likely to influence their decisions”. Because this is a group research project we gained the permission from the Department of Education as a group to conduct the research in one of their sites. I further negotiated with the principal and the participants for permission to work with them in my study. During these negotiations I explained the research topic, research questions, methodological issues, data collection techniques, data analysis and dissemination and issues of validity, trustworthiness and dependability.

The issue of anonymity of the school and participants was also highlighted by the researcher to the participants. By contacting the principal first I was trying to lessen problems by gaining assent and cooperation of the management. Participants were made aware that they had a choice of not participating in the study if they did not wish to and at any time during the study they could withdraw without having to give reasons for such a decision. During the negotiations, participants were given the opportunity of asking questions where clarity was needed. They were assured that

the results of this study would only be used for this thesis and they would be discussed with them in order to plan for the action that would be the next phase in improving the culture of reading in this adult centre.

Participants were also assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Anonymity meant that their names and that of the school would not be mentioned in the study; instead 'pseudonyms' would be used. For this study I called my participants Sipho, Thandi and Nonhle. Confidentiality means "Safeguarding the interests of the research participants by ensuring that their identities are not revealed in the research study" (Chilisa and Preece, 2005, p. 227). This is important in this study because if it is not adhered to participants may withhold relevant information. Teachers were then given the consent form to sign to show that they agreed to participate in this study. (See Appendix 3 for teachers' consent form).

Ethical clearance was applied for and granted by the Faculty of Higher Degrees Committee. (Appendix 5)

### **3.9 Conclusion**

This chapter outlined the research design/methodology that was followed in developing this study and also the steps taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. This qualitative case study took place at the preliminary stage of a larger action research study. Situated within an interpretivist paradigm, it used multiple methods including interviews and lesson observations. It analysed data using content analysis. The next chapter will focus in presenting the findings that emerged from this study.

## Chapter 4

### Findings

#### 4. 1 Introduction

In this section I examine some of the themes that emerged from the interviews and lesson observations data. Data analysis is making sense of all the data that the researcher has collected and trying to draw conclusions about the case. Some authors called this phase “interpreting the case” (Rule & John, 2011, p. 75). It is in this phase where I went back to Chapter 1 and looked at data that will help me answer the research questions. As discussed in Chapter 3, I adopted qualitative content analysis as my analytical strategy. Content analysis is the process of first assigning codes and then moving to themes.

This means working with the codes to identify patterns such as similarities, differences, or what we could call *code absence* which means the absence of coded data in certain transcripts or documents’. (Rule & John, 2011, p. 78)

I used the open coding technique; the codes emerged from the data during the coding process (Henning et al., 2004) cited in (Rule & John, 2011, p.77). This allowed me to assign a suitable label to every piece of data that held meaning in terms of my study. Although I used an open coding system, there were some labels that I had developed before starting this process. These are the labels that were going to help me answer the research questions. While coding I was also memoing. According to Punch (2009, p. 179) memoing involves recording all sorts of ideas that occur while coding.

A memo is the theorising write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst while coding... it can be a sentence, a paragraph or a few pages... it exhausts the analyst’s momentary ideation based on data with perhaps a little conceptual elaboration.

As mentioned in the methodology chapter (Chapter 3), the approach for this study is a case study approach; I will first present the cases that were studied. These are the

three teachers who teach in the Adult Centre. I will then use data collected to provide evidence of themes that emerged.

While reading about the cases it is important to note that all the teachers were talking about how they learnt to read in Zulu. The themes that emerged from the data were how the participants learnt to read, their beliefs about reading, the kind of readings that teachers and learners do, how are the participants teaching reading, their roles as teachers of reading and the availability of teaching materials.

I assume that practices reflect beliefs, but that not all beliefs are put into practice. Therefore in the cases I did consider what they said and did as their beliefs.

## **4.2 The three cases**

### **Sipho**

#### **Background: learning to read at home and at school**

Sipho completed his Secondary Teacher's Diploma at the Edgewood College of Education. He could not find a teaching job in high schools and as a result took a position in this primary school. While completing his Honours he also did a module in Adult education. Sipho is currently completing his Master's Degree in Adult Education.

This participant had a very good home background with regard to the school readiness aspect. His mother was a nurse and taught him to read and write vowels and also to count and write numbers up to 5 before entering school. He was even able to use word recognition skills before going to school and also associating certain words with certain objects. This may have contributed to the way in which he understands reading because he seemed to have better insights regarding reading as meaning-making than the other participants. This participant is also furthering his studies; this might also be a contributing factor as he might be learning about reading in his current studies. This participant mentioned that he reads newspapers and also searches the internet for current news

He learnt to read using bottom-up approaches which are referred in the table that is in Chapter 2 as the ones where meaning comes after letter and word identification.

Sipho recalls that at school he was first taught vowels. He learnt to attach consonants to vowels thus forming syllables like, ma me mi mo mu. It was after this that Sipho was introduced to words. Sometimes they were shown words and pictures and they were asked to match pictures with words. Sometimes a picture would have a word and this is where he talked about word recognition skills. He used to guess what the word was by looking at the picture. They were first introduced to words that contain monographs e.g. umama, then to digraphs e.g. ibhola and later to trigraphs e.g. isitshulu. It was after mastering all this were they allowed to read books.

### **Beliefs about reading**

Sipho has three key beliefs regarding reading. The first one is concerned with the use of the visual, the second is concerned with translation and the third is concerned with comprehension. He demonstrated his first belief about reading when he gave his learners a diagram of a structure of a house and asked them to give the names of the parts that they knew. He wrote on the board all the words that they gave him. When they gave him the Zulu words, he wrote the English words on the board. This was developing their English vocabulary because by the end of the lesson they knew many new English words that were not known coming into the lesson. Another reason of using visuals was the kind of learners that were in this class. Most of the learners are early readers. This category of reader was discussed in Chapter 2 under 'Levels of reading'. One of the characteristics of the learners at this level is that they use pictures to make meaning. (MILL, 2010, p. 13; DoE, 2008, 9). For him these visuals facilitated understanding of the content by the learners. The teacher was using the memory-based perspectives to reading. Each picture triggered the information that was in the learners' memory about structures.

After understanding the diagrams, the learners were asked to give other structures that they knew. This teaching also brought in the idea of constructivism as described by Piaget in Chapter 2. Piaget mentioned that when learners encounter a new



experience, they can make sense of it by associating it with what they already know thus assimilating into their existing knowledge. Rapp and van der Broek (2005, p.276) saw this kind of teaching as reflecting a “constructionist perspective” to reading. In the constructionist perspective the readers actively strive to achieve understanding of the text, strategically activating information to satisfy their search for meaning. From this experience it became evident that Sipho believed that the schemata/background information/ prior knowledge also played an important role in reading.

