

**The role of the learning family in developing a reading  
culture among adults and children**

by

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## Declaration of own work

I, **Jeffrey Sipiwe Mkhize**, a registered student at the University of KwaZulu Natal, student number, 914367521, hereby declare that

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## **Dedication**

I would like to thank God the Almighty who gave me the courage, wisdom and the mind to carry out such an important assignment.

I would like to thank my ancestors: Ngithi thokozani mathonga: Nina bakaKhabazela kaMavovo.

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## **Abstract**

The study was conducted in the rural area of Mthwalo, just outside Pietermaritzburg. This area consists of a learning community which is made up of a Public Primary School where the same premises are used as a Public Adult Learning Centre for the community after school hours. This study focused on two children who were registered learners in the Public Primary School and their parents who were also registered learners in the Public Adult Learning Centre. These participants form the central context of this study which is the learning family.

This study was conducted in order to examine the role of the learning family in promoting the culture of reading as well as to explore how a learning family can enhance this reading culture to the benefit of the child, parent, school, home and the community. This study focused on family reading practices, assessing the reciprocity and the interrelationship between the parents and children as learners and as readers. The study investigated how children and parents as learners influence each other in developing the culture of reading.

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather the first set of data from both the parents and the children who were the participants in this study. Interviews then sought to elicit the views of the participants on the reciprocal value of the learning family and how the family literacy practices enhance and develop the reading practices. The second set of data was gathered through observation. Homes of the participants were visited to observe family literacy practices in the home environment focusing on how both the environment and the practices contribute to the development of the reading culture.

The findings of this study indicated that the learning family has huge educational benefits to all members of the family. Children are encouraged in their own learning by the parents' direct involvement in education as learners. The study proved that the learning family has educational reciprocal value to the benefit of both parents and

children. The study concluded that mothers have a significant role to play in promoting the culture of reading and developing habitual readers.

## **Acronyms and abbreviations**

ABET:	Adult Basic Education and Training
AET:	Adult Education and Training
AIDS:	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
COSATU:	Congress of South African Trade Unions
DFID:	Department for International Development
DJ:	Disc Jockey
GETC:	General Education and Training Certificate
HIV:	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
MDG:	Millennium Development Goals
MOI:	Medium of Instruction
NQF:	National Qualifications Framework
PALC:	Public Adult Learning Centre
POE:	Portfolio of Evidence
SANLI:	South African National Literacy Initiative
SBA:	Site Based Assessments
SMS:	Short Message System
TV:	Television

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# Chapter 1: Introduction to the study

## 1.1 Introduction

This research sought to investigate and explore how the reading culture can be developed and promoted within the context of the learning family and its extended family members. This research looked at the sharing of reading practices as well as the inheritance of reading to promote and develop a habitual reading culture. In this research I focused on family reading practices and the reciprocity between parents as adult learners at a Public Learning Centre and children as learners at a foundation level. Knafllic (2005) cites Basset-Grundy (2004) who describes a process of parent-child learning interactions as one of the most important steps amongst many in the process of reciprocating where children help motivate their parents in parental learning and vice versa.

There seems to be a generally accepted view amongst many authors that parents or caregivers are the first teachers and, most importantly, they agree that family literacy programmes can indeed provide opportunities for educational success for parents and children (Knafllic, 2005). Family literacy programmes can take at least one of the three forms as mentioned in Britto & Brooks-Gunn (2001), Handel (1999), Barton and Hamilton (2000) and Wasik et al. (2000) which are:

- the study of literacy in the family
- a set of interventions related to literacy development of young children, and
- a set of programs designed to enhance the literacy skills of more than one family member

This research touched at least in all three forms in one way or the other. I looked at the role of the learning family in developing a reading culture among adults who are parents and learners in the Public Adult Learning Centre as well as children at the foundation level in the school-based learning community of Mthwalo. Mthwalo is not the real name

of the area. Mthwalo is used to comply with the conditions on anonymity to protect the identity of the participants. I concur with the view which states that the success of a child at school depends on the relationship that exists between the family and the school, the child as a learner, and the school as the context in which learning takes place (Chall, Jacobs, & Baldwin, 1990). The relationship between the child and family still remains important. The family needs to take a supporting role because the school success begins at home (Auerbach, 1995). This study has been continually mindful of the claim made by Chall *et al.* (1990) which states that children from poor families generally have educational problems and tend to perform below norms in literacy assessments. This claim brings the debate closer to the South African context.

In this introduction I have included a brief historical outline of Mthwalo in order to adequately contextualize and frame this study within the realities of South African educational history. It will be an omission to attempt to discuss the challenges related to the reading culture in the South African context outside the historical, socio-political and cultural factors.

Reading levels amongst many South African learners across all levels of schooling are generally low because of a number of reasons. Reading levels amongst many South African learners across all levels of schooling are generally low. The Department of Education in its document called the National Reading Strategy (2008) takes the combating illiteracy as a national responsibility. The document on the national reading strategy enumerates challenges that for all citizens. In its preamble the document says:

South Africa has many challenges in promoting literacy. It is rare to find schools with well-used general libraries. Many homes have no books. Books in African languages are scarce, so children do not have the opportunity to read in their home language. Some classrooms have no books, and even those classes which do have sets of readers, often have them at the wrong level. Poor matric results are in part due to the low level of students skills. University students.....are not proficient in reading (p.4).

This study is mindful of the conditions listed the National Reading Strategy document: teaching challenges, and the language –in – education policy of 1997, the policy that is a problem because most schools do not ensure that learners at foundation phase learn in their mother tongue. It is the same language –in-education policy that, Mqwashu (2007) claims was taken as a political justification. In his study in on language in a postcolonial condition, he cautions readers that the language policy (multilingual policy) that recognises eleven official languages ambitious, because it comes with numerous challenges that could lead to low reading levels like the unqualified teachers, lack of teaching and learning materials, large class sizes, shortage of classrooms and desks.

Pretorius (2002) attributes low reading levels to the deleterious policies and practices of apartheid education which, in the view of the author, these policies are dysfunctional. Apartheid education has resulted in inferior education for the majority of black people in South Africa. Consequently, South Africa has many adults who cannot read and write. Functional illiteracy in South Africa is still growing. There are 1.2 billion poor people in the world and at least 1.2 billion people who cannot read and write (Department for International Development [DFID], 2002). The report goes to state that nine million of those are in South Africa. This figure is tantamount to what Sen (2003) terms “an educational catastrophe.” There is very little or no prescriptions that look specifically at illiteracy in the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) report, though goal two talks about achieving universal primary education, nothing is mentioned about education for adults.

Indeed apartheid fault lines in terms of policies and distribution of resources in schools still affect the children of the working class parents. The situation is even worse in instances where parents are unemployed and illiterate. Lyster (1992) further attests to the previous claim by Pretorius (2002), Mqwashu (2007), and National Reading Strategy (2008).

If family reading practices are not improved, then the claim raised in Pretorius (2002) which says that the gap between the skilled and the unskilled readers is widening will remain a problem. She concludes by saying that unless the reading problems of

students are addressed, the failure rates in education institutions will continue to rise. I would like to add that interventions aimed at improving reading practices should be made early at home before the child goes to school, i.e. before the foundation phase. It is true that what compounds the poor reading situation is the fact that many school-going learners as well as students at the institutions of higher learning "... come largely from an oral culture and reading is not perceived to be a meaningful leisure activity" (Pretorius, 2002, p.89). The same author raises another argument that a "... fundamental feature of academic underperformance in South Africa is poor reading ability. There is a strong correlation between reading proficiency and scholastic or academic success at all ages" (Pretorius, 2002, p.82).

The level of reading competency of parents and care givers has a direct impact on the reading skills of their children. It has been mentioned earlier in this section that challenges related to reading can be attributed to the country's adoption of a multilingual language policy. It can therefore be inferred the scarcity of books in African languages deprives African children the opportunity to read in their own language. Another inference that can be made is that poverty contributes to poor reading as well as the lack of adequate or appropriate reading materials. Willing parents fail in promoting and producing habitual readers in the face of unemployment, non availability of libraries and organized family literacy programmes that empower parents more especially mothers on how to read to their children and how to listen to their children read.

Rule and Lyster (2005) are of the view that family literacy cannot be pinned down to a specific definition because this concept depends on the context in which the term is used. It can mean literacy practices within families and can also mean those programmes which are designed to enhance the literacy skills of more than one family member. Rule and Lyster (2005) cite Morrow (1995) who describes family literacy as what "... encompasses the ways parents, children and extended family members use literacy at home and in their community" (p.7). Sokhulu (2005) adds that there is "... the need for adult participants to enhance their own literacies whilst providing an environment, which enhances the literacies of their own children" (p.4).

“Reading culture” is a combination of two independent terms “reading” and “culture.” Rose (2004) defines reading as a process that “... involves independently recognizing and interpreting meanings in the light of one’s existing knowledge of a field , and being able to predict how these can be applied” (p.96). This, however, cannot emerge spontaneously but is acquired through experience over an extended period, which requires continuous practice and repetition. Rose (2004) highlights the benefits of early reading by saying, “The ability to produce written discourse emerges from a learner’s experience of reading” (p. 96). Culture can be inherited and can be learned; therefore, it can be inferred that culture can be transferred from one generation to the other. In the light of the above, reading culture can be learnt, shared and transferred. It is safe to add that it can happen in the home environment where most of cultural transfer takes place with the full participation and engagement of all members of the family.

Gadsden (2004) adds another very important dimension of other culturally focused programs. Gadsden mentions the use of family stories, where scripts with family stories have been developed with parents, children as well as extended family members. These scripts are about family stories. The major benefit of these family stories is that are made of family photographs and text is created which can be used from reading. This strategy is called fusing cultural and linguistic features of the lives of families to understand both features within the context of English-language literacy that they are learning (p.415). I can argue that English as a language is prescriptive in Gadsden’s context, this study would promote the dominant language in the family or home. The result of learning can still be the same. Gadsden claim assumes that all families are competent speakers and or users of English.

Another perspective on the effects of illiteracy is described by Chall *et al.* (1990) who report that the family background is the greatest contributing factor in children’s academic development in general and school achievement in particular. Anderson and Morrison (2007) also suggest that there is credibility in “research that suggests that children from non-mainstream homes and communities tend not to do as well in literacy and in schooling in general because of a lack of shared understanding between home

and school” (p.71). There have been various attempts in South Africa over the years to redress the illiteracy challenges. In South Africa there was history that was marred by extremely complicated and complex relationship between politics and adult education. This episode of history provides the foundation and the relevance of adult education as a programme of government upon which this piece of research is founded. I have chosen to investigate the role played by parents in promoting the culture of reading in their children. These parents are learners in a Public Adult Learning Centre. One of the reasons that these parents had to re-enter the schooling system is that the apartheid education system failed them and thus made it difficult for them to participate successfully in the current economic system which demands literate and skilled workers. The following paragraph briefly outlines some government initiatives or programmes that have tried to address the issue of illiteracy. I have singled out literacy programmes to deal specifically with creating a reading and a writing nation or citizenry. Reading is the primary focus of this research.

There have been numerous literacy initiatives, programmes and interventions aimed at improving Adult literacy in South Africa which according to Aitchison (2003) dates back to the early 1960’s. The South African National Literacy Initiative (SANLI) was announced in 1999 by the then National Minister of Education, Professor Kader Asmal. This initiative was aimed at breaking the back of illiteracy. The initiative had the following objectives as outlined in (Aitchison, 2003, p.162):

- Mobilizing voluntary services in support of a nationwide literacy initiative
- Developing training programmes and support for volunteer educators
- Designing, developing and procuring reading and resource materials
- Setting-up local literacy units responsible for running the initiative at local level
- Establishing institutional capacity to support, monitor and evaluate the project.

There have been additional literacy initiatives which have had similar objectives and planning, such as the Molteno institute literacy campaign, Masifundisane Literacy Campaign in 2007, which was the project of the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Government,

and the Kha Ri Gude National Literacy campaign in 2008. Central to all these initiatives is to redress the socio-political history of South Africa's apartheid regime, which was surely beyond reach of a couple literacy campaigns. The second aim was to teach citizens to read, write and count. The basic assumption made by the various campaigns is that reading and writing can create an educated citizenry that can contribute to the upliftment of communities in general. Pretorius (2002) correctly contextualizes the argument by stating that "The ability to construct meaning during reading, to access written information independently, to acquire, to consolidate and utilize knowledge from print information is a strong determinant of academic success" (p.79). It is this strong determinant of academic success that this inquiry aims to research, the independent acquisition and use of information from print within a family unit setting.

This study sought to determine the competency that these parents have to support their children in developing and in cultivating the culture of reading. The level of reading competency of parents and caregivers has a direct impact on the reading skills of their children. This study discusses how poverty and other social factors like unemployment, homelessness, sicknesses contribute towards the lack of reading ability and the lack of reading material. It also explores how willing parents fail to promote and produce habitual readers in the face of unemployment, and non-availability of libraries and organized programmes that empower parents, more especially mothers, as to how to read to their children and how to listen to their children read in the home environment as a family, and not necessarily just responding to the demands of the school homework as is the case in many homes.

## **1.2 Background**

The study was conducted at the Mthwalo area outside Pietermaritzburg. Mthwalo is a rural area in the shadow of Pietermaritzburg's Table Mountain. This area was known in the 1990s as a haven of peace in a region in turmoil under the Chieftainship of Inkosi Bhekabakubo Mkhokheli (not the Chief's real name) who was later gunned down in his homestead due to political violence that eventually engulfed that same area. There were

many casualties of this political violence: churches closed down, schools burnt down and people were killed, resulting in many challenges in the area like unemployment, drop outs from school, poverty, etc. The culture of learning was affected in the process. This study was located in a school in the area which has a foundation phase that caters for school going children up to grade seven. It is the same school which is used as the Public Adult Learning Centre that caters for adults who are engaged in the Adult Education and Training (AET) programme from AET level one up to AET level four.

I have chosen to interview AET learners who are parents of children in the foundation phase. The reason was to investigate whether the parents' enrolment as a learner has any benefits to the children's development of the reading culture. I sought to investigate, further, the role played by parents in promoting the culture of reading among their children and extended family. In order for parents or caregivers to give meaningful support to their children's reading development and to their own, one would argue that parents and caregivers need to have a certain level of reading competency. One can then infer that it is that level of competency in reading that should enhance and encourage parents to value literacy and promote positive attitudes towards reading in their children (Auerbach, 1995), noting that many competent readers do not.

### **1.3 Rationale and motivation for study**

There is not enough literature that informs the public about the learning family, where both the parents and their children are registered learners in an institution of learning. The literature that has been read seems to capture or discuss the concept of a family learning in the context of family life and as a family literacy practice, where family literacy is understood as the social organization of a particular family life, a set of interventions related to literacy development of young children, and as a set of programs designed to enhance the literacy skills of more than one family member (Britto & Brooks-Gunn, 2001; Handel, 1999; Wasik et al., 2000). Much has been said about family literacy where the parent is not necessarily learners in an institution of learning, but a stand-alone partner in the literacy and educational practices in the home.

This study was undertaken to determine whether there is a reciprocal value that contributes to promoting a reading culture in a learning family. This study hopes to contribute to the body of knowledge of family literacy by looking at another new dimension of the learning family.

The purpose of this study was, firstly, to examine the role played by parents in promoting the reading culture in their children. Secondly, it is to explore how a learning family can enhance this reading culture ultimately for the benefit of the child, the school, the home and the community.

The study focused on family reading practices. These reading practices were part of an assessment of the reciprocity and the interrelationship between the parents and children as learners and as readers. In this study the parents and learners are referred to as a learning family. The parents were enrolled in the literacy classes and the children were enrolled as learners at the foundation phase level in a school-based learning community at Mthwalo. The study hoped to establish how the learning family enhances the development of reading skills and comprehension of their children in the quest for developing a long lasting culture of reading.

#### **1.4 Main research questions**

In this study I gathered data from both the foundation phase learners and adult learners. These young learners were children of parents who are also registered learners in the Public Adult Learning Centre. This study looked at the family literacy practices in the context of developing and promoting the culture of reading in learning families. Parents or caregivers are agents in this cultural transmission as well as supporting agents in the practice. The following three primary questions formed the basis of all the interview sessions. These questions were asked and there were secondary questions that emerged during the actual interview processes that were informed by the manner in which the participants responded and further accommodated the emotions and the moods of the interviewees at the time of interviews and during the home visits.