In this class dialogic teaching was applied to a limited extent. As described by Rule (2009, p. 6) in Chapter 2, a dialogue is a horizontal relationship between two people. The dialogue that was mainly practiced in this class was between the teacher and the learners. As the teacher was asking questions, the learners were answering them. There was only one incident where the learners had a dialogue amongst themselves. Sipho as the teacher gave them a text to read and asked them to discuss their understanding of the text amongst themselves. From this observation I concluded that the teacher had some sort of an understanding of dialogic teaching. At the same time, the activity where learners were sharing information highlighted another belief that the teacher had which was about comprehension.

Sipho also displayed an understanding of reading as modelling pronunciation and punctuation. This was evident when he read the text while learners were following with their eyes in their own copies. After that he asked learners to read the same text aloud taking turns. This exercise also supported one of the activities of developing fluency whereby learners must read aloud to somebody who is more proficient than them. Sipho had an opportunity to correct the mistakes that the learners made while reading. The third belief regarding comprehension was evident when after reading the text, learners were given a worksheet where they had to apply the information that they extracted from the text. Sipho had also expressed his belief of understanding reading as a meaning making activity during his interview.

I think for learners it is simply reading words and understanding what they are reading about. (Sipho)

By reflecting on Sipho's lesson it is evident that he has a degree of concern about comprehension. He did some activities that are mentioned in Chapter 2 for developing comprehension. He activated the learners' prior knowledge by talking about the structures that they know. This was followed by him reading aloud to the learners and the discussion of the text. He also encouraged learners to decode words that they do not know.

This participant also believed that reading should be an activity that stimulates the reader to understand the author's intentions. Grabe (2009, p.15) called this process "an interactive process" of reading. There is an interaction between the reader and the author. The two (reader and the author) must have a conversation through the text where the reader gets to know more about the author and his purpose about the text. This kind of relation where one takes the side of the other as termed by Buber (1964, p.39) was discussed in Chapter 2 when discussing the dialogue. What was also important for this teacher was that through the process of reading the text, the reader must be able to read between the lines. The teacher understood that sometimes there is a hidden message in the text and the reader has to try and find this hidden meaning. He also mentioned some of the difficulties that he experienced in Grade 2 (when he was a learner and their teacher introduced them to English) and also now as a teacher he experiences the same problem when teaching learners to read English. He said that he had difficulty in making a general rule because of the different sounds represented by the same letter. He gave the example of 'ph' in xenophobia and in upholstery. Fordham et al, (1995), highlighted this challenge and it is discussed in detail Chapter 2 Section 2.3.3.

### **Teaching reading**

In teaching reading Sipho used mostly the same methods that were used by his teachers in teaching him to read during his foundation years. It should be noted that Sipho teaches ABET Level 4 which means that by the time learners come to him they have mastered some reading skills. He used word recognition and decoding skills to read words that were unfamiliar to him. He gave pictures with words written underneath them and asked learners to read words. Sometimes the learners were

unable to read the word when the pictures were not there. He also taught word attack skills. Word attack skills is when learners come across a word that they cannot read and are encouraged to break it down into syllables and letters (decoding). This is one of the ways of developing comprehension mentioned above.

## **Thandi**

### **Background: learning to read at home and school**

Thandi completed her Primary Teacher's Diploma and could not find a job with the Department of Education. While she was seeking employment she enrolled for the ABET certificate with Unisa. She completed her ABET diploma with Unisa. She holds both the school and the ABET qualifications. She was employed by Telkom as an ABET practitioner. She is currently managing the Adult Centre in this school and is also a provincial ABET moderator. She is also a HOD for the Foundation Phase in the mainstream.

Thandi started learning to read at school. She did not mention any particular preparation from home before going to school. At school she started by learning the various letters of the alphabet. She was also taught a song about the letter names of the alphabet to assist with memorising. While in the process of learning letter names, the letter sounds were introduced. Her class was taught to put letters together to form words. These methods are referred to in Chapter 2 as the alphabetic and the syllabic approaches. They form part of the bottom-up approach.

Learners had to memorise the words which were also given to them as spelling tests. They were then taught to put words together to form sentences and paragraphs. From there they were ready to read books. Thandi reflects that in hindsight she is able to see that their teachers were not concerned with reading for meaning but seemed to rather be focused on accuracy in terms of pronunciation and punctuation. Rote learning was the preferred method of learning. She talked about poems and History notes that they were able to recite at length without having any understanding of what they actually meant.

## **Beliefs about reading**

Thandi had her own beliefs about reading. Firstly, she believed that reading meant decoding visual symbols. This is where the teacher used two posters, one was of a school in the rural area and the other was of a school in the urban area. There were no written words but she asked learners to talk about the two pictures, comparing and contrasting them. She did not write what learners were saying, as it was just oral lesson. She also believed reading to be an activity where learners are required to read aloud.

During this process Thandi asked one learner to read aloud for the whole group while the rest of the class listened. In *Teaching Reading to the Early Grades*, (DoE, 2008, p. 14) they promote that the teacher has to read aloud to the learners to develop comprehension of texts. In this case when the teacher read aloud it was not for comprehension but rather for pronunciation. While they were engaged in this reading aloud activity, another belief about reading emerged whereby Thandi saw herself as someone who has to model reading. Thandi was modelling accuracy with special focus on pronunciation. As soon as learners made mistakes she swiftly stopped them and corrected the words that were not properly pronounced. Here we see that the teacher considers herself as someone who reads better than the learners and thus should model to them how they must read in an attempt to develop their skills.

Thandi also believed that reading is a tool for exercising power and authority. She did not use her authority/power to facilitate meaning but rather to correct pronunciation. When Nonhle, who is junior to Thandi, was conducting the lesson in her presence this aspect came up. Nonhle pronounced the word “injured” incorrectly and Thandi immediately corrected her in front of the learners. Thandi believed that translation from English to Zulu equals meaning. Her belief was that if learners can translate sentences from Zulu to English it means that they understood the text. This was interesting to observe as it matched what she said in the interview that interpreting/translation equals meaning.

If it's English I ask the person to interpret it for me. That way I can see if they understand what they are reading because you can read without understanding. (Thandi)

## **Teaching reading**

The teacher again followed the same methodology that was used by her teachers when she was taught how to read at primary school. She used the alphabetic and the syllabic approaches. Thandi started by teaching the names of the letters of the alphabet and then put them together to form words. She mentioned that her teachers put more emphasis on accuracy in terms of pronunciation, which is what she was also doing. She said that she uses a lot of pictures in teaching reading because she believed that pictures facilitate the reading process.

## **Nonhle**

### **Background: learning to read at school and home**

Nonhle has no qualification as a school teacher. After completing Matric Nonhle enrolled for the ABET certificate at Unisa. This is the only certificate she possesses. She was employed by the Adult Centre when the focus was on employing local people and not necessarily qualified teachers.

She was only introduced to reading at school. She followed almost the same pattern as the other two teachers when learning to read. In that they were first taught letters of the alphabet. From there they added vowels to consonants and thereafter used vowels and consonants to form words. They moved to sentences and then eventually to books.

### **Beliefs about reading**

During the interviews Nonhle mentioned that when you are reading you need to understand what is written because there are times where there will be no one to explain things to you. From this one can assume that she understood that comprehension is important in reading. This, however, did not match her practice as seen during classroom observation. There was limited attention to comprehension displayed in all her lessons.

She also believed that reading is accuracy in terms of pronunciation as displayed by stopping learners when they were mispronouncing words. For Nonhle it seemed that reading was characterised by barking at print with the belief that as long as learners

can pronounce words accurately it meant they were able to read. There were a few instances where even the teacher, Nonhle, in the process of correcting pronunciation of learners, mispronounced the word. It is at this point that the senior teacher jumped in to correct the junior teacher's pronunciation.

Nonhle was also of the belief that being able to translate words and sentences from English to Zulu meant that the student had full comprehension of the word/ text. Every time a word/sentence was read she would ask learners to tell her Zulu version of it went as far as to encourage learners to take a Zulu dictionary to find Zulu versions of English words.

The only strategy demonstrated in this class was reading aloud whether by the teacher or by learners. If done by learners, one learner was doing the reading while others listened. When done by the teacher it was to model accuracy in terms of pronunciation. The learners read aloud so that the teacher was able to pick up if there was any mispronunciation.

### **Teaching reading**

Again, the teacher used the same techniques that were used to teach her reading when she was younger. She first introduces her learners to vowels. Once vowels are mastered they are then introduced to consonants which when combined with vowels form syllables. They are then introduced to words. When they cannot read words they are asked to break them into syllables and letters. Sentences and reading books are the next step to be introduced. It was evident during the two lessons observed that the presence of the senior teacher affected Nonhle's confidence negatively. In the first lesson, the senior teacher was not there; she had more control of the environment and was significantly more confident about herself. In the second lesson, the senior teacher was there, she had no confidence in herself. After saying something to the class she kept on looking at Thandi as if she was looking for approval. This was worsened by the senior teacher jumping in to correct her in front of the learners.

### 4.3 Thematic analysis: Data from interviews and lesson observations

The process of content analysis revealed six key thematic clusters namely; learning to read, teaching reading, teachers' understandings and beliefs about reading, teaching materials, reading that teachers do, and teachers' role when teaching reading. Under each theme there were different subthemes. I will present key insights into these thematic clusters using the data that was collected through interviews and lesson observations.

#### Learning to read

When exploring this theme it was evident that the participants started learning to read at different ages and levels. This was due to their home backgrounds and the availability of resources, both human and physical. Though all of them did not attend formal pre-school education, one of them (Sipho) was fortunate to be brought up by a mother who was a nurse. He was exposed to the written word at home before going to school. His mother played a major role in preparing him to read and write. This is what he said during the interview:

I read what I saw before I went to school around 5 years old. My mother used to write on the ground just to teach me to write the vowels a, e, i, o, u. She taught me to read the vowels a, e, i, o, u and to write them as well as counting. And also writing numbers 1 – 5. I learnt that at home before I even went to school. So I was prepared before I even went to school. I never went to pre-school, I never did Grade R. Those are the first things I learnt to write, vowels and numbers. (Sipho).

It is evident from what this participant said that he started at a level that was better than that of Thandi and Nonhle. By the time he went to Grade 1 he was able to read and write vowels and also to count and write numbers 1-5. Sipho's home background being stimulating prepared him to be able to read. The point of home background where there are no books or there is no culture of reading as a challenge to reading was mentioned in Chapter 2.

When they entered school, all the participants had a common way of learning to read. They all followed the bottom-up approaches. In this approach phonics or letter names precede any reading that will take place. The focus is not on meaning but on being able to read the sounds that make words and then proceeding to sentences. Reading for meaning is only brought in while reading sentences and paragraphs. The participants started with sounds and letters of the alphabet and moved to words and sentences. The following excerpts reflect the experiences of how the three participants started to learn to read.

In Grade 1 we also learnt to write vowels. Consonants with vowels were the basics e.g. ma me mi mo mu. (Sipho).

We started with (...) sounds yes. We were taught sounds ... then you end up knowing how to put words together (...) learn how to construct a word. (Thandi).

We started by learning letters of words... then words that form sentences. (Nonhle)

Weaver (1994, p.9) characterises the process of reading as being “about getting meaning from certain combinations of letters. If the learner knows what each letter stands for, s/he can read”. This is applicable to the above process. Here the learners were engaged in combining letters so that they make words. These words, when combined together, form meaningful sentences which will in turn form paragraphs. Comprehension will then have to be part of their reading. The process may be described as synthetic rather than analytic, as Analytic and synthetic methods were discussed in Chapter 2.

Synthetic methods are based on the principle that it is best to teach the elements of words first and that these must then be combined (synthesised) to form words. (Lyster 1992, p. 118).

One of the participants mentioned that he used word recognition skills in learning to read. This is where one is able to recognise words by looking at the shapes of the letters that form the word. He said he was able to read only vowels and then he used word recognition skills to identify other words. This participant believed that the word recognition skills facilitated high speed in learning to read. When looking at the



reading levels as described in Chapter 2, this learner was an emergent reader as a child because he was aware of text in the environment. He was also able to identify with logos of products like 'CLOVER'. According to Moodie's pyramid of the reading process in Chapter 2, he was entering the letter and partly word recognition stages.

At this stage I could write and tell them [vowels and numbers]. I was able to recognise them by their shapes. Any other thing except the vowels I couldn't read. I remember that there was a CLOVER bus in the area. I couldn't read the word but was able to recognise that it is a CLOVER bus. I associated the sound with CLOVER but I couldn't exactly read the word. If the colour of the words and the bus could change I was not going to be able to recognise the bus. Sometimes you see a word and you are able to recognise it without looking at its letters. This is how you learn to read fast. Sometimes you find that learners know certain words by seeing them without looking at the letters that form that word. (Sipho).