- 1.1 What are the perceived benefits to parents or caregivers and children of developing a reading culture within the context of a learning family unit?
- 1.2 What is the role played by parents or caregivers in promoting a reading culture?
- 1.3 What competencies do these parents have to support their children in developing or cultivating the culture of reading?

## **1.5 Research Methodology**

This research formed part of a cohort study made up of four other fellow students who also pursued the same field of study. Each member of the group looked at a specific area that relates to the promotion of the culture of reading. All the other studies which were conducted by the other members of the cohort were in the same school-based learning community of Mthwalo as defined in the preceding paragraphs. It is vital to outline in point form what other cohort members investigated:

- Materials used to teach and develop the culture of reading
- Methods used to teach reading
- How reading is assessed
- The relationship between the school and the parents.

In this particular inquiry, as I have noted earlier, I looked at the role of the learning family in developing the culture of reading. According to Professor S.B. Merriam during her lectures at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (personal communication, 2010), research is defined as a systematic investigation to increase knowledge and/or understanding of the phenomenon. This particular study aimed to acquire knowledge and increase the understanding about developing the culture of reading in the learning community of Mthwalo.

In this study I adopted an interpretivist research paradigm, in which cultures can be understood by studying what people think about their ideas and meanings that are important to them. The interpretive or constructivist paradigm has a clear purpose

which is to understand, describe and interpret the phenomenon. This study, at this stage, did not hope to predict, control and generalize as the positivist or post-positivist researcher would aim to do. Neither did this study aim to directly emancipate, empower or change the phenomenon as the critical epistemological perspective would dictate; nor did it try to deconstruct and problematize as the postmodern perspective would do.

Case studies are a common way to do a qualitative research. Professor S.B. Merriam (personal communication, 2010) describes the case study as an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system. The bounded system in this study consisted of two parents and a child each herein defined as the learning family, the single entities. The study was conducted within the set boundaries of the school and the home, as well as the Mthwalo area in general. There are other types of case studies that study history or development, or which are evaluative, multi-case and embedded. While each of the four types of case studies listed have value in different settings and for different reasons, I have opted for a descriptive case study which aims to provide a detailed account of the unit under study, which is the learning family.

Professor S.B. Merriam (personal communication, 2010) cites Van Maanen (1979) who describes qualitative research as an "... umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world." I opted for a qualitative approach because that allowed for the systematic collection, organization, and interpretation of textual data derived from talk and observation. I personally collected data, which is one the characteristics of qualitative research inquiry. Within the quantitative research approach the researcher frequently makes use of a survey, which detaches the inquirer from the participants. The qualitative research inquiry, however, allowed for a closer encounter and interaction between the participants and the researcher. In the quantitative enquiry approach, participants are referred to as respondents. The term respondents signals distance or remoteness between two equal and important partners in the research process. The qualitative approach is suitable for the exploration of the meanings of the

social phenomena as experienced by individuals themselves, looking at a wide variety of factors like economic, political and social settings.

One distinct characteristic of the qualitative research design is a small non-random sample. The sample selection was purposeful. The major or primary sources of information were, firstly, the two parents or caregivers who were enrolled in the Public Adult Learning Centre at Mthwalo as learners in an AET class and, secondly, the two children who were selected for this study were those that were children of the enrolled parents or caregivers at the Public Adult Learning Centre at Mthwalo. The reason for this was to explore how the two sets of participants, the learning parents and the learning children, enhance or complement each other in reading and how the reading culture is developed and promoted. Thirdly, the Learning Family which was made up of the children and parents that I have briefly described above. Finally, an observation was done at the homes of these families where the children and the parents or caregivers spend a lot of their time to interact as a family, and as a learning family. I looked at whether the home environment allowed for set family reading practices. The methods of data collection were, in the main, in-depth interviews and observation. I will be dealing with this section in more detail in chapter three of this dissertation.

## **1.6 Methodological limitations and boundaries**

Though the study managed to reach its aims and objectives, there were limitations that were unavoidable. The study was limited to the Mthwalo area with specific reference to two learners at Mthwalo Primary School as well as the two learners who are parents to the same children. These parents were registered learners as well in a Public Adult Learning Centre (in this study I called this Public Adult Learning Centre uMbikowesizwe (the message of the nation) which is not the real name. This was a very small sample in terms of the area and the participants. In order to generalize results from this study would require a larger sample. The major objective was to focus on the family reading practices of the two learning family in a rural area.

The study covered the reciprocity that enhances and develops the culture of reading within the family and the extended family members, based on the fact that both the parent and the child were registered learners in a public education institution and the participants were limited to two families. These were the main similar considerations that were taken into account. The study was limited to these two learners and their two parents who are in the foundation phase of their learning.

The first limitation was that the participants were females and as a male researcher it was not appropriate to conduct interviews in a private place. I conducted all interviews during the school hours at the primary school where the children were enrolled. This may have created an uneasy environment for participants to be free as opposed to being interviewed in the comfort of their homes. The second limitation was that home observations had to be limited to one home visit per family and I had to be accompanied by a female educator from the same learning environment or community of the Mthwalo area. This may have impacted negatively because one home visit may not have been enough to really understand the family practices. Thirdly, the women were married and their husbands were also not at home during the time in which the observation schedule was set. It is disrespectful and unethical to enter a man's house as an unknown male and talk to women and children in the absence of the man of the house. Men in both families do not stay at home during the course of the week. They stay temporarily in the city closer to the workplaces; consequently, the number of home visits had to be limited to one visit per family. The impact of the visibility of the school teacher during the observation period or home visits was another limitation. This may have affected the participant's freedom of participation. It therefore became important that, as a researcher, I sought assistance from a member of the opposite gender who is in good standing in the community to neutralize the situation during home visits in the research process.

## 1.7 Conclusion

This chapter has stated that the objective of this study was to focus on the family reading practices of a learning family as well as the role played by parents in developing and enhancing the culture of reading. It has been mentioned in the introductory paragraph that the success of a child at school depends on the relationship that exists between the family and the school, on the child as a learner and on the school as the context in which learning takes place. This study covered the home and the extended family as another site of learning hence the study also investigated the reciprocity between the children as learners and the parents as learners as well. The study managed to determine the interrelationship that enhanced and developed the culture of reading within the family and the extended family members.

Given the history and the background of the Mthwalo area, there is a strong correlation between this area and poverty. This chapter also noted the government efforts to redress the education system by providing programmes that are aimed at producing an educated and functionally literate citizenry. Thus the claim by Pretorius (2002), Anderson and Morrison (2007) that children from poor families have educational problems and tend to perform below norms in literacy assessment cannot be left unattended. I have outlined in this introductory chapter and I will elaborate in the subsequent paragraphs that culture can be inherited and can be learned, therefore, it can be inferred that culture can be transferred from one generation to the other within a home and the community, including the school, through the full participation of all involved. The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of the learning family in developing a reading culture among adults and children.

The next chapters will look at the following: chapter two will discuss the literature focusing on what other authors say about home literacy practices. This chapter will also look at what has been studied in the same field. In more detail I will highlight how this study hopes to contribute to the body of knowledge in this sphere. There are gaps in

other research studies that will also be identified. The second chapter will also discuss in detail why this study is important.

Chapter three will discuss the research design and methodology. The third chapter will present the research paradigm within which this research is framed. There will also be an in-depth discussion of the research style employed, sources of information, sampling, methods of data collection, the limitations of the study and data analysis techniques. The third chapter will conclude by discussing how validity and reliability were ensured.

Chapter four will focus on the presentation of the findings. The fourth chapter will begin with a short overview and thereafter present the findings in a tabular form using subheadings with supporting quotes from interviewees.

Chapter five will be the in-depth discussion of the data. In this chapter I will make meaning of the data making specific reference to surprises and new insights. In this final chapter I will relate the data to the literature which was reviewed in chapters one and two. This final chapter will also position the same data in the knowledge base, stating how this study has contributed to the body of knowledge and the implications for practice. I will also conclude by making recommendations for future research.

## Chapter 2: Literature review

### 2.1 Introduction

This literature review will look at some crucial issues around the enhancement and development of a reading culture with specific reference to the learning family as previously articulated in the preceding chapter. The review of literature will focus primarily on these themes: family literacy, connection between school and home, family learning programmes, the role of adults in children's education, family learning programmes, family reading, promoting the culture of reading in families and family literacy practices. It will conclude by discussing the theoretical and conceptual framework that underpins this study. This focus is congruent with the key research questions which I have reiterated hereunder:

- What are the perceived benefits to parents or caregivers and children as a learning family through the development of a reading culture?
- What is the role played by parents or caregivers in promoting the reading culture?
- What competency do these parents have to support their children in developing or cultivating the culture of reading?

To further outline this section I have drawn from the research that has been previously conducted by Desmond (2004), Sokhulu (2005), Pretorius (2002) and others. I have drawn mainly from what has been recommended and I have gathered information that bears special significance and relevance to this particular study. As I deal with literature in this chapter, I am guided by the main research questions which have been outlined in the preceding paragraph as well as by the purpose of this study which is twofold: firstly, to examine the role played by parents or caregivers in promoting the reading culture in their homes in general and amongst children in particular. Secondly, to explore how a learning family can enhance the reading culture at school, home and the community level.

A general view of the reading challenges, academic success, students' performance, illiteracy rates and poor reading abilities in the South African historical context will also be outlined. This is done to bring forth the view from which the deteriorating or non-existing reading culture emanates. This general view is of paramount importance for this study. In the South African context there are challenges that are compounded by some deep-rooted issues that are part of the education system pre-1994 and beyond. Mqgqwashu (2007) attributes the challenges related to reading to the country's adoption of the multilingual language policy which Mqgqwashu (2007) relates to as the "... political symbolism to mark the shift from apartheid to post apartheid society" (Mqgqwashu, 2007, p.55). This means that changing educational policies was meant to achieve political intentions rather than deal with educational issues.

Subsequent to the claim in Mqgqwashu (2007), there are at least two views. The first view is that the majority of South African schools use English as a medium of instruction irrespective of their geographical location. The second one is that the people who live in rural areas are mainly exposed to a spoken African language as a mother-tongue. If we are to encourage sound family literacy practices that will encourage a culture of reading, are we encouraging the culture of reading in English which is the language that children, teachers, parents use very rarely outside the classroom? Or do we want to encourage reading in the first language that is, for an example, isiZulu, which is used widely outside the classroom but does not have a major impact in the classroom situation where learners are taught, examined and assessed for progression into the next grade. I have used isiZulu as an example because this particular study was conducted in KwaZulu Natal, where isiZulu is widely used as the first language most particularly in rural areas where Mthwalo is also situated.

## **2.2 The role of adults in children's education**

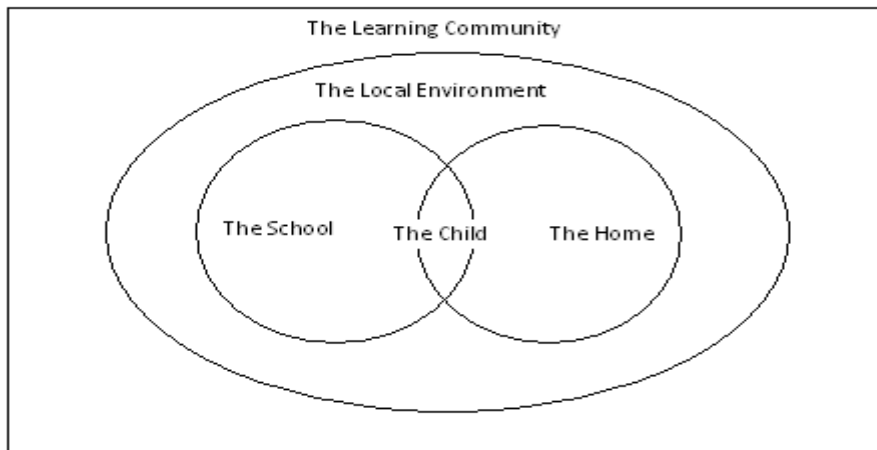
There seems to be a generally accepted view amongst many authors that parents are the first teachers and most importantly they agree that family literacy programmes can indeed provide opportunities for educational success for parents and children (Knafllic, 2005). This particular section of the study looks not at any adult but focuses on adults as caregivers of children in school and of children's schooling or learning. Desmond (2006) claims that children learn from those around them, and this claim is in line with the findings of the research conducted by Cairney and Langbien (1989) which illustrated that early literacy experiences of children are deeply embedded in the social relationships that children experience at home and at school. These findings further illustrate that language is socially situated.

Anderson and Morrison (2007) encourage parental participation in empowerment programs that support children's learning. There is evidence produced in Anderson and Morrison's study which suggests that non-formal education programmes aimed to improve parental involvement in children's learning are valuable to both parents and children. The role of women in society varies from simple household chores to active participation in economy and leadership. This is central to the social learning theory regarding which Merriam and Caffarella (1991) state that it "... posits that people learn from observing other people, by definition, such observations take place in a social setting" (p.134). It can also be learnt from Lave and Wenger (1991) in their discussion of the communities of practice that parents or caregivers have the potential to develop a community of readers and writers. The response on the "how" part of this development is further articulated by Aitchison (2003) who looks at adult education as a means to attack the previously created social disadvantages, the racial segregation policies and the apartheid policies. Aitchison (2003) discusses the social disadvantages associated to non-provisioning of education to deserving citizens. In order to attack the social disadvantages there have to be particular programmes aimed at adults (as defined within the context of this study), which may include amongst many literacy programmes and family learning programmes, as well as the community health programmes, to

mentioned just a few. Schools still remain primarily the sites for social construction and important institutional mechanisms of production and maintenance for the social change. Desmond (2004) contends that children learn from those around them. They make sense of the world by watching those around them which Lave and Wenger (1991) describe as the legitimate peripheral participation which takes the sharing of information and experiences as a central element to members of the group as they learn from each other. Desmond's contention holds substance in view of the fact that children spend all their schooling years surrounded by family and extended family members; also they return home from school and spend more time with parents and members of the community at large.

The logical conclusion that can be drawn from the preceding discussion is that most of the child's education is influenced mainly by the members of the family, siblings and extended family members, as most of the learning occurs in rich social contexts fuelled by the extension of their relationship with others. It has been alluded to in the first chapter that the success of a child at school depends on the relationship that exists between the family and the school, on the child as a learner and on the school as the context in which learning takes place (Chall *et al.*, 1990). It can now be inferred that the role of adults, therefore, is to provide a caring environment that enables the child to perform educational functions as well as support, mentor, monitor and encourage the education of the child. It then becomes imperative for both the parents and the educators to know, understand and maintain a healthy connection between the school and the home so as effectively to nurture, promote and enhance the educational development, learning and growth of the child. The following drawing attempts to demonstrate the connections amongst the home, school, environment and the community as significant contexts within which the child grows, learns and develops.

**Table: 1 Diagrammatic representation of the surrounding factors that contribute to the development of the child**



### **2.3 Connection between school and home**

This section of literature review attempts to suggest links in the circle where the school and the home work on assumptions, expectations, and speculations in an attempt to teach the child and enable the child to grow. Numerous theorists, researchers and writers like Vygotsky (1962), (1978), Bruner (1982), Auerbach (1989), (1995), Lave and Wenger (1991) and Pretorius (2002) all discuss, write and theorize about the gap between what a learner has already mastered (the actual level of development) and what he or she can achieve when provided with educational support (potential development) within a given social setting or environment. Based on what the latter theorists have claimed about and argued on the zone of proximal development as well as the communities of practice, one can claim that it would be naïve to dispute the fact that there is a formal partnership between the school as a site of social construction or as an institution of learning and the home as a site of cultural practice and nurturing.

Families send children to school with the hope that their children will become learners and subsequently will develop into full and participating citizens (Pretorius, 2002). On the other hand, at the end of the school day the school will send the children back to their families hopefully with the assumption that the families will provide the support which children need to grow and learn. The school and the home, therefore, are the two most important worlds in the child's growth and development. It takes the two institutions, the home and the school, to connect consciously with the aim of assisting the child to grow and develop to his or her full potential. It is upon the same premise that the family needs to take a major supporting role because school success begins at home (Auerbach, 1995). However, one needs to be consistently mindful of the family composition, economic status and educational background, as well as its location in various economic, educational, social and political settings which has a bearing on better participation in societal programmes including school. These will determine the extent and type of support that can be given to the child's academic development.