In using this skill the participant was using one of the reading methodologies namely, look and say. This is where you are able to read the word by looking at the shapes of letters that form it. If the word is decoded and you are asked to read it letter by letter you cannot do it. One is able to read it as a whole word. Weaver (1994, p. 9) sees reading as a "... a psychological guessing game. It is not about precise perception and identification of letters and words but about efficiently using cues to make appropriate guesses. It involves interaction between thought and language." In the above quote from the interview transcript my view is that this participant was using the cues of letter shapes in order to make appropriate guesses in being able to read words. Different forms of cues were engaged in this example; visual elements like the colour of the bus and the shape were included. Also the context of where was this bus seen and time could also be considered as cues. Also the association of the object (the bus) and the word was a cue on its own.

Learning to read through the use of pictures was commonly experienced by all participants. This was experienced at different levels because two participants used pictures to match with words, one participant said that they were asked to talk about the picture. In this scenario it seems like the teachers applied constructivist teaching. Constructivism claims that 'learning is a process of constructing meaning derived from the learner's action in the world'. (Gravett, 2003, p. 19). Learners are actively

involved in the construction of meaning. Constructivism has been discussed in detail in Chapter 2 under the Theoretical Framework of this study. The learners were engaged in the process of meaning and knowledge construction. When talking about the picture they were not passive in the learning process but had to engage with the picture and involve their thought processes thus constructing knowledge and better understanding of the picture. The other participant used pictures for predicting what the text was about. As mentioned in the definition of reading above that “reading is guessing game”, pictures are good in facilitating this guessing. Even if one cannot read the word, once you see a picture you try and guess what the word might be. The example of this is from the excerpt that is given in the section on ‘Teaching reading’ where one participant talked about the picture of a goat and the word ‘imbuzi’ written underneath. In reality the participant could not read the printed word but was guessing through decoding the picture.

The challenges of the current approaches to reading as discussed in Chapter 2 are evident in the way these teachers learnt to read. The elements of reading were seen as isolated aspects. At some stage it is evident that when the participants were children their teachers were more concerned with the process of reading than the product of reading. Their teachers used the bottom-up approaches which are more concerned with the process than the product of reading. The product of reading (i.e. comprehension) was believed to take place after the process was mastered. As mentioned in Chapter 2 in the discussion about recent approaches to reading, the bottom-up and top-down approaches must be seen as compensating each other rather than competing with one another. The Landscape model (discussed in Chapter 2) explains clearly what happens to the reader during the process of reading.

### **Teachers’ understandings and beliefs about reading**

The way teachers were taught to read and their teaching of reading reflected some of the understandings that they had about reading. All the participants had a common understanding that reading is important and a continuous process. They also see reading and writing as interconnected. According to them one cannot read without being able to write and cannot write without being able to read. One of the

participants linked reading to understanding written texts. This participant attached the meaning dimension in reading. For him if one is able to read, that person must be able to give the meaning of the text read.

Reading is helpful, it is important because most of the time when you are expected to write something you must first read. You find that there is no one to explain things to you but you need to read. (Nonhle).

I think in order to understand the text you must know what is written. (Sipho).

... reading is something that you do daily, it is continuous and without ending. So I think reading is important, it is important that a person is able to read. (Thandi).

Another participant seemed to attach the dimension of personal development to reading. According to her, when you cannot read you are less knowledgeable and less empowered. She also linked reading to being literate.

... you find that if you can't read you struggle to get through life hence reading is important for each and every person. There are different ways of reading but at the end of the day a person must know how to read, as we are promoting reading and literacy, these go hand in hand. People must know how to read. (Thandi).

The more you read the more you learn. (Thandi)

This dimension links with Gray's definition of literacy that sees a person as 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 use these skills towards his own and the community's development." (Gray, 1966, p. 24). This perspective of reading links to the socio – cultural approach to reading as described in Chapter 2.

One participant believes that reading is being able to understand the author's perspective. In order to be able to do this the reader must have a dialogue with the text. There must be "communion" between the reader and the text. The reader must do what Buber (1964, p. 39) calls "going to the other side" because s/he must see

him/herself as the author and try to understand why the writer wrote this text. In Chapter 2, Kennedy (1984) was quoted saying that reading is an activity binds two people – reader and writer. The participant said the following about understanding the author's perspective:

I also want to know what the thinking of the person who wrote it was. I try to understand the perspective of the writer – why did he write that text. I also try to understand the background of the writer. (Sipho).

This participant brought in another important factor in reading; understanding the background of the author. This point is very important because nowadays we find people misquoting others because they did not understand their background. For me, background in this particular instance includes things like; socio-economic issues, what triggered the author to write. This links with the other point that this participant mentioned: “being able to read between the lines”. When engaged in reading, the reader must also be able to get the “indirect” message from the text. One must be able to pick up details that are not explicitly mentioned in the text.

You also want to read between the lines. (Sipho).

### **Reading that teachers do and learners' attitudes towards reading**

There is a belief that if a learner is exposed to reading material s/he is likely to have interest in reading. Adults need to model reading to learners. In schools, there is a 30 minutes Drop Everything and read period that promotes the modelling of reading by teachers to learners. Everyone at school is expected to read during this period. In order to get more clarity on what teachers believe reading to be it was necessary to find out about their reading patterns; what types of reading do they do, how often do they read etc. The participants did not spend much time on reading. They gave different reasons for this but the common one was lack of time to read and being overcommitted with other duties. As mentioned before, two of my participants are teachers in a mainstream school. They teach children during the day and adults in the afternoon; they still have to care for their families. One of the participants also mentioned that she lacks enthusiasm to read. The following excerpts partly

demonstrate the attitudes of teachers towards reading because if you believe in something and love it you would try to make time for it. Since they knew that they need to model good practise with regards to reading, they are supposed to be exemplary to learners that they must read.

Read novels but as I grew I don't have the same enthusiasm. But now I just read newspapers and things like the Sunday Times (...) but I like reading. During the week (...) if I haven't had time to read I take my bible and read a verse or two (...) don't read always. (Thandi).

I read magazines like Bona. (Nonhle)

I read novels and books. Sometimes I read current news from the internet. (Sipho).

The participant who said he reads books and novels when asked about the types of books that he reads it was academic books.

A further question was asked in order to establish if their lack of commitment to reading had influenced the behaviour (attitude) of learners towards reading. Adult learners were not reading at home even if they were given something to read. They only read if there was a test /examination coming.

You find that most of the learners don't read the notes. When they come the following day they have not read what you have asked them to read. They only read when there will be a test other than that the notes just pile up. (Sipho).

In this particular case there was a pattern of a lack of a reading culture amongst both teachers and learners. This was partly due to a lack of reading materials available, but also a lack of motivation. In Chapter 1 I mentioned that most teachers read for certification which seemed to be the case in this Centre. Lyster in Chapter 2 noted that adult learners get tired because classes are normally in the evenings.