Clark (1983) claims that the family's role in children's achievements in school and in life has in the poor American households been aligned to the household composition. Other studies allude to the fact that two parent intact families have a positive effect on the child's school performance, citing negative effects caused by one/single parent or broken families. It is also interesting to note that in South Africa there is an emerging type of family unit: the-child-headed-families which come as result of the death of the parents mainly because of the scourge of HIV/AIDS. It is interesting to note that Clark (1983) claims that it is not just family composition but the overall quality of the family's lifestyle that determines whether or not the children are well prepared for academically competent performance in the school environment. This means that Clark's contention is based on the parents' disposition and interpersonal relationships with the child in the home. There is a role played by home experiences in pupils' preparation for school learning. This further confirms other claims made by various authors over the years that families are the first educators as stated in Chall, Jacobs, and Baldwin (1990), Auerbach (1995) and Desmond (2006). It is worth noting that there are other

contributing factors that have an influence on the home like the social class, geographic location, educational background, income and race background of parents and families. This study focused on rural families, where there are parents with a low educational background where learner achievement is challenged in the face of acute poverty.

Lyster (1992) claims that a strong correlation between poverty and illiteracy exists and this claim is further supported by Adiseshiah (1990) who also argues that:

There is a close connection between illiteracy and poverty at all levels--global, national, and sub- national; the countries with the lowest levels of literacy are also the poorest economically. Poverty breeds illiteracy by forcing children to drop out of school to work, and these illiterate people are forced to stay on the lowest levels of the work force and thus remain in poverty. Thus illiteracy in turn reinforces poverty, and poverty is cyclical in families. Women and girls are especially vulnerable to the cycle. In order to break the cycle of illiteracy, a multipronged program against poverty must be carried out. (p.45)

Whilst studies may share common views on issues of family composition, educational background of families, issues of poverty, and social and race class, there are other factors that still need further discussion and study. Illiteracy, in all likelihood, can be transferrable and recurring. Chall, Jacobs, and Baldwin (1990) state that the family background is the greatest contributing factor in children's academic development in general and school achievement in particular.

Consensus needs to be reached by both the school and the home that the parents and/or caregivers and the educators in schools have a shared responsibility in children's success in the world of learning and that the linkages of such success should be promoted and facilitated by both parties. It will be naïve of me in this research to assume that such a responsibility can only be assumed by parents who have low levels of education. It is true that the general view shared by Sokhulu (2005) is that the educational background of parents has a larger impact on this responsibility than the partnership between the school and the home. Parents are expected by teachers to

carry out school-like activities in the home regardless of their levels of education. In the same vein, Auerbach (1995) cites Simich-Dudgeon (1987) who argues that “Parents with limited English proficiency must become their children’s tutors, performing structured academic activities that reinforce schoolwork” (p. 13). The schools in South Africa teach more than one language, you find that most parents struggle to cope with reinforcing what was taught in school in both languages. One may further extend Simich-Dudgeons argument to say that schools have an assumption that parents know what to do when it comes to performing structured academic activities. Schools further have other assumptions that all homes are conducive to teaching and learning with resources that are needed to learn.

## **2.4 Family literacy**

The term ‘family literacy’ is used in several ways. Morrow (1995) concedes that ‘family literacy’ as term does not have a clear definition. Many authors have attempted to pin down the term into a specific definition:

- (1) the study of literacy in the family,
- (2) a set of interventions related to literacy development of young children, and
- (3) a set of programmes designed to enhance the literacy skills of more than one family member as claimed in Britto and Brooks-Gunn (2001), Handel, (1999) and Wasik *et al.* (2000).

In this study I have preferred to look at family literacy within the broader context of literacy as a field of study. Literacy as a field of study can mean different things to different people. Lyster (1992) cautions practitioners that the definitions of literacy are not merely academic exercises. She further contends that definitions of literacy

profoundly affect and reflect our perceptions of literate and illiterate individuals and societies, and that we need to examine literacy in relation to its social functions.

This study has looked at the ways in which the learning family influences children's opportunities for reading through reading practices in the home environment. Rule and Lyster (2005) are of the view that the concept of family literacy cannot be pinned down to a specific definition because, as has been stated earlier in this section, this concept depends on the context in which the term is used. Family literacy can mean literacy practices within families and can also mean those programmes which are designed to enhance the literacy skills of more than one family member. Auerbach (1989), (1995), Jordan and Snow (2000) are of the view that similar or such practices can become a very valuable resource for the success, development and progress in school for any member of the actively practicing family. This claim includes children, parents and members of extended family as learners.

Taylor (1983) uses the term 'family literacy' to refer to literacy practices within families as well as to an inter-generational educational programme that promotes the development of literacy and related life skills between the young and the old. These life skills may include family religious practices like the reading of the Bible in Christian families or the Quran in Muslim communities. Taylor (1983) further uses the term 'family literacy' to describe the rich and diverse uses of literacy within homes and communities, mainly affluent communities, where reading of books is very common. Rule and Lyster (2005) cite Morrow (1995) who describes family literacy as what "...encompasses the ways parents, children and extended family members use literacy at home and in their community" (p. 7). This could include writing letters, sending of a short message by cellular phone (SMS), writing the grocery list, homework sessions, television games and many other practices. The above definition by Morrow (1995) is in line with the views that literacy is a social practice and hence the theory of family literacy goes beyond

what Street (1985) - and reiterated by Lyster (1992) too - claims as an autonomous model of literacy where it is clearly stated that:

People who operate on the basis of the autonomous model tend to see literacy as a technology which can be used to achieve certain instrumental ends. In South Africa, this model underlies a lot of literacy work in industry and commerce, state adult education centres (night schools), state development initiatives (like those of the Department of Health and Population Development), and conservative church work . (p. 20)

The above perspective understands literacy as a technical skill with major emphasis on reading and writing. The meaning of family literacy as outlined in Rule and Lyster (2005) assumes a more ideological model because Lyster (1992) argues that:

People who operate from what Street calls the ideological model, assume that the meaning of literacy depends on the social institutions in which it is embedded, that is, how and why it is used in particular contexts. They see the provision of literacy as ideological; how and what is taught reflects the social structure and relations of power within a society. They understand that all education is a form of social control and that it cannot be neutral even when it purports to be. They see the so-called consequences of literacy as not necessarily being caused by literacy per se, and see literacy and orality as merging and overlapping in all societies. In South Africa this model underlies most literacy work in progressive trade unions and community organizations. (p. 20)

From Street's ideological model one can infer that families can influence children's opportunities for emerging into literacy, meaning that a family has an influence on children's literacy. In this instance it could be from simple to complex literacy events and activities which may look at reading and discussion of the school sports notice, the invitation to the community meeting, reading and weather prediction listening to radio and maybe watching television to decide on the suitable clothing to be worn the next

day or preparation for the next sports day at school. Other literacy activities could be a manual for connecting a music system, the do it yourself manual to assemble a television stand or a bicycle.

In view of literature that views homes as sites of social construction, Christie and Roskos (2009) also supports research that agree that the social environment has an impact on play-literacy connections. Parents, as mentors in home learning need to be empowered on how to provide settings that can promote literacy activities, skills and strategies. Johnson (2010) provides uses of literacy within the family setting which the families that he studied used to build relationships with one another. One of the two families in this study has hesitantly mentioned the Bible and the hymn book (which as a researcher I also observed) as print material in the home. One of the families that I observed in this study was busy looking at a grocery list from a local cash and carry. Johnson (2010) says these are multiple uses of literacy that defines the literacy culture of a family. Johnson (2010) puts the uses of literacy into seven categories:

1. Educational
2. Financial
3. Instrumental
4. Interactional
5. News-related
6. Recreational
7. Spiritual

The mutually beneficial reciprocity that this study investigated ties closely with uses of literacy listed above. This study had much emphasis on the educational uses of literacy, looking at promoting the culture of reading. However, it emerged that all categories of literacy uses have been evident in both families.

In this section I have included a list of family practices and literacy practices that are applicable to a traditional, rural and Zulu family. This shows areas of discussion that emulate inter-generational educational practices within the family. In most cases these literacy practices are oral in nature in most rural black South African families. Children who live in 'reading homes' are most likely to become readers themselves. This can be attributed to the fact that if families offer a context for literacy learning then the child or the young adult will become a member of a reading family which subscribes to the benefits of reading as part of the family rules, culture and morals. This aspect regarding legitimate peripheral participation is discussed in more detail in the section in this chapter describing the theoretical framework.

The preceding paragraphs have attempted to discuss literacy within the context of this study. This paragraph will discuss the family as another component in family literacy. Families or homes should offer apprenticeship in reading. Sokhulu (2005) claims that: "There is the need for adult participants to enhance their own literacies whilst providing an environment which enhances the literacies of their own children" (p. 4). It has been stated in this study in point 2.3 that the school, the environment and the home play a significant role in the educational growth and development of the child. This study looks precisely at the reciprocal nature between parents as learners and children as learners, where both are engaged in formal schooling. The education of children in schools and in the homes as well as the education of adults in public adult learning centres should not be treated as two separate fields for they are intertwined. This research has attempted to bring the two spheres of learning together into the home or family environment to see the extent to which the culture of reading can be enhanced or developed as the foundation for lifelong learning, to achieve this, families need to engage in a set of fixed learning programmes. The previous statement does not in any way suggest that non-formal and informal learning should be abandoned.

## 2.5 Family learning programmes

It is mentioned in the preceding paragraphs and elsewhere in this study that family members - mothers, fathers and other extended family members - are their children's first educators as Morrow (1995) claims. It has also been stated that the home learning environment has a beneficial impact on children's learning, growth, development and school success Clark (1983). This section will attempt to answer the following four questions:

- What do families do to simulate schooling in terms of teaching and preparing the child for adulthood?
- Are there programmes that families engage in?
- Is there any form of conscious engagement in those programmes?
- Are there planned daily family learning activities?

In attempting to contextualize the concept of a learning family, this study has looked at the family learning programmes as activities in which the members of the family engage, in the comfort of their familiar home environment, where there is the conscious transfer of skills, knowledge and information in either oral or written form or through play. Adult family members, more especially parents who are directly involved in the upbringing of their children, know their children well. These parents are in a good position to contribute positively to the educational and social growth and development of their children.

It is through organized family learning programmes, informal and non-formal learning programmes that parents can capitalize on or tap into this advantage of knowing their children in a home environment, a situation with which they are familiar. This advantage is sufficient to boost the confidence of the parents in supporting their children's learning.

Family learning programmes take place during family learning. Family learning can be seen as set of activities, events or practices where the family learns together.

Christie and Roskos (2009) refer to Vygotskian theory that focuses attention on the role of adults (and peers) in acquiring social literacy practices during play. In view of the challenges that these learning families face like: lack of appropriate literacy material, the use of play in acquiring literacy skills could provide a viable option. There are traditional or indigenous games which could provide literacy skills, Mlabalaba as an example. Mlabalaba is a board game that can be played by two or more people, it can be home-made and does not cost money, and it can teach numeracy skills and can improve reasoning, logic, and prediction. There are other games like the playing cards, monopoly and puzzles. These can extend literacy acquisition beyond the use of books and Newspapers. This study found that Newspaper is the most used print material in both families. The reason is that it is obtainable free of charge. This is in line with what Johnson (2010) categorize as a News-Related use of literacy.

Evidence of stories read from the newspapers were mentioned in the findings of this study, like the post advertisement, Radio uKhozi DJ, story and the winners of the business competition. Christie and Roskos (2009) further argue that literacy acquisition is social, constructive process that begins early in life. This study focused on learners that are in the Foundation phase of their learning. These authors have argued that children develop literacy skills through everyday experiences with others including bedtime storybook reading. This story book reading may not be practical reality to participants in this study because of the challenge mentioned earlier in this paragraph. Izinganekwane (African folk tales) can provide a suitable replacement in the face of challenges.

There are perceived benefits attached to family learning programmes, as most of the authors have argued in the preceding paragraphs. It has been stated that the benefits attached to family learning programmes include an improved educational performance

for children in school and in the community, and improved family relationships and communication. Family learning programmes afford parents an opportunity to engage with their children while they are learning. Parents can assist children when making career choices. Family learning programmes provide parents with an opportunity to learn in the process as well. Parents can be encouraged to improve their own education by re-enrolling in mainstream education courses, thereby making choices about their own educational involvement. To conclude the section on family learning programmes, this study has looked precisely at enrolled parents and children in schooling. This was done to bring together two spheres of learning within the family and see how these spheres can complement each other. In support of this thought Nutbrown, Hannon and Morgan (2005) argue that:

Family literacy programmes in the twenty-first century can thus be seen as a merging of literacy teaching in early childhood education and in adult education, and future development will depend upon success in combining the strengths and avoiding the weakness of each strand. (p. 26)

## **2.6 Family literacy practices**

The preceding sections in this chapter have discussed both the ideological and the autonomous models of literacy. These models point to what literacy is used for, including considering the context and the purpose for which it is being used. This section discusses literacy practices within the family. Barton and Hamilton (2000) point to literacy practices as cultural ways of utilizing literacy. These practices are surely influenced by the context or the domain in which they occur. In this study, the domain is the home, which is the context or the environment where literacy practices occur. The study examines the role played by parents and extended family members as well as children in enhancing, developing or promoting the reading culture. Barton and Hamilton (2000) describe domains as, “structured and patterned contexts within which literacy is used” (p. 11). Family literacy practices can, therefore, be associated with all literacy events that take place in the home environment. These literacy events are commonly

associated with or mediated by text. Below are examples of family literacy practices that are associated with or mediated by text (Barton and Hamilton, 2000, p. 7):

- Shopping lists
- Recipe books
- The Bible
- Television schedules
- Personal letters, including cards (invitation, birthday, etc)
- A diary
- Local newspapers
- Advertisements and catalogues
- Books
- Clinic cards
- Homework
- Applications for a job
- Text messaging

Children, parents and family members are constantly exposed to these practices and more. Family members also participate effectively in most of them on a regular basis. Barton and Hamilton (2000) have raised two critical points that confirm the value of family literacy practices as well as their origin:

- a. Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships and some literacies are more dominant, visible and influential.

- b. Literacy practices change and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making.

Barton and Hamilton (2000) discuss literacy as a set of practices that are essentially social and that literacy is located in the interaction between people. This discussion carries a notion that literacy is a set of social practices or that which people do, inferred in events that are mediated by text.

## **2.7 Family reading**

Handel and Goldsmith (1994) state that:

Family Reading offers permanent gifts. It provides enjoyable and nourishing reading experiences for adults. It also undoubtedly provides rich literacy experiences for children. It deepens relationships between adults and children. By regarding the family as a learning unit engaged in shared literacy experiences, Family Reading offers benefits to all members of the family. (p.150)

In the face of under-development of the majority of South African citizens, family reading may be a fruitful exercise or campaign. Lyster (1992) contextualizes illiterate adults in South Africa as: poor, black, and mostly found in rural areas. This study was conducted in a rural area and made findings on how family reading is affected by socio-economic conditions. Family reading is beneficial to parents as it makes them become the literacy resources for their children and consolidates their own development of reading skills. Family reading follows on from a wide range of ethnographic studies of adult-child book reading which are based on Vygotsky's theories of adult mediation of children's learning which is discussed in the section that looks at the theoretical framework of this research and surely on shared enjoyment too. Parents need to be actors, resources and learners themselves in the reading world in the quest to develop, enhance, encourage and promote the culture of reading. This area of parental development as readers needs further exploration in the South African context.

## 2.8 Promoting the culture of reading in learning families

It is widely claimed that children who live in homes where reading is consciously done those children are more likely to be readers themselves, meaning that reading can be transferable to younger members of the family. Ulijn and Salager-Meyer (1998) as well as Mason and Krashen (1997) who further claims that it is the ability to read that mainly governs an individual's quest for, and acquisition of, knowledge and his overall level of awareness. On the basis of this, one may well concur with the views shared by Gascoigne (1995) and others that the role played parents in mediating reading as cultural practice in the home is of great value. This mediation role can be played by affording the families an opportunity to make readable, appropriate and user-friendly materials available and accessible to their children, notwithstanding the socio-economic conditions of the families which were interviewed in this study.

Ulijn and Salager-Meyer (1998) are also of the view that learning, both at school and beyond, is largely dependent on information derived from books. Therefore, schools, communities and homes must have books available for use. It is also incumbent upon government to provide libraries in communities where financial resources are scarce. The use of mobile libraries to promote, develop and encourage the culture of reading could be a solution or possible means to enhance and develop readers in isolated areas.

There is a wide variety of literature that seeks to outline how the culture of reading can be enhanced in homes, for example, the work of Auerbach (1995), Chall *et al.*(1990), Pretorius (2002), Rose (2004), Knafllic (2005), Sokhulu (2005), and Rule and Lyster (2005). Most of their findings have created the direction for this study where the primary aim has been to develop mediation strategies for parents, communities, educators, policy developers and administrators of education, particularly those involved directly with teaching and learning. To help children to emerge as readers, there are a range of activities in which parents, communities, educators, policy developers and administrators of education can engage. Auerbach (1995) and Simich-Dudgeon (1993)

suggest the following activities which could help parents improve the culture of reading amongst members of the family, particularly the younger members of the family:

- Develop programmes to empower parents to be readers to their children.
- Set time aside at schools and at homes for reading and discussion on what has been learnt.
- Set time at homes and at schools where information gained from reading will be shared.
- Encourage children to read.
- Provide parents with grade appropriate materials.
- Assist parents to promote good reading habits.
- Give parents guidelines to assist children with homework.
- Train parents for home tutoring.
- Train parents how to read to children or listen to their children reading.
- Encourage parents to communicate with schools.

It needs to be further articulated that the extent to which the reading culture can be developed depends on a number of factors which could pose challenges to families.. One always needs to be mindful of the fact that the activities or suggestion listed above are always open to challenges and are influenced by the economic and political conditions as well as social factors, more especially unemployment, illiteracy, homelessness, poverty and disease, to mention just a few. Sonnenschein and Munsterman (2002), Duursma, et al (2007), and Snow, et al. (1999) describe a multitude of common challenges associated with the factors mentioned above which ultimately impede the good intentions of family, community and society aimed towards the enhancement and the development of the reading culture of children, in particular, and members of the extended families in general. Hereunder are some of the challenges:

- Lack of appropriate literacy practices in homes: there are homes or families that are not exposed to reading materials which therefore compromises the chances

of families to engage constructively in literacy practices. Notwithstanding the family literacy levels

- Monolingual families: It has been mentioned earlier in this section that within the context of this study children come from mainly oral cultures where isiZulu is widely used at homes. Schools use English as medium of instruction and return home with school work that requires a certain level of English proficiency which parents do not have.
- Schools' language policies: This is a challenge in South Africa because the country recognises eleven languages as official. That on its own creates a mathematical problem for government to have school language policies that caters for all citizens equally. Though this research did not focus on a language but the circumstances around participants compels one to present a view. While languages are generally understood to be important because they carry a cultural identity on nations, South African parents prefer schools that use English as medium of instruction. These choices are made because English is central in the economic sphere and the world of employment.
- High illiteracy level of families: Illiterate families are unable to cope with the demands of schooling. Parents are unable to help their children.
- Hours of work: Parents that are unemployed find it difficult to make time available for children because of time spent at work, sometimes distance they travel to work and the amount of time they spend at home with their children.
- Unemployment: this is related to poverty, there could be no food, no electricity, and i.e. access to basic needs is limited. This hampers the child's development. Parents cannot afford cope with the demands of their children's schooling.
- Child-headed households and households headed by grandparents: This is now a new trend in South African. Parents die mainly because of diseases. The responsibility to manage the household falls to other children and grandparents. This compromises guidance and support on school projects. Particularly where illiteracy is a problem.

- Non-availability of books: not all households have reading materials. Not all communities have libraries. This situates limits any purposeful endeavours to meaningful reading.

Sokhulu (2005) is of the view that families which have a low or no formal educational background are most likely to lack in the conscious development of the culture of reading at home. The least they would do where the situation (economic, political and social conditions) allows, is to send their children to school and hope that the teachers at school will teach their children.

## **2.9 Theoretical and conceptual framework**

Blaikie (2000) emphasizes the role played by theory and concepts in research. Central to his claim is that in research every day concepts are given precise meaning and commonly used theoretical concepts are given new definitions where empirical science connects fruitfully with the empirical world. Blaikie (2000) claims that a theory is explains how and why events in the universe occur. Theory and concepts are of relevance to study because both attempt to find out how the learning family enhances the reading skills and comprehension of the children in their natural home environment in the quest to develop a long lasting culture of reading. Blaikie (2000) also claims that concepts in research are means of establishing the connection or links with the social world. Also, as is the case in this study, there is every reason to believe that cultures have beliefs, values, manners, normative behaviours, and practices. I raise this general notion about culture in order to frame this research within Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory. It is precisely because of this reason that this study employs Blaikie (2000) who describes theory as explanations of recurrent patterns or regularities in social life. Lev Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist and a renowned author, is widely known in the academic world as the father of socio-cultural theory which has found a place in modern teaching, schooling and education.

Socio-cultural theory has renowned proponents and various theorists like Lev Vygotsky, Jean Lave, Jay Lamke, Barbara Rogoff and James Wertsch, to mention just a few. According to Yildirim (2008), in order to understand learning and development, one needs to focus on the process of learning instead of the product of learning. Lantolf and Beckett (2009) look at socio-cultural learning theory as one that adopts a learner-centered approach. Lantolf and Beckett (2009) further claim that there must also be greater account taken of important roles that are played by social relationships, the community and culture in cognition and learning. Lantolf and Beckett (2009) are amongst the proponents and theorists of the socio-cultural theory. The Vygotskian socio-cultural theory posits that learning, thinking and knowing are the relation among people in activity in, with, and arising from socially and culturally structured word. Yildirim (2008) another proponent and theorist of the same theory mentioned above, further attests that learning is embedded within social events and social interactions, as well as cultural contexts.

Vygotsky argued that a significant role is played by the external world in the development of the child. It can be inferred that knowledge is socially constructed. Socio-cultural theory has two significant aspects which are culture and participation or interaction. Culture and interaction are central to this study for two reasons. First, parents or caregivers are agents of culture. Second, the child cannot master difficult tasks alone, but can do so with the guidance and assistance of adults. Children constantly seek the guided participation of adults in mastering actions that have cultural meaning. Applefield, Huber, and Moallem (2001) argue that knowledge construction is the result of social interaction of people which involves sharing, comparing and debating among learners and mentors. I have stated that cultures have beliefs, values, manners, normative behaviours, and practices that can be learned by children and be transferred from one family member to the other. This makes homes primary sites for learning and for social construction.

In addition to Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, this study also made use of the theory of the communities of practice, because this theory upholds interaction, purpose, relationship, common identity and learning. These are the critical elements which define the learning family in the context of this study. Lave and Wenger (1991) claim that the communities of practice are groups of people who share a common concern or a similar passion for something they do and value. Their claim goes on to state that these members of the group learn how to do what they are passionate about through regular interaction. The purpose of this regular interaction in the main is to better their own practice, passion or concern, enjoy what they do and get some gain from it. The proponents of the theory of communities of practice further state that there are three major components associated with this theory which are the community, practice and the domain. To further extend our understanding of the three critical components of communities of practice one can add that there also ought to be a purpose, relationship, common identity and intended learning amongst the members of the group.

The three major components of the communities of practice listed are briefly discussed in the context of this study. Firstly, the 'community' in this study refers to the learning community of Mthwalo which comprises the public primary school, the Public Adult Learning Centre (PALC), and the children and the parents who are participants in this study. Secondly, the 'domain' specifically refers to the home environment. Finally, the 'practice' refers to common identity, defined relationships and the regular interaction of the learning family through reading or engagement in literacy related practices. Communities of practice, therefore, is a social learning theory which promotes interaction, collaboration and sharing in an area of common interest that happens over an extended period of time.

This study looked at the family literacy practices in the context of developing and promoting the culture of reading in learning families. Parents or caregivers are agents in this cultural transmission as well as supporting agents in the practice. Applefield, Huber,

and Moallem (2001) claim that “When children work on tasks that cannot be accomplished alone but can be successfully completed with the assistance of a person competent in a task they are said to be working within their zone of proximal development” (p. 39). This notion of the zone of proximal development looks at the difference between what a learner can do on his or her own entirely without the help of others be it adults, teachers or peers as well as what he or she can do with help.

In this study I have adopted an interpretivist paradigm. This paradigm has an epistemological view of knowledge as a social construction, based on subjective beliefs as well as the way people think or make meaning about their lives. In this study I looked at the learning family and the role it plays towards developing and promoting the culture of reading. The epistemological assumptions of the interpretivist paradigm were also relevant to this study in that the communal process was duly informed by the participants in their natural habitats. I further made use of inductive thought which built on examination of data derived from interviews and observation of essential processes like the family settings, literacy practices in the home and reading programmes. This section of the study is discussed further in the next chapter which deals with methodology.

## **2.10 Conclusion**

This section has discussed some crucial issues that have an impact on the enhancement and development of the reading culture with specific reference to the learning family. School are separated on the dominant language, as a result; learners, teachers and families and to a large extent members of the community are uncertain as to the extent in which a certain language needs to be given preference. A certain language spoken in the community may not be the language of instruction in a school. This poses challenges to developing a reading culture, given the two dynamic platforms of learning deliveries, the school and the home. Another contributing factor in the South African context is illiteracy amongst adults who mainly live in poor and rural areas. This state of affairs has an impact because children who come from a family of readers are

likely to grow as readers, but if the opposite happens the gap between the skilled and the unskilled readers will widen.

The review has further looked at the role played by adults in children's education as well as the significance of the connection between the school and the home. It has been discussed, as agreed by many authors, that parents are the first teachers and that the family composition also plays a significant role in the children's academic development. The parents' level of education and their proficiency as readers has also been discussed as key to the development of habitual readers. This led to the discussion of practices in the family that are aimed at developing habitual readers. Those practices are family literacy as a structured practice in the home. This study has adopted the definition or the understanding of family literacy as those programmes which are designed to enhance the literacy skills of more than one family member. This understanding call for family learning programmes which have benefits where parents have an opportunity to engage with their children while they are learning, thus assisting them when they make career choices. Parents learn in the process as well. It is through family learning programmes that parents can be encouraged to improve their own education by re-enrolling in mainstream education courses which is making choices about their own educational involvement.

Once families are consciously engaged in literacy practices as a family activity or programme and this is done frequently in an organized fashion, the family literacy and family learning programme can become family literacy practices mainly mediated by text. Family reading activities have been discussed and labelled as permanent generational gifts to children. Vygotsky argued that there is a heavy and a significant role that is played by the external world towards the development of the child. Parents or caregivers are agents in this cultural transmission as well as supporting agents in the practice.

The next chapter discusses the research design and the methodology employed while conducting this research. The next chapter also presents the research paradigm within

which this study was framed. It also presents the research approach that was followed. There is also a discussion on the research style, sources of information, sampling, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques, as well as a discussion of the limitations of this study. The chapter concludes by stating how reliability and validity were ensured in the study.

## Chapter 3: Research design and methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

There are many paradigms in which research can be framed. Guba (1990), Denzin and Lincon (2001), defines a paradigm as an interpretative framework, which is guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied. Those sets of beliefs are

- 1) Ontology: This set of belief deals with the question of what is real. Ontology questions what kind of being is the human being? Guba (1990).
- 2) Epistemology deals with what is the relationship between the inquirer and the known. Epistemology is the branch of philosophy that studies the nature of knowledge and the process by which knowledge is acquired and validated (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996).
- 3) Methodology deals with how individuals know the world and how individuals gain knowledge of it.

Merriam (1998) mentions at least three research paradigms, namely:

- the positivist
- the critical
- the interpretative research paradigm

I adopt the views expressed by Gephart (1999) who said that, "... many actual research studies use aspects of more than one paradigm; the discussion here is not intended to advocate one paradigm as opposed to another" (p. 1). It will be worth noting that these paradigms are significantly different and carry different philosophical assumptions. As a

result, this section of study will briefly highlight these research paradigms and in detail discuss the main research paradigm used in this study.

Miles and Huberman (1994) claim that the positivist research paradigm assumes an objective world and it searches for truth and facts conceived in terms of specified correlations and associations amongst variables. Guba and Lincoln (1996) posit that the critical research paradigm uncovers hidden interests, exposes contradictions, enables more of informed consciousness, and displaces ideology with scientific insights and change. It is worth mentioning at this stage that both the paradigms which I have briefly outlined did not dominate in this study because the goal of this research was to describe meanings, understand participants' definitions of the situation, and examine how objective realities are produced. The key focus of this study was on the search for patterns of meanings as opposed to uncovering truth, facts and hidden interests. The world view of social construction of reality is best understood within the interpretive research paradigm which is discussed in detail in the next paragraph.

### **3.2 Research design**

This study was conceived and conducted within the interpretive research paradigm. The interpretive research paradigm has a view that cultures can be understood by studying what people think about, their ideas, and the meanings that are important to them. Schwandt (1994) claims, "The interpretive research paradigm is fundamentally concerned with meaning and it seeks to understand social members' definition of a situation" (p. 118). Schwandt (1994) further describes interpretivism and constructivism in research as terms that direct the researcher towards a particular view. Schwandt (1994) claims that:

The proponents of these persuasions share the goal of understanding the complex world of lived experiences from the point of view of those who live it. This goal is variously spoken of as an abiding concern for the life world, from the emic point of view, for understanding meaning, for grasping the

actor's definition of a situation, for Verstehen. The world of lived reality and situation-specific meanings that constitute the general object of investigation is thought to be constructed by social actors. (p.118)

An interpretivist research paradigm is fitting and suitable for this study because I had a particular interest in finding out and establishing the social reality of the participants, as well as analyzing and interpreting this reality as it is lived and experienced by them, i.e. reality as experienced by those who construct it. Interpretive research paradigm is concerned with subjective meanings "...on how individuals or members of society apprehend, understand and make sense of social events and settings and how their sense-making produces features of the very settings to which sense-making is responsive" (Gephart, 1999, p. 4).

### **3.3 The research style**

The research style was a qualitative approach because this style allowed for the systematic collection, organization, and interpretation of textual data derived from talk and/or observation. The qualitative approach was also suitable for the exploration of meanings of the social phenomena as experienced by individuals themselves.

### **3.4 Research approach**

This has been a case study of two Mthwalo learning families. A case study has been chosen because case studies have a number of advantages, particularly in a qualitative study like this one. Case studies often focus on the establishment of the cause and effect of the phenomenon and case studies focus on individuals or groups and seek to understand the participants' perceptions of events. The case study as an approach has been relevant for this study because this research was conducted within set boundaries of the school and the home, in particular, and as well as the Maqongqo area in general. The units of analysis were the parents, the children and the home environments.

### **3.5 Sources of information**

The major or primary sources of information were the two parents. The specific focus was on these two parents who were enrolled in the Public Adult Learning Centre at Mthwalo as learners in an AET class. I had initially chosen to use the term 'caregivers' as synonymous with parents to guard against a situation wherein the biological parents might not be staying with children either because they are working elsewhere far away from home, or may not be there at all due to various social reasons. It was discovered that during this research the biological parents as well as their children were available. The key factor was that those who carry out the parental responsibility for the children ought to have been enrolled as learners in a Public Adult Learning Centre. Another primary source of information was the two school-going children who were selected for this study. They were specifically those who were children of the enrolled parents or caregivers at the Public Adult Learning Centre at Mthwalo. The other sources of information were the homes of the participants, where the observations were carried out.

### **3.6 Sampling**

Huizer (1999) claims that in research it may not be possible to come into contact with or make direct observation of each and every individual from the population you intend to study. It is in the light of this claim that I opted to collect data from what could be called the subset of the chosen population of the learning community of the Mthwalo area. The sample that I used was ideal because it corresponded with the larger population and, therefore, I could reasonably or fairly make inferences as well as conclusions about the entire learning community of Mthwalo. In this study I chose to use purposeful or purposive sampling. I did not opt for random sampling because it was going to be difficult to find the sources of information that fits the required participants in this study at random. The next paragraph discusses why and how the sampling was done.

The purposive sampling targets a particular group of people. The desired population for this particular study was rare and very difficult to find, locate and recruit for the study. Purposive sampling was suitable for this study because I wanted to explore how the two sets of participants (parents and children) enhanced or complemented each other as learners in reading and how the reading culture was developed and promoted. These children had to be enrolled as learners at a primary school. Their parents had to be enrolled as learners in the Public Adult Learning Centre in the area. These children together with their enrolled parents constituted the learning family for the purpose of this study. The learning family was made up of the children and parents whom I have briefly described above. I used two families as I had initially intended. They were certainly going to give the best information on the role of the learning family.

The identification of the participants was made possible with the help of the Centre Manager of the Public Adult Centre where parents were registered learners. The Deputy Principal signed the consent form giving me permission to interview the children and the Centre Manager also signed the consent granting me permission to conduct interviews to parents who are learners in the adult centre. The Centre Manager is also a teacher in the same primary school where children are registered as learners. Therefore, with the help of the Deputy Principal of the primary school and the Public Adult Learning Centre, I managed to choose two parents who were in the Adult Basic Education and Training Level 4 group, as well as children who were both in Grade five. I was able to identify them as the two learning families because they fitted the description of the required participants for this study.

It has been mentioned in various chapters of this study that this research was part of the cohort project. There have been other researchers who focused in the same area but investigated other topics. The site was then chosen because:

- The primary school and the Public Adult Centre shared the same premises, and the same teachers, making the two centres fit the description of the learning community.
- It was in a rural area.
- It was within reasonable proximity to all researchers from Durban and Pietermaritzburg respectively.
- It was accessible because the Centre Manager of the Public Adult Learning Centre and the Principal of the primary school welcomed the idea of the research based on the topics that were going to be covered and the school management saw that it could add value to their operations if the results could be shared after the studies had been completed.

### **3.7 Methods of data collection**

The methods of data collection were interviews and observations. Punch (2005) argues that interviews are one of the main data collection tools in qualitative research and are advantageous because they are flexible and adaptable to suit a wide variety of research situations. There is also another added advantage that is attached to interviews. Burns (2000) describes interviews as a verbal interchange in which an interviewer tries to elicit information, beliefs and opinions from another person. Burns (2000) further categorizes interviews into three various forms namely structured interviews, semi-structured and open interviews. The semi-structured and open interviews were used to collect data in this research. Semi-structured interviews were deemed appropriate for the study due to their flexibility, the space for more in-depth discussions and probing, and the fact that they allow participants to express themselves freely and ask critical questions (Powney & Watts, 1987; Cohen & Manion, 1989; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). I chose these forms of interviews because these had the potential to provide me with the informants' perspectives. The participants were given the freedom to use their natural language which is their own words as opposed to trying to use a language of the

researcher as you would find in the form of structured interviews (Blaikie, 2000; Burns, 2000; and Punch, 2005). All interviews were conducted in isiZulu.

I have already mentioned that the primary sources of information were the children as well as the parents or caregivers. I had planned to start with the observations first, then the interviews. That sequence could not be followed because of a number of reasons. Firstly, the relationship between the researcher and the participants was not sufficiently well established for them to invite the researcher into their homes. Secondly, all the four participants were females, i.e. both the children and the parents. This on its own posed a challenge as I could not easily conduct interviews far from the sight of the public. Thirdly, both parents were married females and the challenge was to enter their houses in the absence of their husbands. The arrangement was made that all interviews would be done at the local primary school. The observations were limited to one day per family in the company of the Centre Manager of the Public Adult Learning Centre. The initial intention of spending more time in the homes would not materialize. I managed to spend one day per family. This situation flouted the rules of the initial plan of trying to find out what is happening from inside by spending more time in the environment.

### **3.8 Data collection process**

I started with the children's interview first and then followed with the parents' interviews. The observation took the form of a home visit. Primarily the observations were meant to take place in the homes where both the children and the parents or care givers spend a lot of their time to interact as a family in general and as a learning family in particular. In the homes I observed the learning related activities with particular focus on the reading practices of the learning family and the extended family. There were other family members who were learners as well. It was worth noting various educational interactions amongst members of the family who spent a considerable amount of time in the home environment doing school work while doing their chores. I need to mention that the home visits were planned to precede the interviews. This order was preferred

so that the family practices would not be pre-adjusted to suit the intentions of the researcher.

However, the short observations had a high significance to the study. Literature states that observations in research include listening as well as looking, and everyday face-to-face interaction. The key feature for observation is that it is dependent on both verbal and visual behaviour (Punch, 2005; Burns, 2000). The choice for the use of observation was also informed by the fact that it can take both structured and unstructured forms (Punch, 2005). The advantage of the unstructured approach to observation is that observations are natural and not predetermined.

### **3.9 Ethical considerations**

Subsequent to the identification process of the participants, I made appointments with the identified participants through the Principal and the Centre Manager. The aim of these appointments was to introduce myself and the purpose of the study as well as the interviews. This was a way of preparing for the interviews and the observation. I then outlined our working relationship, established rapport and sought permission to visit their homes. I then sought permission to use devices like the tape recorder and the video recorder and we negotiated and agreed on dates, days and times that were suitable for the interviews as well as the home-visits. Lastly, together with the families we planned and scheduled all activities that were related to the research like the interview dates and times, number of days that I could spend in their homes and a minimum number of hours that I could spend per home visit.

The ethical considerations were dealt with. The issue of confidentiality was guaranteed and participants were made aware that they were participating on condition of anonymity. Pseudonyms would be used and their identity would be protected. All the participants were informed that the data collected will be solely for use by the University. All records will be kept by the University for a stipulated period of time. They were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study if they felt that they did not wish to

continue as participants. The participants signed the consent forms and parents signed on behalf of their children. The children were informed on what the research is all about and were told what their role is. They agreed to participate, and thereafter parents signed the consent forms on their behalf. The participants were informed that their names, the names of the school, the public adult learning centre and the name of the area would be withheld for reasons of anonymity. The consent forms were signed by all concerned:

- The Principal of the primary school
- The Deputy Principal of the primary school
- The Centre Manager of the Public Adult Learning Centre
- The parents
- The parents signed consent forms on behalf of their children.

### **3.10 Limitations of the study**

Some of the limitations of this study have already been mentioned. With the assistance of the Deputy Principal and the Centre Manager of the Public Adult Learning Centre, I chose participants on the basis of their participation and enrolment or attendance in AET classes. The participants had to be parents who are learners in the Public Adult Learning Centre who had children who are enrolled as learners in the primary school, specifically in the Foundation Phase. I had anticipated experiencing the challenge of not finding the match that I needed but I did not have a problem to finding perfect matches. I had a challenge of accessing the homes of the participants because all of them were married females and young girls. I was governed by moral principles not to invade a man's house in their absence. These were the rules that govern conduct. In the light of fearing to cause family problems, I approached the Centre Manager of the Public Adult Learning Centre who is also a female to accompany me to the homes of the participants. This particular arrangement, at a glance, did not pose any threat to the study. I am aware that it may have unsettled the normal home arrangements because

the teacher was in the home environment which is a very unusual state of affairs. The researcher's presence as well as the teacher during data gathering could have affected the participants' natural responses and reactions. This state of affairs was unavoidable. Consequently I could not make repeated visits to the home. I was forced to make one home visit per pair of participants. I admit that there ought to have been prolonged engagements at the site so that distortions produced by the presence of the researcher could be overcome (Franklin, Cody, & Ballan 2010, p.365).

### **3.11 Conducting interviews**

Interviews were conducted in isiZulu. When doing the interviews, both semi-structured and open-interviews, I was making notes and I used a tape recorder which I supported with back-up recordings by two cellular phones. The questions were pre-planned. I chose to use these types of interviews in order to allow for probing and getting more desirable answers. However, in the main, as the data was recorded, this gave me more time to interact with the participants. Interviews were one-on-one; I interviewed each child and each parent separately and individually.

### **3.12 Observation**

I was guided by the observation schedule that I had prepared. I noted that on the way from Pietermaritzburg there were few print materials on the road. In the main it was the road signs. Around the Mthwalo area there were a few election posters of the 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2009 national and provincial elections and signage that showed the directions to clinics and schools. On the walls of the local shops in the area there were advertisement signs for Rama margarine and Holsum cooking fat. There were no other significant writings.

Upon arrival in the homes, I observed the following:

- a) Daily routine of homework
- b) How family chores are controlled
- c) How reading is done

- d) Family interaction, including that of extended family members
- e) Story-telling and discussions
- f) Posters like calendars, pictures on the walls
- g) Reading materials available in the homes
- h) Notable parental interventions in reading
- i) Reading events

### **3.13 The data analysis process**

Upon completion of the data gathering process, the next phase was to transcribe all the recorded data and translate it into English because all the interviews were conducted in isiZulu. The first step was to transcribe all the recordings. The next step was to translate all the transcribed data into English. When that process was completed, the following steps were followed.

#### **a) The transcripts were analyzed**

It has to be mentioned that there was data for each child and each parent. This was done because each participant was interviewed individually. This process included the interview question as well as the individual respondent's response. This was followed by putting the children's responses into one table with a separate table for the parents' responses. Observation notes were also kept separately. There were three sets of data: the table of children's responses, the table of parents' responses and the observation notes.

#### **b) The transcripts were arranged into themes**

Using the research questions, the responses from each category mentioned above were arranged into themes. It needs to be mentioned that, at this stage, I had to see what cuts across the responses as themes, i.e. I looked at what it was that talked to the family reading practices, reciprocity, family reading programmes, etc.

### **c) The data was analyzed**

The data was analysed in terms of the themes. I then made inferences, e.g. when children say they are encouraged by their mothers attending adult classes. The inference made was that there is value added by parents to their children's education and development simply by attending classes. Their daughters are encouraged. That is how a particular response was individually analyzed and put into perspective.

### **d) The findings**

When all the themes were analyzed, I then put the analysis into a table which was used for the presentation of data in chapter four of this dissertation.

### **e) Conclusion and recommendations**

The final chapter (chapter five) deals with discussion, conclusions and recommendations. It is in this chapter where inferences are made based on the findings. Finally, the report was written, using the data that had been analyzed (this part is dealt with in more detail in the next chapter).

## **3.14 Validity**

One other most critical area in this research was to look at and ensure the validity of this study. This is a cohort study and there were three other fellow students in the same environment performing investigations on other topics dealing with developing the culture of reading and the role played by:

- a) Parents
- b) Teachers
- c) Books
- d) School.

The teachers and the parents were interviewed, and there was an audit on the available books at the school and in the homes. Reading lessons were also observed. Reliability

is concerned with the replicability and consistency of the findings, i.e. the degree to which other researchers performing a similar activity would generate similar interpretations and results (Franklin, Cody, & Ballan, 2010).

There were meetings held that were scheduled to outline the purpose of this research to the various stakeholders and participants. These meetings included:

- a) Parents: parents were informed of the home visits, the interview dates and times and that two of them would have their children interviewed.
- b) Teachers: teachers were informed about the purpose of the study and that they would serve as the link between the researchers and the participants. Amongst them there were some who were informed that they would be interviewed.
- c) Learners in a Public Adult Learning Centre: they were informed that they would be required to participate in the research as directed by the school or the centre.

There was an agreed level of overlap of participants amongst members of the cohort; hence the results of the data collected were shared amongst the various researchers on site. I adopted a peer review strategy where other members of the cohort did the cross checking to ensure consistency and, as a cohort, we had comparable and agreed data collection protocols (Franklin *et al.* 2010). Franklin *et al.* (2010) claim that "... validity is concerned with accuracy of the findings" (p. 363). The same authors further cite Guba (1981) who brings another dimension stating that reliability is a precondition for validity. Firstly, I asked the Centre Manager of the Public Adult Learning Centre and the Principal of the primary school to identify families which match the description of the learning family. Secondly, I used multiple data collection methods which are interviews and observation. Finally, I used peer debriefing which served a similar function as cross-checking. We had sessions where we shared data that was collected by ourselves as members of the cohort.

### **3.15 Conclusion**

This section has discussed the research methodology. The section has discussed why the interpretive research design was preferred. The interpretive research paradigm has a view that cultures can be understood by studying what people think about, their ideas, and the meanings that are important to them. This was done using a qualitative research style which seeks to provide in depth knowledge. Data was collected using interviews and observations of participants who were purposely selected. The data that was collected was then categorized into themes. The next section presents the data that was collected and analyzed.

## Chapter 4: Presentation of data

### 4.1 Introduction

This section of the thesis presents data elicited from the research participants. In order to initiate the process of communicating or reporting results effectively, it is imperative that the key research questions are reiterated in order to contextualize this thesis within the broader framework of the objectives, purpose and motivation for this research. The underlying principle of reporting is that the report should communicate the useful information to an identifiable audience for a specific purpose (Wisdom, Cavaleri, Onwuegbuzie and Green, 2012).

This section will outline and present the useful information that was collected, captured and analyzed during the entire research process. This section will further outline and develop the logical description of the investigation. Merriam (1998) refers to data analysis as “the process of making sense out of the data” (p. 178). Miles and Huberman (1994) refer to data analysis as a process that has to do with categorizing, coding, clustering and consolidating data.

Data that was obtained from interviews and observation is now presented in this section following closely the three research questions that guided this study:

- What are the perceived benefits to parents or caregivers and children as a learning family through the development of a reading culture?
- What is the role played by parents or caregivers in promoting a reading culture?
- What competency do these parents have to support their children in developing or cultivating the culture of reading?

This study is part of the cohort project that looked at developing a reading culture among adults and children at a foundational level in a school-based learning community

of Mthwalo. The purpose of the wider cohort as it is outlined in the original concept document (of the School of Education and Development's Centre of Adult Education, which was developed by Doctor Peter Rule) in the main was to contribute to the promotion of a reading culture amongst educators, learners, parents and other stakeholders in the learning community.

This particular study which I conducted looked at the role of the learning family in developing the reading culture. In some instances data was shared amongst the members of the cohort during data analysis sessions and in some instances interviews were conducted at the same time. I did not see this process negatively affecting the interview processes, but, instead, it saved time and prevented monotony as the information needed by different researchers was obtainable from the same sources. There were instances where the data was collected at the same time and in the presence of other fellow cohort members. This process enabled other members of the cohort who had interest in particular areas to sit in as observers and make their own notes. Other information was shared electronically. The sharing of data brought light to other areas of significance in my study. I had an opportunity to listen to a reading lesson conducted by one of the school teachers. I had the privilege of sitting in interviews with the school deputy principal and all the teachers in the primary school; some also happen to be the same teachers who teach in the Public Adult Centre where parents were enrolled. I had also an opportunity to listen to the presentation made by one member of the cohort on how reading is assessed.

It needs to be mentioned that there were challenges that were experienced when the interviews were conducted with the participants, i.e. the learning family. Interviews were conducted in isiZulu. There were words in isiZulu that carried more than one meaning: the word "Funda" in isiZulu can mean to read, learn, study or to engage in education or learning activities. During the start of the interviews "Funda" was misinterpreted by all the participants as meaning or referring to learning, studying or engagement in educational or learning activities. This had to be explained in the context in which it is used in this study which is reading. If you translate the English question "Do you like

reading?” into isiZulu, it is phrased as “Uyakuthanda ukufunda?” To an isiZulu speaker the response could relate to any of the meanings referred to above. This became evident when they were asked in isiZulu “Yini ndaba uthande ukufunda?” The English translation is “Why do you like reading?” The direct responses in isiZulu were “Ngifunda ngoba ngithanda ukuba uthisha.” The English translation is “I am learning because I want to be a teacher.” Hence all isiZulu questions had to be qualified to refer specifically to reading books or any other print materials. In isiZulu this means “Ukufunda izincwadi noma incwadi, imibhalo eyehlukahlukene okukanye amaphepha-bhuku noma amaphephandaba.”

The next sections in this chapter will present data from the interviews conducted with two children and the two parents, as well as the observations that took place in the homes of these families. The first section, 4.2, presents data elicited from children and 4.2.2 presents data elicited from parents. The other sections present the rest of the data as discussed under various headings.