## **Teaching reading**

In teaching reading it was evident that the participants mostly used the methods that were used by their teachers when they taught them to read. There could be a

number of reasons for this practice; it could be that the teachers lacked exposure to a variety of reading methodologies or they find these methods effective. One teacher Thandi explained that she learnt to read through pictures. When asked how much of this she uses during her teaching, this is what she said:

I do it a lot, more especially with picture reading because that is where a person can express their feelings and ideas. (Thandi).

While observing the very same teacher presenting her lesson it was confirmed that she really employs this strategy. She brought to class two posters and asked the learners (Level 2) to compare and contrast them. One picture was of a school in a rural area and the other one was of a school in an urban area. The posters only showed pictures with no words written on them. In the urban school there were robots and street names. There was busyness going on in this picture with people crossing the streets. The one in the rural area was near a farm with livestock grazing around the school. Thandi asked learners to talk about the picture, identifying what was the same and what was different. She did not write anything on the board. It was just an oral lesson. Given that there were no written words in the lesson, the question arose regarding how it was a reading lesson. To justify this lesson as a reading lesson this participant said that “it is what I call picture reading”. For her, reading also meant decoding pictures. This might relate to a broader view of literacy as not simply literacy (learning to read and write) but as “literacies” (engaging with a range of codes, including visual). Barton and Hamilton (2000, p. 8) called this ‘multiliteracies’ which was discussed in Chapter 2.

From what I gathered during lesson observations I learnt that for my participants reading did not only mean reading the written word but also decoding visual symbols like pictures. This is evident in the lesson described above and also in another lesson where the teacher handed out charts with different types of pictures. She then asked learners (Level 2) to choose those pictures that represented different kinds of transport and write down their names. There was no intense engagement of learners with printed texts.

The use of pictures was the most commonly used form of presenting lessons amongst the three participants. Teachers used pictures in different ways showing different understanding of reading and the relation between pictures and words (oral/written). The teachers seemed to have a strong belief that pictures facilitate the process of reading. This is what one teacher, Siphon, said about the use of pictures in teaching reading:

Sometimes learners can read words through pictures and when pictures are removed they can't e.g. if there is a picture of a goat and underneath there is a word "imbuzi"; one finds that the learner can read the word if the picture is there but once the picture is removed the learner fails to read the word. (Siphon).

In teaching reading through the use of pictures, one teacher seemed to be partly using the language experience approach. In this approach the class starts by having a discussion which is generated through the use of posters. (Lyster, 1992, p.135). This approach uses learners' real, lived experiences ... (MILL, 2010, p. 20). It forms part of the top down approaches. The different approaches were discussed in Chapter 2 Section 2.3.3. (Moodie's model of the reading process) shows the focus of the bottom up and top down approaches. The teacher who used this approach believed that pictures also develop learners' thinking skills. Below is an excerpt from her interview transcript:

When there is just a picture and they talk about what they see, what is happening maybe say what is going to happen? They also give the picture a heading so they can apply their thinking. (Thandi).

When presenting English lessons one observed that, for the teachers, comprehension means being able to translate an English text into Zulu. In all their lessons when they were checking if learners understood whatever they were reading, for example comprehension passages, instructions etc. learners had to translate that into Zulu. Teachers were aware of the fact that one can read without understanding and that, for them to check comprehension of text, learners must translate into Zulu. One teacher's (Thandi) statement gives evidence of this:

If it's English I ask the person to interpret it for me. That way I can see if they understand what they are reading because you can read without understanding. (Thandi).

The assumption here is that translation is equivalent to comprehension, but this is problematic. Translation might simply reflect a superficial understanding of the meaning of the word in another language, rather than the meaning of the text in context. Since this teacher knew that one can read without understanding as she has said in the interview, one would expect her to engage learners in a discussion even in Zulu to see if learners understand the text beyond this superficial level.

In one of the lessons observed during the second reading of the story, the teacher asked learners to read the story sentence by sentence and tell her the Zulu version of each sentence (Nonhle). Even when learners had to answer questions based on the story, they had to first translate the questions into Zulu.

Teachers seemed to pay more attention to accuracy (pronunciation) rather than meaning. As soon as the learners pronounced the word wrongly the teacher stopped them and asked them to say the word after him/her. During the interview one participant (Thandi) said that comprehension was more important for her but during lesson observation she did something different. She asked one learner to read while others listened. If the learner pronounced the word wrongly s/he was stopped immediately. The teacher read the word and the learner repeated after her.

Most learners seemed to have mastered word-attack skills at a low level. During lesson observations they were trying to break through from being intimidated by words that were unfamiliar to them. They used decoding skills where they tried to break down the words into smaller pieces (sounds and syllables). They also tried to use the Zulu sounds in sounding out the words. Lyster (1992, p.127) describes this as an analytic approach – starting with the word and then breaking it down into smaller units. The teachers seemed to be influential in promoting decoding skills as one of them puts it like this:



You can break down the words then talk about the roots. You don't teach the word "kinetic" as a whole, you have to break it down. It makes sense to them if you show the root of the word and other words that are linked to it. (Sipho).

Teachers were very active in helping the learners in increasing their English vocabulary. During the interviews one of the teachers said this about the aim of her lesson:

I am also aiming at them being able to speak and get new words and also to use dictionary to get meaning of words. (Nonhle).

During lesson observation one of the teachers wrote the words that learners gave him on the board. Even when they gave him Zulu words he wrote the English version of it. This served as evidence that he was determined to increase the vocabulary of her learners. In another lesson the teacher provided Zulu/English dictionaries for learners to use in finding the words that they wanted to use.

Teachers saw themselves as role models that learners must imitate when reading. While interviewing them this is what they said about modelling good reading practice:

When we do reading I sometimes take a book and read it to them so that they can understand. Because while we are reading, grammar is applicable and language things. They learn that there is a full stop, comma. Even though they do not see, I am reading, they are listening and can hear when I take a break. I read and read in an appropriate way and then I give them the book so that they can read in turns. (Thandi).

Sometimes I read and they read after me. (Nonhle).

Though the third participant did not mention this during interviews, it came up during lesson observation. He gave the learners a hand-out. He first read it aloud while the followed with their eyes on their copies. Thereafter he asked them to read aloud.