## **4.2 Presentation of findings**

### **4.2.1 Children**

It has been stated in the preceding paragraphs that two children and two parents were interviewed. I have coded these children and parents as Child 1 and Child 2 and the parents are coded as Parent 1 and Parent 2. Child 1 and Parent 1 were from the same family, as was Child 2 and Parent 2. This was done to meet the conditions for anonymity. To ensure the identity protection of the children, the names of the area, the parents and the school where the interviews took place were also disguised. The names of siblings and members of the extended family and neighbours were also changed. Child 1 is a ten year old girl who is doing grade five at a primary school in Mthwalo. Child 2 is a nine year old girl who is also doing grade five in the same primary school. Both children have other brothers and sisters who also attend school in different grades.

Both children have parents who are enrolled as Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) Level Four learners and they attend classes in a local Public Adult Learning Centre. It was discovered during the process of conducting the research that in one of these two families, the entire family was a family of learners because even the father was enrolled as an ABET Level Four learner at his place of work. Both of the children's mothers had just graduated with ABET Certificates in June 2012. The parents had just achieved the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Level 1 certificate, which is the General Education and Training Certificate (GETC) (ABET Level 4). It then was not surprising to hear responses that showed some form of parental involvement in the children's reading activities, particularly the acquisition of and the exposure to reading materials. The following table presents the analyzed data that was obtained during children's interviews.

#### 4.2.1.1 Data analysis table for children's responses

**Table: 2 Data analysis table for children's responses**

<b>Interview questions</b>	<b>Responses from Child: 1</b>	<b>Responses from Child: 2</b>	<b>Key issues arising from the analysis</b>
<b>Background</b>			
<b>How often do you read books on your own?</b>	I read books at school when we have reading lesson.	Not very often. Most of the time a lot of my reading takes place at school.	Reading books is not a voluntary and an out of interest activity. It does not happen very often. Both children know that reading happens at school and in class during teacher-planned lessons.

<p><b>Which is the last book that you have read?</b></p>	<p>I remember that I have just read the Newspaper “Edendale Eyethu”, a local free issue newspaper available every week in Pietermaritzburg and the surrounding area</p>	<p>I cannot remember the name of the book. I read “Echo”, a local free issue newspaper available every Thursday in the Pietermaritzburg area</p>	<p>Children reflect that when reading takes place even at school or anywhere else, book titles, and authors are not introduced to them. Reading of local newspapers is common to both learners</p>
<p><b>Do you enjoy reading?</b></p>	<p>Yes.</p>	<p>Yes.</p>	<p>Both children enjoy reading. When given an opportunity to access books or any print material and have structured programmes for reading, children can develop into habitual readers.</p>
<p><b>Where do you get your books (or reading materials) from?</b></p>	<p>Dad sometimes brings some newspapers home and also mom would come with some books and magazines and the school gives books too sometimes.</p>	<p>From home and school.</p>	<p>There is evidence that points to the fact that both home and school to certain extent provide some reading materials. Making reading materials available to children does</p>

			happen. What needs to happen now is to work on the frequency of such access and range of materials.
<b>How many other children in your home go to school?</b>	(She started counting using her fingers). We are four, Dad, (me: in grade 5), Amahle (grade 2), Mbali. Mom finished last year (2010) ABET Level 4	It is Njabulo who is in grade 9.	It is interesting to note that, other than the pairs, there are more family members who form part of this study and who go to school. Of these other family members the one father is attending school as well. It can then be concluded that families even in rural areas see the need to send their children to school and also to develop themselves, parents included.

<b>Reading practices at school</b>			
<b>Do you read at school?</b>	Yes we do.	Yes.	School has times set for reading.
<b>How do you do reading at school?</b>	We are given work books and then we read and then write.	We read as a group.	Teachers employ various types of reading strategies or methods.
<b>Do you enjoy reading at school?</b>	Hesitant and says she does not know.	Yes. I do.	There is an element of hesitation when it comes to reading at school. Child 1 seems to have a problem with reading at school. Child 2 enjoys reading at school.
<b>Do you think the time that you spend at school reading is enough?</b>	Yes. It is enough.	Yes. It is enough.	The time allocated to reading at school is enough to the children. If used in a structured way, it can help the learners develop their reading.

<b>Why do you think so?</b>	Because you still can remember what you were reading, while you still enjoy and love what you are reading and are still not tired.	Because other teachers also need to come in and teach.	It appears that reading at school is confined to reading only during "Language teaching". Teachers of other subjects and parents should encourage children to read and allocate reading time.
<b>Which method of reading do you find most interesting?</b>	It is to read on my own.	I enjoy reading as a group.	Different methods of reading work differently for different children. One needs to employ different strategies when encouraging reading.
<b>Why does this method interest you?</b>	Because you can read fast if you like or slow.	Because when you make a mistake in reading the group will correct you.	Self-paced reading allows for independence and individual growth as a reader, while the group creates a dependent reader.

<p><b>Which story have you read and found most interesting?</b></p>	<p>It was about businesses. There were children who entered a competition; they won, and their names were Sifiso and Sicelo. They entered a business competition.</p>	<p>The story was the Clovers' strict trio. I cannot remember the name of the book it came from. The story is about three girls, one of the girls was a new comer at school, she was afraid of the other children. It was from an English book. It ends up with the new comer (girls) being a friend with the other three girls.</p>	<p>Children can remember what they have read. They can tell what lessons they have learnt. They can sometimes relate to the stories that they have read.</p>
<p><b>From which book did you read that story?</b></p>	<p>I did not read it from a book. I read it from the newspaper Edendale.</p>	<p>I cannot remember the name of the book.</p>	<p>Even when the book title cannot be remembered the story is known in detail.</p>
<p><b>Do you share your stories with your parents?</b></p>	<p>Yes.</p>	<p>Yes.</p>	<p>This is the time where reading experiences and stories are shared. This is the time where future reading practices are planned, targets for reading are set and habitual readers created.</p>

<b>Reading Practices at Home</b>			
<b>How do you feel about your parent going to school?</b>	I feel very excited because they set an example that we must go to school to learn and pass and be successful. They encourage me to learn.	I feel very excited	Parents who attend school add value to the education of their children.
<b>How do you help each other with schoolwork?</b>	We all sit at home: Zinhle, Amahle, Daddy and mom Anele and Mbali: all seated doing homework we help each other. When someone is having a difficulty with something he asks someone for help. It is Anele who is Grade 8 that normally asks for help a lot. Dad also asks for help and they help him too. I have never been able to help dad. We help each other.	Sometimes when I say something wrong, she (my mother) almost does like teachers, she tells me that this is wrong, this is the correct one.	There is inter-family assistance with reading and school work. The family that learns together grows together and similar values are shared.

<b>Who helps the other the most?</b>	Mom.	Mom.	Mothers play a very significant role in the growth and development of their children. (as citizens, learners, readers): the growth of the child in totality.
<b>How do you know that? Why do you say that? What is it that makes you think that way?</b>	Because when everyone has something that he or she does not understand or does not know asks mom. Even dad asks mom. She is always at home to help us.	Sometimes when I say something wrong, she tells me that this is wrong, write this one.	Mothers are seen as helpers in school-related activities to all members of the family, regardless of the education level of the mother or the other family member. In one instance the “husband as a learner that is dependent on the wife as a source of information”
<b>How do your parents help you with your reading?</b>	Someone will read for mom. It is nice to read together with your parents. When we make reading mistakes, mom corrects you.	Sometimes when I say something wrong, she tells me that this is wrong, write this one.	It is implied that most reading that takes place is reading aloud. The mothers correct children when they read. Children are of the view that it is nicer

			to read with mom at home because there is no tension. When you make mistakes, no one laughs or shouts at you.
<b>How do you help your parents with reading?</b>	Never helped them. Mom and dad can both read. Mom reads very well.	I do not help her because she knows a lot of things and she is the one who helps me.	Children look up to their mothers for help and do not see themselves physically helping them with reading.
<b>What makes reading with your parents enjoyable?</b>	Because if you are in a home environment you feel free and fearless. No one will laugh at you as it sometimes happens in class.	Because sometimes when my friends visit me to do homework with me together, there is mom to help us. And also when we play we play together.	Home environment is the best to develop habitual readers.
<b>Do you find reading at school or at home most enjoyable?</b>	It is nice to do reading at home.	It is nice to read at home.	Reading at home is much more enjoyable.
<b>What can your parents do to help you improve your reading?</b>	Mom encourages me and motivates me the most about reading. She must just correct me when I make mistakes during reading. She must also get me	Mom has more time with me. It is almost the same as at the school.	Mothers have more time, more patience and the willingness to help their children learn to read. Mothers need to source reading materials

	some home books for reading.		for their children.
<b>Who is the person that motivates you to read? And why?</b>	Mom. Mom encourages me and motivates me the most about reading. She is the one who corrects my mistakes.	It is mom. She is the one who spends a lot of time with me. She corrects me when I say wrong words and she helps me by telling when I say wrong things.	Mothers are the major sources of motivation and encouragement.
<b>How often do you read together as a family?</b>	We read daily, or when one needs help he/ she reads.	Not very often. We only sit and do homework with mom and Njabulo.	Frequency of reading is determined and defined by the school work that is given. If there is homework, there will be reading.
<b>Who has the highest level of education in your family?</b>	My sister at the finishing school and mom.	It is mom.	Mothers are the most highly educated in these families who children look up to.
<b>How does this help you with your reading?</b>	They both know a lot about things that I do at school.	It is mom. She is the one who spends a lot of time with me. She corrects me when I say wrong words and she helps me by telling when I say wrong things	Mothers who have higher education levels than their children are much more likely to be resourceful.

<p><b>How does this help your parents with their reading?</b></p>	<p>I think sometimes they find new things from our school books.</p>	<p>I do not know if they get help except school books and the Bible.</p>	<p>Parents learn along with their children. The school textbooks become a source of knowledge for them (mothers)</p>
<p><b>What is the most memorable reading family experience that you can remember?</b></p>	<p>The business competition story that we read at home with my mom. The business competition story.</p>	<p>I cannot remember.</p>	<p>The story read together as a family has a longer impact on children.</p>
<p><b>What is it that you read together?</b></p>	<p>Maths books, school textbooks, the Bible, magazines, newspaper.</p>	<p>There is no book that we read together, except for school textbooks, the Bible, magazines, newspaper.</p>	<p>The major books available for reading are the school textbooks</p>
<p><b>Which reading time at home have you found most interesting/rewarding? And why?</b></p>	<p>After six pm. By this time I finish playing with my friends. I have a bath, and then do my reading after watching television a little bit.</p>	<p>There is no family reading time that we have to just sit and do the reading. But for time I prefer to do the reading after seven pm.</p>	<p>Children prefer to read after six in the evening. At this time they have played, finished their chores and have had a bath. There is less interference.</p>

<p><b>Which reading time with your parent have you found most boring? And why?</b></p>	<p>In the morning. Because I still feel sleepy.</p>	<p>It is at 3pm. Because when I have finished reading my friends will come to me and say child 1 let us go play.</p>	<p>Sleeping time and play time should be made available to children. Children must play and grow as children.</p>
<p><b>How often do you read together as a family?</b></p>	<p>Every day when we have school work.</p>	<p>We do not sit around and read together each sits on her own and does her work. Mom will call and ask what we are doing and we will tell her our problems.</p>	<p>School "homework-time" is the most valuable and suitable time for family reading activities. Everyone is geared for reading and doing some formal, structured acquisition and sharing of new knowledge. No evidence points to relaxed or fun reading activities</p>
<p><b>Tell me about your family story time?</b></p>	<p>We do not have a fixed story time at home. It sometimes happens that mom or dad tells us stories. Mom sometimes tells stories.</p>	<p>There is no fixed family story time.</p>	<p>Story-telling time seems not to be popular amongst both families.</p>

<p><b>Tell me about your family's favourite newspaper(s) or magazines. Who buys these and how often?</b></p>	<p>It is the, ECHO, the Edendale. Dad sometimes is the one who buys these newspapers for us at home to read. I read them when they are available.</p>	<p>It is the, ECHO, the Edendale. It is mom who brings it home when she comes from school.</p>	<p>Children know local newspapers and they read them because they mostly carry or talk about local stories, use local language and talk about local places.</p>
<p><b>When a newspaper or magazine is bought, do you get an opportunity to read it?</b></p>	<p>Yes.</p>	<p>Yes.</p>	<p>Newspapers have a role to play in reading development, because they are easily accessible.</p>
<p><b>Tell me about your television viewing practice?</b></p>	<p>I watch television. I like Cartoons. I watch them in the mornings before I go to school and in the afternoon after school. Mainly after school. My favourite Cartoons are Ben Ten as well as the Super-Strike</p>	<p>I do watch television, just a little bit. My favourite TV programme is Crocket. I like it because when they use a language that I do not understand they show words that I can read in English and understand.</p>	<p>Television programmes that are educational and to the level of the children at school do add value to new knowledge acquisition</p>
<p><b>Why do you like reading? OR why don't you like reading?</b></p>	<p>I like reading a lot because of what I gain from books, things like: knowledge, it is learning new things</p>	<p>It is nice to read.</p>	<p>Knowledge is obtainable from books and you get it through reading. There can be humour vicarious</p>

	<p>or about things that I was not familiar with. It widens my knowledge and it broadens my thought and my mind.</p>		<p>adventure too.</p>
<p><b>What do you and your friends like to read most and why?</b></p>	<p>We like to read mathematics problems, magazines and old newspapers.</p>	<p>Books and old magazines. We like to do the word puzzles and enjoy stories.</p>	<p>Children seem to enjoy reading with other children more that they do at home and at school. They like doing reading in groups. They also enjoy interacting with other children when reading.</p>
<p><b>What is your attitude towards reading?</b></p>	<p>I have a positive attitude towards reading.</p>	<p>I have a positive attitude.</p>	<p>The children value the process or the activity of reading.</p>
<p><b>Do you think reading is important? Why do you think reading is important?</b></p>	<p>Yes I think so. Because it has results. Good results, like when you read you can know about the kind of job that you want to know and you succeed. Like if you want to go to university you must read so that you can be able to read books for other subjects.</p>	<p>Yes I think it is important. Because I find out about things that I know and some that I do not know from or through reading.</p>	<p>General view is that reading is beneficial to the children. They can become better performing people in other subjects at school and beyond.</p>

<b>How has reading helped you?</b>	It is because I know a lot of things and I can read things for myself.	It has helped me. I am able to read and understand how to read for school subjects.	It encourages children to acquire new knowledge from books. It helps children to be able to understand school related subjects as well.
<b>If you had an extra R100 rand would you buy a book?</b>	Yes.	Yes. I would like to buy the "The princess and the frog".	Children would love to buy and have books of their own

When asked if they ever read on their own, and share what they have read with the members of the family, friends and teachers and fellow school mates and parents, their response was that they hardly share what they have read. They said that there are no set instances where they consciously share their reading experiences. If they ever talk about their experiences, it is very infrequent and unplanned.

The interviews revealed that these children read mainly prescribed school books, magazines and local newspapers and newspaper supplements from home. Child 1 said "I did not read it from a book. I read it from the newspaper Edendale Eyethu". Confirming the similar thought, Child 2 said "I cannot remember the name of the book. I read "Echo". This study focuses on the role of the learning family but not on the availability of books; however during the first visit at school there was evidence from the observation and further investigations that the school does not have a library.

There was a room that was full of donated books, which upon further exploration were good for university students. The books did not fit the level of learners at the foundation

phase. It will be very naive of this research to conclude that children do not read at all. The children demonstrated a high level of interest in reading. They also articulated the significance of reading to their life at school and beyond. Child 1, when asked if she thinks reading is important, said:

*Yes I think so, because it has results. Good results, like when you read you can know about the kind of job that you want to know and you succeed. Like if you want to go to university you must read so that you can be able to read books for other subjects*

It is the environment in which they are brought up as well as the limited and unavailable resources that contributes to the low reading frequency of these children. The frequency of reading is determined by the homework given.

Emanating from the initial responses, it is deduced, firstly, that children have an interest in reading. Secondly, it is evident that there are no books available for the children to read. Thirdly, children depend on reading that is done at school. The availability of reading material is incidental. Child 1 said, "We are given books at school and then we read". The further enquiry about these school books revealed that it is prescribed text-books for various learning areas. Child 2 further said, "We read as a group". This has a benefit because, as indicated in her response to the follow up question, "Because when one makes a mistake in reading the group will correct her".