During this process of modelling reading something interesting was observed (explained under Thandi's case above). One teacher was trying to correct learners' pronunciation of a particular word which she also pronounced wrongly. Thandi corrected her in front of the learners. I felt that she used her authority as senior to the other one and exercised power. I also felt that this behaviour had a negative effect on the other teacher's self-esteem. This took me back to the comment that Thandi made during interviews that learners were not happy with Nonhle. It is possible that this kind of behaviour reduced Nonhle's self-esteem and the learners have lost confidence in her. Another interesting factor here is that the senior teacher used her power to focus on pronunciation and not on meaning. This suggested that pronunciation was more important than meaning.

The reading aloud strategy was employed in almost all the classrooms. This is where one learner read aloud while others listened. They took turns in reading. Sometimes they were asked to read aloud in unison. In one lesson learners read aloud as a whole class while in another lesson learners took turns in reading the handout aloud. The participants said the following about how they teach reading:

Sometimes I would bring the newspaper and ask someone to go stand in front and read for me. (Thandi).

I read and read in an appropriate way and then I give them the book so that they can read in turns. (...) when they read in turns and I say another one must read the one stops at the full stop and then when I say next the other one carries on from the full stop. I let them all read and listen to them (Thandi).

Sometimes they read individually one by one. (Nonhle).

When learners are asked to read aloud the teachers were not focussing on meaning (Gravett, 2003) as explained in Chapter 2. They could allow the learners to have dialogue with the text and amongst themselves. Learners may be asked to discuss amongst themselves what they understand about the text.

## **Teachers' roles when teaching reading**

Teachers saw themselves as people who are more skilled as readers than the learners. For them to mention that they have to model how to read for the learners was an indication that they saw themselves as more skilled in reading. One of the participants also mentioned that she was there to guide learners and to help them. This role of being a helper has been mentioned in Chapter 2 where Vygotsky described "The zone of proximal development" that an adult or someone capable is required to move a learner from where s/he is to the next level.

One of the roles displayed by teachers was that of being a corrector when learners mispronounced the words. It was discouraging to observe that they did not praise learners when they pronounced words correctly. It appeared as if they were just looking for mistakes. Teachers also demonstrated the role of being a mediator between the visual and written. They asked learners to discuss pictures and at times the teachers were writing what the learners were telling them. One of the teachers displayed the role of being a student and an electronic reader. He is furthering his studies and also read news from the internet. He also mentioned that he searched information from the internet in preparation for his Technology lessons. All the teachers played the role of being a translator whereby they told learners the Zulu versions of words and sentences if they failed to do it.

## **Teaching materials**

If one has to teach reading successfully it is important that there are materials for learners to read. In this Adult Centre the situation is different from the expected normal one. This was highlighted in Chapter 2 under constraints that literacy programmes operate in South Africa. There are no reading materials in the classrooms. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the area was a target of violence so most of these adult learners are unemployed and cannot afford to buy books or newspapers to read. As one of the participants (Thandi) mentioned that "the more you read, the

more you learn”, these learners are faced with a challenge of the lack of reading resources. All three participants were in agreement that lack of reading resources was a challenge.

We have a challenge of not having materials but when I can I do bring for them. Sometimes we don't have materials so what I sometimes do so that each person can get an opportunity to read what is in front of them is to make copies so each person has a page. (Thandi).

I think there is nothing because even the newspapers are not easy to get. People are unemployed and cannot afford them. We have no reading materials. (Sipho).

There is a shortage of books. I make copies because we do not have enough books. (Nonhle)

The reading resources that were evident during classroom observation lessons were copies of the Echo newspaper which teachers said they go to the Witness newspaper's offices to ask for. There was also one book which was a teacher's copy that they used to make copies of work for learners to do.

The availability of resources as a challenge in teaching reading has been discussed in detail in Chapter 2. Lyster and Welch in Chapter 2 were quoted regarding this challenge. The teachers at this centre are also faced with this challenge.

#### **4. 4. Conclusion**

In this chapter I have provided the findings of the study by analysing the data that was captured through interviews and lesson observations. It was mentioned in Chapter 3 that the findings of the case study cannot be generalised. These findings contribute into understanding the causes of the illiteracy challenge that was specified in Chapter 1. In the following chapter I will answer my research questions and also provide some recommendations for future research. As mentioned earlier, my research is at a foundational stage of the intervention that seeks to improve the culture of reading at this centre.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This is a concluding chapter where I will try and clarify all the loose ends about the research questions that have been left hanging in this study. This chapter will be divided into the following sections; Section 5.2 will present the main summary of the findings, Section 5.3 will be the recommendations, Section 5.4 will be the suggestions for further studies and Section 5.5 will be the reflections on my own learning and Section 5.6 will be the conclusion.

#### **5.2 Summary of findings**

The summary is presented by relating the findings of the study back to the key research questions and to use the key questions as headings. It should also be noted that the findings might discover key features that provide valuable insights but are not directly related to the research questions. In case this happens, these unexpected but significant aspects will be highlighted as they might be useful to other researchers (Rule & John, 2011, p. 130).

#### **What is the relation between the practises of teachers of reading to adults and their beliefs about reading?**

This is the main question of the study. In order to answer it I devised sub questions that assisted me to understand it. For each sub-question the participants will be compared in a tabular form to find out the differences and the similarities. Each table is followed by a discussion that summarises the findings.

**Question: What are the beliefs of this teacher about reading and the teaching of reading?**

Theme	Sipho	Thandi	Nonhle
<b>Visuals</b>	Using visuals makes learning to read a simpler process.  Visuals enable the learner to guess what the word is.	Decoding of visuals is reading even if there are pictures only and no words.	Visuals play a major role in teaching reading.
<b>Comprehension</b>	Comprehension – the reader must understand what s/he is reading about	Learners must read for meaning.	Comprehension is important as one need to understand what s/he is reading about.
<b>Translation</b>	Translation equals comprehension in reading	Translating texts from English to Zulu equals comprehension.	Translation from English to Zulu means comprehension.
<b>Reading Aloud</b>	—	Learners must read aloud	Reading aloud by learners helps the teacher to spot out the words that are pronounced wrongly by the

			learner.
<b>Important activity</b>	<b>————</b>	Reading is an important activity.	Reading is important
<b>Other points highlighted</b>	<p>Development of vocabulary must be catered for. The reader must gain new words.</p> <p>Background information/ prior knowledge/ schemata plays a major role in understanding the text</p> <p>Dialogue amongst learners and between teacher and learners facilitates the comprehension process</p> <p>During the reading process, the learner must understand the author's perspective.</p> <p>The learner must be able to read</p>	<p>Reading is continuous and must be done every day.</p> <p>Reading is a tool for exercising power and authority</p>	<p>Reading is helpful.</p> <p>The reader must be accurate in terms of pronouncing words when reading</p>

	between the lines.		
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The table above reflects the teachers' beliefs about reading. It compares the three cases to find out what is similar and what is different in their beliefs. From this table one can see that their beliefs are the same concerning the use visuals, importance of comprehension when reading and that translation of texts from English to Zulu equal comprehension. Thandi and Nonhle also shared the same belief that the teacher should read aloud for the learners and that reading is an important activity in one's life.

The row on 'other points highlighted' is what is different in their beliefs. Sipho seemed to have deeper beliefs than others. It was interesting to note that he was aware that a text might have a hidden meaning when he talked about 'reading between the lines'. The issue of understanding the author's perspective was also important. As mentioned in Chapters 2 and 4 that Kennedy (1984) is in favour of this aspect. He saw reading as something that binds two people (the author and the reader) together.

Thandi seemed to use reading as a tool for authority and power. As discussed in Chapter 2, how she interfered with Nonhle's lesson. This made me think that she was undermining her status of being a junior teacher. Thandi also believed that reading must be done every day. She emphasised that one must not go to sleep without reading something so that fluency and the love for books may increase.

Nonhle believed that reading is helpful and that pronunciation is the most important aspect of reading.



**Question: What methods do teachers say they use in the teaching of reading?**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sipho</b>	<b>Thandi</b>	<b>Nonhle</b>
<b>Pictures</b>	Using pictures	Talking about pictures	Use of pictures
<b>Reading Aloud</b>	—	Reading aloud by teacher to model pronunciation and punctuation.	Teacher reads and learners read after her.
<b>Other points highlighted</b>	Word recognition skills  Decoding skills  Word and picture matching	Learners read in turns	Whole class reading.

As can be seen from the table, all the participants said that they use pictures when teaching reading. Nonhle and Thandi agreed that the modelling of reading by the teacher is important. Thandi gave the reason that as the teacher reads, learners get a chance of hearing good pronunciation and punctuation.

Sipho pointed out the importance of teaching decoding skills whereby if learners are confronted by a difficult word they break it into its simplest parts. He also mentioned the importance of associating pictures with words. Learners can use pictures to guess what the word is. Thandi mentioned that in her class she asks learners to take turns in reading while she listens for correct pronunciation. Nonhle on the other hand said that in her class she allowed learners to read aloud as a whole class (chorus reading).

**Question: What methods do teachers actually use in the teaching of reading?**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sipho</b>	<b>Thandi</b>	<b>Nonhle</b>
<b>Phonics</b>	Phonic approach	Phonic approach	Phonic approach
<b>Syllables</b>	Syllabic approach	Syllabic approach	Syllabic approach
<b>Decoding words</b>	Decoding	—	Breaking words into letters and syllables
<b>Pictures</b>	Used pictures	Using pictures	Using pictures
<b>Reading aloud</b>	Reading aloud	Reading aloud	Reading aloud
<b>Other points highlighted</b>	Used word attack skills  Look and say  Word recognition skills	Alphabetic approach	—

The table above reflects what transpired from lesson observations. In teaching reading the three participants used almost the same methods. The phonics approach and the syllabic approach were the common methods used by all three participants. These methods form part of the bottom-up approaches that were described in Chapter 2. The use of pictures was also observed from all lessons. It was interesting to observe how differently the pictures were used. These differences have been described in Chapter 4. Sipho used the picture of a structure as to activate the

learners' background knowledge. Thandi used the picture of the rural and the urban school to generate discussion in her oral lesson while Nonhle used the poster with different pictures for classification. She asked learners to choose the modes of transport and write their names.

Reading aloud was also a common strategy used by all participants. In reading aloud, all of them aimed at modelling pronunciation. Siphso and Nonhle also helped learners to decode words that were unfamiliar to them. Siphso took it a step further by asking learners to sound out words that they could not read. He equipped his learners with word attack skills instead of keeping quiet when confronted with unfamiliar words. Siphso also encouraged his learners to use look and say especially with words that they come across with almost every day like in adverts. They need not decode these words but to read them as a whole. Thandi was different in the sense that she used the alphabetic approach which also forms part of the bottom-up approaches.

**Question: To what extent do what teachers say they do match what they actually do?**

Theme	Siphso	Thandi	Nonhle
	<p>Siphso's beliefs and practise matched in most cases.</p> <p>He used the learners' schemata when teaching.</p> <p>Comprehension was attended through a worksheet.</p>	<p>Thandi believed that reading must be a daily activity but in practice she does not provide any reading for learners to take home and read. She attributed this to the lack of books.</p>	<p>In Nonhle's case there is a mismatch in terms of her belief that comprehension should form part of reading. In all her lessons there were no activities to cater for comprehension. Instead she understood</p>

	<p>Horizontal dialogue amongst learners was observed though minimal. Vertical dialogue between teacher and learners was the common form observed.</p> <p>Learners were encouraged to break down the unfamiliar words into letters and syllables.</p> <p>Teacher modelled pronunciation by reading the text aloud while learners were following with their eyes.</p>	<p>Thandi was aware that it is possible to read without understanding what you are reading about yet no comprehension activities were done.</p> <p>She used pictures in almost all her lessons which is what she said during interviews.</p>	<p>comprehension as being able to translate from English to Zulu.</p> <p>As she mentioned during the interviews that the teacher must read aloud for the learners, this was observed during her lessons where she was mainly modelling pronunciation.</p> <p>The focus on pronunciation that was observed also supports the teacher's statement where she emphasised accuracy in pronunciation.</p>
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**Question: How do we account for the relation between their beliefs and practice in the teaching of reading?**

Modelling of reading through the constructivism encourages that the learner be assisted in order to work towards the ZPD. Through this reading aloud the learner is taken to being able to pronounce the words that s/he could not do on his/her own. This could be taken further by incorporating meaning making.

In teaching reading all the participants used the bottom – up approaches. One reason for this practice could be that they were teaching reading in the same way they were taught to read. It was mentioned in Chapter 2 that these approaches do not focus on meaning. Reading is more than “barking at print” (Lyster, 1992, p. 109). All the teachers learnt to read through the bottom-up approaches.