When asked where they get their reading materials from, Child 1 said, "Dad sometimes brings some newspapers home and also mom would come with some books and magazines." Child 2 said, "From home and from school." Whilst both children indicated that they have the passion and love for reading, at their age they were unable to say easily when they last read a book. They said they do most of their reading at school and only during reading lessons. Both children are not exposed to further reading other than the structured reading lesson in class, some reading at home and sometimes with friends when they happen to lay their hands on a magazine or newspaper.

The kind of situation discussed above is the beginning of a reading challenge that can go beyond grade five and can affect the university performance of these children if there are no interventions to help these children and others in the area with more exposure to print materials. Pretorius (2002) argued that the fundamental feature of academic underperformance in South Africa is poor reading. Pretorius (2002) further states that there are numerous historical, socio-political and cultural factors that have contributed to nationally low reading levels. In this study it is evident that the family background of the parents, in particular their educational background, as well as the unavailability of books, aggravates the reading problems. This on its own marks the beginning of an era of arrested development in reading where the love of reading is slowed because of social and economic factors.

#### **4.2.2 Parents**

The background of the parents was shaped by history. The two parents who were interviewed have a more or less similar background. Both the parents were Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) Level 4 learners. Both parents were unemployed at the time of the interviews. Their enrolment in the ABET programme as learners was because they both wanted to improve their education levels so that when they look for jobs, they are able to speak English and they can read and write. They said they would be able to produce a certificate that shows their educational qualifications when asked to do so. Both parents see the importance of reading and are committed to help their children to improve their reading. Parent 1 says, "We get to spend time together as family and share in each other's learning experiences. I get to know what goes on at school through the work that we do together." Parent 2 says, "It improves family relations." The following table presents data obtained during the interview of both parents. The table also briefly outlines the key issues.

#### 4.2.2.1 Data analysis table for parents' responses

Table: 3 Data analysis table for parents' responses

Interview Questions	Parent : 1	Parent : 2	Key issues arising from the analysis
<b>Background</b>			
<b>How many children do you have?</b>	I have three (03) children	I have five children: aged-06, 10, 14, 18 and 26. All of them are girls.	Parents have three and five children respectively
<b>How many of them go to school and what grades are they in?</b>	Three go to school. The oldest child is in grade 9, Nokwanda in grade 5 and the youngest is at the crèche	Three go to school. Girl 6 year old is in grade 2, 10 year old in grade 5, 14 year old in grade 8 and the 18 year old in the finishing school redoing grade12.	Both parents have more than one child each that go to school ranging from pre-school to grade 12.
<b>Please tell me the ABET level that you are in?</b>	Yes I was a learner there. I completed last year (2010). ABET Level 4.	I have just passed ABET Level 4 in all learning areas. I am currently waiting for my GETC in NQF Level 1.	Both parents had just passed ABET Level four in 2010 and had just been awarded their GETC Certificates at the NQF level 1.
<b>How long have you been a learner?</b>	It was three years.	It has taken me three years; from 2008, 2009, and completed in 2010 October	Both parents had re-entered the schooling system for three years.

<b>When did you enrol?</b>	I started in 2008	In 2008	They had both attended school for three consecutive years
<b>What made you come and enrol as an ABET learner?</b>	It is because I left school as a child before I completed my matric. Also when you look for a job you must show evidence that you have been to school. That is why I attended classes. I wanted to continue with school, because I will not be able to go back to main stream education.	Well firstly I liked school. I wanted to complete school as a child, but unfortunately I could not. I wanted to be something in life. Here in ABET I wanted to continue to get knowledge that I always wanted to have. Also find a better job. This was my second chance. I now needed to have a certificate, because every time you are looking for a job, they ask you to present a certificate of your qualifications. A "paper" is needed for the job. I also wanted to show my paper when I ask for a job.	Parents joined/enrolled at the adult centre to fulfil their childhood ambitions of passing matric. Parents are aware that to get a job you must have achieved a certain level of education. They also wanted to compete confidently in the saturated job market.

<p><b>Interviewer:</b> The last time I spoke to you had applied for a job with the Department of Agriculture. The vacancies were advertised in the Ilanga Newspaper (June 2011). Would like to share with me what happened?</p>	<p><b>Not applicable to parent 1</b></p>	<p><b>Parent 2:</b> I applied for two jobs: a messenger and a cleaner. I have since learnt that those vacancies or positions unfortunately were frozen. The Department of Agriculture will re-advertise.</p>	<p>During the first round of interviews this parent applied for a job that need an ABET level 4 (NQF Level 1) qualification. She was proud to see that she can use her qualification to apply for a job.</p>
<p><b>School work and children</b></p>			
<p><b>How often do your children come home with homework?</b></p>	<p>Every time during school days.</p>	<p>Almost daily after school.</p>	<p>Parent-child interaction is dependent on the school work given.</p>
<p><b>What role do you play in their homework?</b></p>	<p>I would encourage them, we would sit together. I also had my own homework. I would say let us sit together and help each other. Help one another: when one needs assistance.</p>	<p>I help them often. When they arrive after school I allow them to do their chores, they sit down and do their homework. That is when I sat around their place of homework and help when they ask for help. If they do not ask for help I just ask them what their work is all about just to satisfy myself that indeed they had work</p>	<p>Encourage, motivate, help and give assistance where necessary</p>

		<p>to do and it was done. (I avail myself to help, I ask what they were doing, and, I help where there are problems. When I was still a Learner I would also sit and do mine at the same time with them). Luckily I like Mathematics and I enjoy helping them with their math problems. But most of their work, other than Math, they do it themselves.</p>	
<p><b>How often do you help your children with their school work?</b></p>	<p>Yes it is a usual thing. I am used to it. (Helping my children with school work). Sometimes I miss one or two sessions when I am busy with other things.</p>	<p>Almost daily, when I am at home and as and when they ask for help. I ask them to come to me if they have problems. They would say: "Mom please could help me here or mom I want to read this to you".</p>	<p>Almost daily when there is school work, when children ask for help</p>
<p><b>For how long have you become involved in your children's school work?</b></p>	<p>I have helped all of them. From the time they started school till today. As long as I know what to help them with. Only when</p>	<p>I have helped all of them even before they start school. I would say twenty six years ago. I taught her a lot before she went to school. She did not go</p>	<p>Parents have been involved in helping their children learn from home from the time they started school: Pre-School, Grade R to higher</p>

	<p>things are difficult do I experience failure to help.</p>	<p>to grade R. She went straight to grade 1. She did grade 1 here at home. I helped my first child and I still do with the youngest one. I have taught them all counting (before they start grade one, I teach them the vowels, and the letters of the alphabet including the: ma me mi mo mu. That is why I have a six year old in child in grade two.</p>	<p>levels. Parents have always been there.</p>
<p><b>How do you find helping your children with school work?</b></p>	<p>It is a challenge at times, because, sometimes you find that there are things that you do not know. You have to keep trying as a parent and not show that you are struggling. (in the eyes of the children)</p>	<p>It makes me feel very happy to help my children I find it very useful. You do not have to wait for the school or teachers to tell you what challenges your child has. You will know from home. You also feel proud to make a contribution to your child's education. At times it is difficult particularly when you cannot help the child because you do not</p>	<p>To help children learn is an exciting experience. It can be challenging when there are things that you do not understand as a parent and you are unable to help your child with that particular challenge.</p>

		<p>know the answer and do not have any where to find answers; another good thing is that it also helps me to learn as I work with them. I sometimes remember things that I had forgotten through working with them.</p>	
<p><b>Can you share with me some interesting points (and challenges) that you find when working with your children?</b></p>	<p>It is not always difficult. It is just that the children like TV. The time you say it is study time; kids are still stuck there watching TV. Even when they are now engaged, his/her mind is not on what you say but still on the TV. You have to use your parental image (authority) to get them going again.</p>	<p>There are social problems like the father drinks alcohol. That affects the children. They literally cry when they see things that happen when the father is drunk. They lose concentration while waiting for the father. There are no study tables they do their homework on the floor or on the grass-mat. I am also not so highly educated to be able to cope with all my children's work. There are interesting points. Working together instils discipline in children because they</p>	<p>There numerous challenges: television, social problems, furniture. HOWEVER some good points: Instil discipline to children; an opportunity to learn together and re-affirm what the school has taught; to instil the culture of learning; and to see a child learn from a parent.</p>

		<p>sort of know that I am involved in their work as well. They then learn to be respectful. They believe in me, listen to mom. They still love their dad.</p>	
<b>Reciprocity</b>			
<p><b>How has your schooling (your enrolment as an ABET learner) helped you in general and as a parent who has children who attend a particular school.</b></p>	<p>Yes it has helped me a lot. Indeed it has helped me. Because there were some things I did not know. Because we share the work load. They take out theirs and I take out mine. I help them and they help me.</p>	<p>Well, I did not tell you that my husband is an ABET Level four learner as well. (He works for the Provincial Department of Agriculture he got motivated by his children and me). Secondly, it motivates us all. We sit down and do work together. I do not appear as “policing their work”. They see that every one that goes to school has work to do. When work is too much, we all say so. That becomes the story for discussion. “How is your work”? Are you coping and so on and so on, they were motivated to</p>	<p>Children learn from seeing their parents learn. Parents are encouraged to learn because their children look up to them. If and when parents achieve, progress and pass, children feel proud, encouraged and want to learn from what their parents do.</p>

		<p>learn. To tell you: I have just received an award. I attended an award ceremony. It is the first time an award is received and brought to my home. My children are very happy for me. They say: "Mom even though you did not finish school, this award shows that you had love for education.</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> Congratulations. That is very encouraging.</p> <p><b>Parent 2:</b> it has now become a challenge to them because they now say we also want award to work hard and get awards.</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> It means your involvement in your own schooling is evident in these awards. It is clear.</p> <p><b>Parent 2:</b> They are now encouraging me to continue with studying and proceed to FET Colleges and</p>	
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		<p>study further. I tell them that even though I want to, but I can't because I do not have money. They say there are bursaries. The biggest challenge will be transport because it is only my husband that works.</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> That is very moving. What award did you get?</p> <p><b>Parent 2:</b> I got an award on Travel and tourism. There was a big function (At Imbali Township- Pietermaritzburg) for all ABET Learners that got A's.</p>	
<p><b>What do you do together as a family of learners that benefits all of you as learners?</b></p>	<p>I normally listen to the reader (Reading). If I hear reading problems (poor reading), I tell them the correct way of reading.</p>	<p>As I said I like Math. We do Math together. Math is a problem. I also check my husband's bag for homework. Currently he is busy with some work for ABET Level four Portfolio of Evidence (POE's) or (Site Based Assessment-SBA's). I do a lot to help him</p>	<p>Parents do:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading</li> <li>• Maths</li> <li>• General homework</li> <li>• Serve as a resource for children</li> <li>• Help children where they have problems with</li> </ul>

		with his school work as well just as I do for the children. If he can pass his ABET Level four maybe he can get a promotion and it will be a benefit for all of us as a family. Also, I go around to the children in the neighbourhood to seek assistance where I can help my family. (As I said to you earlier; that we do not have any place to get information from).	school work.
<b>What role do you play as a parent in your children's reading?</b>	I normally listen to the reader (Reading). If I hear reading problems (poor reading), I tell them the correct way of reading.	I help them mainly in Maths to read word problems first, then listen to my child read and I will correct where possible....but sometimes they pronounce words differently and I will agree with them because they become better and advanced in English these day because their education is better than ours.	It has been mentioned that parents borrow books, go to neighbours to seek help. ABOUT READING parents: Help find reading material Listen to their children read Correct them where they are wrong.

<p><b>What role has been played by your own children in your reading?</b></p>	<p>Not quite. Because I am old, and I do difficult stuff. I am more advanced than they are. Seeing things in their lens (in terms of modern times) has been my major gain.</p>	<p>They read. The thing is we do not have books at home. We read Edendale, Echo, Ilanga and Isolezwe. When they have finished their school work they take and read any of those Newspapers when they are available. Then they tell me what they have read, and I take the Newspaper and read myself just to see if they understood it correctly.</p>	<p>Learning is shared as an experience. There are clear roles that each parent/child do. Parents still remain in charge/in control and responsible for their children's learning. This suggests an element of silent reading!</p>
<p><b>What kind of books do you read?</b></p>	<p>Not much. There are not many books available. Newspapers are sometimes available (but not always/ frequently). But it is unusual. But when it (newspaper) is available we try to read it. But in the main whatever</p>	<p>Mainly we read newspapers when they are available and their homework books. The newspapers that we read are: Ilanga, Natal Witness, Echo, and Edendale. There are no books for us to read.</p>	<p>Newspapers, school textbooks and notes.</p>

	they bring from school		
<b>Which books have you read together as a family?</b>	It is mainly the newspapers but only when they are available,	Mainly we read newspapers when they are available. The newspapers that we read are: Ilanga, Natal Witness, Echo, and Edendale. There are no books for us to read. But my little girls would bring school books. They would read to me, and she tells me what she has read. Sometimes Mrs. Lembede would bring additional books for grade 2 and grade 3.	Mainly newspapers, school books, and borrowed books from the neighbourhood. .
<b>Which books do you have at home?</b>	Ay we do not have books. We do not have books. We are not used to having books because we do not buy them. Even if you have one. It could be borrowed from someone that you had liked, and then you bring it home to read. In	I have an old Informal English, English Made Easy and Inqolobane Yesizwe.	Old informal English, newspapers, English made easy, Inqolobane Yesizwe, Bible, hymnbooks. Mainly it is church and school books.

	<p>the main, it is books that are borrowed from someone else. So I can say that it means the only book that is available at home is the Bible, and the hymn book. Those are the only books that always available, but other books NO.</p>		
<p><b>How do you share the reading experiences?</b></p>	<p>Yes we do share the reading experiences from the little we get to read at any particular time given when something to read is available. So it is not a habit. We also discuss with the children about what we have read, even it is from a borrowed book. I see it as having an impact in the children performance at</p>	<p>Not quite often. But when reading takes place one of us would read for all of us.</p>	<p>Reading experiences are shared through reading aloud. Asking a child to tell the parent what was being read is also another way. As parents there is a stage where you share reading experiences as well.</p>

	<p>school. Because sometimes, you read a story that did not make you feel happy. You tell them. Sometimes it a story that made you laugh, you also tell them about as well. You also discuss about the lesson you got from the story.</p>		
<p><b>How does reading together (as a family) influence your relation with the school?</b></p>	<p>We get spend time together and share in each other's learning experiences. I know what goes on at school through the work that we do together.</p>	<p>It improves family relations, it does quite well. Like when I am stressed up I read something and when happy as well, I read.</p>	<p>Improved mother and child relationship. Share learning experiences.</p>
<p><b>What is the most recent memorable reading experience that you can share with me?</b></p>	<p>I have read the article from the Natal Witness; about people from Somalia. Women left one of her children, to die while on their way to the</p>	<p>I have read an article from Ilanga newspaper. The article was about a well known Ukhozi FM DJ (Khathide Ngobe: affectionately known as Tshathugodo to his followers) where the</p>	<p>Reading experiences range from local stories to international stories. This broadens the knowledge base from social experiences to economic, and educational ones.</p>

	<p>refugee camp. Due to the lack of water she had to make the most difficult choice of leaving her child: to the mercy of his God. They could not all survive on the water they had before reaching the camp.</p>	<p>readers and listeners complained that he must no longer attend the reed ceremony (umkhosi womhlanga), where the Zulu maidens parade for the Zulu King. The concern is that he 'destroys' the virginity of the girls and only pay R2000, 00 to the family for the damages he has coursed. <b>Parent 2: Edendale (18/19 August)</b> The most recent one was about Students From the DUT, they had entered a competition, and they are from Sweet Waters. I cannot remember. <b>Interviewer:</b> I have heard that same story from my discussion with Zinhle.</p>	
<p><b>How can you rate your own reading now (good, bad, improving) and why would you rate yourself so?</b></p>	<p>I am a good reader.</p>	<p>A good reader.</p>	<p>Children are good readers.</p>

<p><b>How can you rate your children's reading now (good, bad, improving) and why would you rate their reading so?</b></p>	<p>They are trying (improving) more especially Nokwanda is not a very good reader.</p>	<p>I would say they are good readers. Because they can read independently and can even use a dictionary. My children are good. Very good. Particularly the one child in Grade 2. She loves reading. Sometimes when I want to read something, I just give it to her. She would read and explain what she has read. That is where I see that teachers are good in this school. Seeing a grade 5 so independent in reading, she rarely asks for assistance.</p>	<p>Improving and is likely to gain independence soon with more supervision and practice.</p>
<p><b>How can your reading as family improve even better than what you rate it to be?</b></p>	<p>I think it is to encourage her (Nokwanda) to read, and to sit down with her more often and teach her to read. I should also read</p>	<p>I would say we need to read frequently, more often and develop reading interest not as learners (not for school purposes only).</p>	<p>Reading more frequently and encourage independent reading</p>

	and must tell her to read as well.		
<b>Which books (any other reading material) have you read in the past year? Can you name/list a few)?</b>		Informal English, English Made Easy, Inqolobane Yesizwe, the Bible, and the Hymn book (Lutheran Church Hymn Book which we do not use very often because there is no Lutheran Church here at Maqongqo. When I go to church I go to the Zion Church).	Informal English, English Made Easy, Inqolobane Yesizwe, the Bible, and the Hymn book (Lutheran Church Hymn Book).
<b>When last have you read a book? Which book was it?</b>	Newspaper is mainly what I read.	Not recently. I recall that if you count the Bible as one of the books. I would say I have read the Bible.	Newspapers and the Bible
<b>Have you shared what you have read with your children? (How?)</b>	Stories that I have read like the Somalia article. We discuss the details, the feelings and what would I have done.	We discuss our understanding of the text; we discuss and share the word of God. We also use the hymn book when we sing (Sometimes: but very rare at home and at church). This is mainly because I am of the Zion Church denomination and; it	Parents share their stories/reading experiences with their children though discussions.

		is my husband that is Lutheran. In my church on Sundays we do not use the Hymnbook. We are just guided by the spirit when we sing. (We read the Bible more often, than the newspapers when we have them. My husband sometimes brings newspapers)	
<b>Do your children share what they have read with you? (How?)</b>	Yes. They discuss what they have read, and I ask them questions and they explain where they can.	Yes, we do. They share with me when they have read something from school books, and I share with them the newspaper article. But this is not a structured reading and sharing. We do this in response to the school work. The Bible reading is more of family practice. They do not read the Bible we read it to them. Maybe it will be a good thing to take turns to read it.	Reading experiences are shared through asking questions and discussions.
When last have you bought a book?	I have bought school books this	I can't remember. I do not think I have ever	Only school books (prescribed) have

	year.	bought a book to read for myself. In actual fact I have never bought a book.	been bought where the school cannot provide.
<b>Where do you get your reading from?</b>	From the school, and newspapers.	From the school books where we have to do our homework from, Newspapers that my husband brings home sometimes and also sometimes from Mrs. Lembede.	Newspapers, school books and borrowed books from the neighbourhood.
<b>If you have an extra R100 would you buy a book? Which book would you buy?</b>	Do you want me to tell you the truth? Honestly, NO. Ay, on our side, we are not used to buying books. You sometimes see something else. I can only buy what the school asks me to buy.	Yes I can buy it from Adams (Book store) in Pietermaritzburg. I can look for a nice book, a novel and buy it. I do not have a title in mind. Yes I can buy a nice book. I would like to have both English and Zulu.	Buying the books is not infused in the minds of many. Books are not a priority. It depends what is the reason for buying a book. It varies, though, as the second parent would buy a book.
<b>Which book do you wish to own?</b>	Yes I would love to. I like reading novels.	I do not have a title in mind. Yes I would like to have a book and many books too for all of us to read.	Parents see the need of having their own books.
<b>Do you think reading is important? Why do you think so? What do you</b>	Yes I believe so. You learn new things and keep	Yes reading develops intellectual growth. You learn new things.	Yes reading develops intellectual growth. You learn

<p><b>think needs to be done to improve reading?</b></p>	<p>me busy because I am not working.</p>	<p>It helps to relieve stress. It is good for children to read for leisure, and when they are happy and sad. You get new things that you did not know previously.</p>	<p>new things. It helps to relieve stress. It is good for children to read for leisure, and when they are happy and sad. You get new things that you did not know previously.</p>
<p><b>Do you think your children like reading?</b></p>	<p>Yes I believe they do.</p>	<p>Yes.</p>	<p>Both parents see their children as ones who like to read, and who have the potential to grow as readers.</p>
<p><b>Why do you think so?</b></p>	<p>Yes there are signs. You see them having a piece of paper reading. They read whatever is there for them to read. Even when they cannot read, they can see the pictures.</p>	<p>They can read and work independently. I also get feed-back from teachers that they are also good readers. I also see that they are not lazy to read. I know that from the reading that we do at home. It is just that we do not have anything for them to read at home and in the community as there are no libraries.</p>	<p>Children interact with print material, independently and show signs of passion. Feedback from teachers is also very encouraging. Teachers see the children as reasonably good readers.</p>

<p><b>What can you do as a parent to improve their reading?</b></p>	<p>It is to encourage them and that I must have time for them when they read.</p>	<p>We need to have a library here at Mthwalo. We must also encourage the children to read. We must borrow books from those that have them. We need to have tables and chairs in my home so that can sit comfortably to do their school work and reading. As a parent I need to create an environment that is conducive to reading. I need to see to it that they read. There must be libraries at school. There must be computers. As a community we must have access to even old newspapers. If those are brought to us we will have more reading materials. We must encourage them to read more often.</p>	<p>Children need to be encouraged to read more often in a structured environment that is suitable and conducive to learning. There must be a library in the area. The free issues of local newspapers must be brought to the area. Local newspapers must deliver old newspaper to the area for easy access and regular reading.</p>
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It can be inferred from the data that has been presented that the claims made in Pretorius (2002) are true as they reveal that inequality in reading levels is further perpetuated by family backgrounds. The above table presenting data elicited from parents has shown that these parents are unemployed and thus they both lack the financial muscle that would allow them to buy reading materials for their homes. Pretorius (2002) further claims that illiterate parents do not encourage children to read. This claim was not supported by the findings of this study as both these parents are literate. They had each achieved an NQF Level 1 qualification at the time of the interviews. Parents stated that there are numerous reasons that lead to their re-enrolment in education. Firstly, they said that they did not want their children to go through similar challenging life experiences. Secondly, they want to be role models to their children. Thirdly, they want to encourage their children to use educational opportunities early and not suffer the process of studying when you are old. Finally, and most importantly, they enrolled in further education courses in order to be able to compete fairly in the saturated job market. Both parents indicated that they were school drop-outs because of early pregnancies. When asked why they re-enrolled, this is what Parent 1 had to say:

Well firstly I liked school. I wanted to complete school as a child, but unfortunately I could not. I wanted to be something in life. Here in ABET I wanted to continue to get knowledge that I always wanted to have and also find a better job. This was my second chance in life. I now needed to have a certificate, because every time you are looking for a job, they ask you to present a certificate of your qualifications. A "paper" is needed for the job. I also wanted to show my paper when I ask for a job.

The same parent (Parent 1) was very humbled by the fact that she completed ABET Level 4. She had an official GETC certificate and an official NQF level 1 recognized qualification. She was amongst the top learners in the Province and received awards of excellence in an official ceremony in the capital city of KwaZulu Natal, Pietermaritzburg. This was an outstanding achievement. With a smile on her face and tears in her eyes

she said: "I have just received an award. I attended an award ceremony. It is the first time an award is received and brought to my home. My children are very happy for me".

This statement above statement indicates that the social ills at the time, affected Parent 1's educational progress. As she uttered this statement, she was in tears and vowed that she would not love to see her children suffer the same way as she did. Parent 2 had this to say:

It is because I left school as child before I completed my matric. Also when you look for a job you must show evidence that you have been to school. That is why I attended classes. I wanted to continue with school, because I will not be able to go back to main stream education. Surely with better education I can get a decent job. That can help me. I can be able to send my children to better schools in town.

I asked Parent 2 what was her understanding of a better school. She said, "A school with many educational resources and good education. A school must have many books, like the library. The school must have a lot of sports and teaching must be done in English."

The following question was asked to Parent 1 during our second session of interviews: "The last time I spoke to you; you had applied for a job from the Department of Agriculture As there were vacancies that were advertised in the Ilanga newspaper (June 2011). Would like to share what happened?" The parent responded by saying:

I applied for two jobs: a messenger and a cleaner. Both of them needed an ABET level four qualification; I was very excited to see that my education can start working for me. I was so happy to see that I can meet the job's education requirements. I have since learnt that those vacancies or positions unfortunately were frozen. The Department of Agriculture will re-advertise.

This is one of the indications that repudiate families or parents from the claims made that the parents with low education levels have a low reading interest. She read a news-

paper, found a job advert and applied. Parents are of the opinion that the school must have a library that will help children to get books which they can borrow and bring home for reading, and the school must allow the children to tell stories that they have read to their teachers and share them with their parents and members of the family.

#### **4.3 The perceived benefits of parents and children as a learning family**

The children were asked how they feel about having parents who are learners in an education centre. Child 1 said, "I feel very excited because they set an example that we must go to school to learn and pass and be successful. They encourage me to learn." Child 2 said, "I feel very excited, because we help each with school work." Both children value their parents' involvement in education. Both children were clear that it is their mothers who play a big role in assisting them with school work, homework, reading and maths. In essence they attribute that direct involvement of their mothers in their school work to enrolment in the Public Adult Learning Centre. Child 1 has a father who is also an ABET Level four learner. There are instances where the entire Gumede family gets involved in an education activity at the same time. When Parent 1 was asked what she perceives as the benefits of attending school as a family she said:

Well, I did not tell you that my husband is an ABET Level four learner as well. He works for the Provincial Department of Agriculture he got motivated by his children and me. Secondly, it motivates us all. We sit down and do work together. I do not appear as "policing their work". They see that every one that goes to school has work to do. When work is too much, we all say so. That becomes the story for discussion. "How is your work?" Are you coping and so on and so on, they were motivated to learn.

Child 1 who is the daughter of Parent 1 also confirmed the statement said by her mother when she said:

When we are all seated at home: Zinhle, Amahle, daddy, mom Anele and Mbali: all seated doing homework we help each other. When someone is having a difficulty with something he or she asks someone for help. It is Anele who is Grade 8 that normally asks for help a lot. Dad also asks for help and they help him too. I have never been able to help dad. That means we help each other.

Most of the responses showed that it is the parents (the mothers) who contribute more to the learning family. The study revealed that mother played a major role in the education of the children, including the members of the extended family. Parent 1 goes beyond helping children; she helps her husband too. She had this to say:

I also check my husband's bag for homework. Currently he is busy with some work for ABET Level four Portfolio of Evidence (POE's) or (Site Based Assessment-SBA's). I do a lot to help him with his school work as well just as I do for the children. If he can pass his ABET Level four maybe he can get a promotion and it will be a benefit for all of us as a family. Also, I go around to the children in the neighbourhood to seek assistance where I can help my family, as I said to you earlier that we do not have any place to get information.

This particular scenario where a woman is more educated and more informed than a man, it shows a Zulu man that is dependent to his wife as a source of information, as an advisor, a helper, a tutor and as mentor. It breaks certain stereotypes that Zulu man cannot ask for help from women. A woman has assumed a leadership role.

#### **4.4 School work with children**

There is agreement in the responses from both the children and the parents that a lot of time is spent in the home doing school work. During my observation I saw that parents do spend time with their children doing school work. The kind of school work they are engaged with is doing homework. I also noted that the school assumes that parents are competent in reading English as instructions in the homework books are in English. The

subjects that the children bring home are subject that are taught in English. Homework, therefore, involves a lot of reading in English. What I noticed is that there is a lot of isiZulu that is used during homework time to help children understand what needs to be done and what the homework is all about. Despite all those challenges both parents showed a high level of commitment and effort. It would have been interesting to observe what challenges would have been experienced by both children and parents where the parents are illiterate. When I asked the parents about their role in their children's homework, they both demonstrated in their responses that there is commitment, structure and a plan in place that is part of the family activities which are followed to do school work.

When parents were asked what their role was in their children's homework, this is what they had to say: Parent 2 feels that working with children in doing their school-work provides a good opportunity for building sound family relations. She said, "I would encourage them, we would sit together. I also had my own homework. I would say let us sit together and help each other. Help one another: when one needs assistance."

Parent 1 adds the supervisory dimension to the school work as opposed to Parent 2 who role models and encourages. Parent 1 said:

I help them often. When they arrive after school I allow them to do their chores, they sit down and do their homework. That is when I sit around their place of homework and help when they ask for help. If they do not ask for help I just ask them what their work is all about just to satisfy myself that indeed they had work to do and it was done. (I avail myself to help, I ask what they were doing, and, I help where there are problems. When I was still a Learner I would also sit and do mine at the same time with them). Luckily I like Mathematics and I enjoy helping them with their math problems. But most of their work, either than Math, they do it themselves.

It was evident from the parents' responses that besides the fact that there is a scarcity of reading materials, parents are not capacitated by the school to deal with children's

homework. Parents end up being tutors of their children instead of getting involved as partners in the learning process. Instead, parents get involved directly and play the role of the teacher. This is simply because the school or teachers assume that parents are competent to deal with their children's educational challenges in general and reading in particular.

#### **4.5 The role played by parents in promoting the reading culture**

There was no evidence of a structured reading programme in the homes, one that is supervised, initiated and monitored by parents. There were sparsely cited cases that are recorded in this study. There were no spontaneous responses that pointed to frequent reading. In the main what is read are newspapers, though Child 1 remembers a book that she read. Parents were precise and cited newspapers that are issued free in Pietermaritzburg and it was pointed that these are read when they are available. The responses tabled hereunder signify a situation that hampers the good intentions of the family to read together. The non-availability of books or reading materials is the major problem. Where reading was done all the participants have a vivid memory of what was read.

#### **4.6. What can be done to improve reading?**

I asked the parents what can be done to improve their children's reading practices and habits. Parent 2 said, "It is to encourage them and that I must have time for them when they read." Parent 1 said:

We need to have a library here at Mthwalo. We must also encourage the children to read. We must borrow books from those that have them. We need to have tables and chairs in my home so that can sit comfortably to do their school work and reading. As a parent I need to create an environment that is conducive to reading. I need to see to it that they read. There must be libraries at school. There must be computers. As a community we must have access to even old

newspapers. If those are brought to us we will have more reading materials. We must encourage them to read more often.

## 4.7 What was observed?

### 4.7.1 General observation

In the foregoing chapters I mentioned that Mthwalo is a rural area that was heavily affected by political violence. The area is still developing.

**Figure 1: An aerial view of Mthwalo**



**Figure 2: Mthwalo area with no Electricity**



As you drive into the area you will see some posters for the local government elections. There are no road signs that show that you have now entered the residential area. There were no signs that show that there is school, or that there is livestock on the road. The area has a beautifully tarred main road.

**Figure 3: tarred roads of Mthwalo**



There is a shop that has billboards that have pictures of Holsum and Rama margarine. You will find a lot of young men sitting in their homes in groups, smoking and with beer quarts in front of them, as is the case all over the world money for alcohol is available. This showed they do not work and do not go to school. There is electricity in some homes and some are brick and tile homes.

**Figure 4: The developing side of Mthwalo.**



When I visited the homes, I observed that there were no tables for children to sit on and do homework which was done, instead, on a grass mat. The little girls and other family members sometimes do homework lying on their bellies. The older family members can cope doing school work on their beds. The newspapers are used as table-cloths to cover the tables and cupboard shelves. There were calendars on the walls. The mother sits on a sofa while children lie to do their school work. The homes do have electricity

and tap water, though I was informed that there is a problem with regard to receiving clean, regular tap water. Families have the privilege of having a radio, a television set, a refrigerator and an electric stove. There were no visible reading materials. There were structured and monitored education activities.

#### 4.7.2 Reading related activities

Family 1 (Child 1 and Parent 1) was working on a grocery list that they were going to use over the weekend. They had sale adverts from the local free issue of Echo newspaper. There was a