Sipho seemed to be different from the other participants. He had a better understanding of the reading process because he allowed his learners to have dialogue with the text. He used their background knowledge/schemata whereby learners make sense of the new information by associating it with what they already know thus assimilating into their existing knowledge. The difference that was observed in Sipho might be a result of him furthering his studies as mentioned in his background in Chapter 4.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

i) The present study revealed that there is a challenge of reading resources in this Adult Centre. The following suggestion might be useful in providing learners with something to read even when they are not at school:

Thandi is an HOD for Foundation Phase in the mainstream and also a manager in the centre. She might organise that they borrow books from the mainstream or they make copies of Chapters because they have access to the photocopying machine. It should be noted that the texts that appeal to children might not appeal to learners but the purpose in this case is for the adult learners to read every day

ii) It surfaced from this study that teachers did not have thorough understanding on the teaching of reading. The teachers at a foundational level should be assisted with the different reading methodologies. MILL (2010, p. 21 – 27) mentioned the following methods:

- Shared reading
- Reading Aloud

- Group Guided Reading
- Independent Reading

Teachers should be sensitive to the fact that their learners are of different abilities and they must also use different reading strategies.

iii) During English periods teachers should use English more than Zulu if they want their learners to speak and understand it. Language is acquired by being exposed to it. Teaching English in Zulu is hindering learners' progress.

iv) Teachers must work as a team when preparing their lessons. During the preparations they should share ideas and learn from each other. This will also prevent the situation whereby they correct each other in front of the learners.

v) Teachers must familiarise themselves with reading about recent approaches to reading and teach accordingly.

#### **5.4 Suggestions for further studies**

Similar studies should be conducted in other ABET Centres to get a broader picture about the beliefs and practices of teachers that teach reading to adults.

- The reading materials available for adult learners and teachers in this particular centre need to be explored further.
- The support that the DoE gives to teachers teaching in ABET Centres especially the ones who do not have a school qualification.
- The role that ABET Centre managers play in supporting their subordinates.

#### **5.5 Reflections on my own learning**

The process I spent in doing this research study was very beneficial to me. It was mentioned in Chapter 2 that the approach for this study was a case study. This is a systematic inquiry into an event or a set of related events which aims to describe and

explain the phenomenon of interest (Rule & John, 2011, p. 4). I have grown in the understanding of the process of reading. Though it was not an easy process, it was worth doing it.

The engagement I had with the participants was an eye opener for me. I have an experience of working with teachers of reading to children. I have never been exposed to formal adult classes. I learnt that teaching adults is totally different from teaching children. Adults come to classes with their own burdens that the teacher has to accommodate. Sometimes they come to class late or tired and one has to bear with them.

I thought that a local teacher would be more admired than teachers who are not from the same community as the learners. I learnt something different; Nonhle did not get that respect from the adult learners. She is younger than the learners. They did not see her as a teacher but as 'somebody's child' from the community. On the other hand Nonhle had a better understanding of the community than the other teachers.

Teaching in the adult centre at a rural context has also its own challenges. Learners do not come on time. Teachers had to wait about 30 minutes or more before learners arrived. Others said they were waiting for their children from school to come and look after their siblings. Time spent in class was not enough as they also wanted to leave early. They travelled long distances from their homes and when I did observations it was around winter time. It was getting dark early.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

In concluding this chapter I will highlight that, though this study focussed on the three teachers and one adult centre, the results may shed light into other ABET centres that operate under similar conditions. In Chapter 1 the statistics of illiteracy rates among adults were discussed; this study seeks to contribute in trying to fight illiteracy by providing insight into beliefs and practices regarding the teaching of reading. This study is a small focused contribution in a particular context but it does resonate with broader concerns. There was also a mention in Chapter 1 that the South African learners are performing badly in the International evaluations because they cannot

read and write. As the study explored the methods used in teaching reading to adults, it became obvious that the way reading is taught at this particular centre is not yielding the desired results. It is believed that if the recommendations can be followed, the reading levels will improve among the learners thus decreasing the illiteracy levels.



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## **Appendix 1**

### **Guidelines for teacher interviews before lesson observation**

#### **Background**

- Please tell me about your own schooling and how much you learnt to read.
- Tell me about your training as a teacher/ ABET teacher.
- Describe your life at the centre (history/ roles/ subjects taught etc.).

#### **Understanding and experiences of reading**

- What does reading mean to you? How do you understand reading as a process?
- What kinds of reading do you do and why?

#### **Teaching reading**

- Please describe to me a typical reading lesson (purpose, methods, materials, assessment).
- How do learners respond to reading?
- What problems do learners experience? What do you do about it?
- What challenges do you encounter as a teacher of reading?
- What do you believe is the best way of teaching reading?

## **Appendix 2**

### **Guidelines for teacher interviews after lesson observation**

- What were you aiming to teach your learners?
- What would you like them to have learned from the lesson?
- How does this lesson fit in with what your learners know already and need to know?
- What made you think that the learners were ready for this lesson?
- Pick up and explore particular methods of teaching seen in the class – why did you choose these methods?
- Did you want the learners to learn the same/different things? Why did you have/did you not have same aims for all the learners?
- How will you follow up this lesson?



## Appendix 3

### INFORMED CONSENT

DECLARATION OF INFORMED CONSENT OF TEACHERS  
RESEARCH ON EXPLORING THE TEACHING BELIEFS AND PRACTICES OF  
ABET TEACHERS OF READING

I .....  
(**Full name and surname of participant**) hereby confirm that I understand the nature of the research project. I agree to be part of the research project. I understand that in this project a voice recorder will be used during interviews and that photograph might be taken in my classroom during classroom observation. If photographs are taken they will be used for the research processes. I accept the assurance of the researcher that no harmful or disrespectful use will be made of the recordings and the photographs taken.

I understand that I can withdraw from the project at any time if I want to. I also understand that I will not be forced to give reasons for my withdrawal.

Signature of participant:.....  
Date:.....

## **Appendix 4**

### **Checklist for classroom observation**

#### **Type of classroom activities**

- Configuration of lesson (small group/ whole class)
- Major focus of lesson (handwriting/ speaking/ reading/ writing)
- Specific foci of reading activities (reading connected text/ comprehension skills/ comprehension strategies/ focus on lower level meaning/ focus on higher level meaning/ letter recognition strategies/ spelling)
- What material is used? (library book/ text book/ worksheets/ learners' writing/ conversation poster/ chalkboard)
- What does the teacher do? (model/ scaffold/ mark/ tell or give information/ lead discussion/ recite/ assess)
- What do the learners do? (read/ recite/ copy/ write/ listen/ discuss)

## Appendix 5



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1 August 2011

Mrs IN Nkosi (992241015)  
School of Education & Development  
Faculty of Education  
Edgewood Campus

Dear Mrs Nkosi

**PROTOCOL REFERENCE NUMBER: HSS/0661/011M**

**PROJECT TITLE: An exploration of the teaching beliefs and practices of ABET teachers of reading**

In response to your application dated 26 July 2011, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

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

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

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

Yours faithfully

Professor Steven Collings (Chair)  
HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

cc. Supervisor: Dr P Rule

cc. Ms T Mnisi, Faculty Research Office, Faculty of Education, Edgewood Campus



Founding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville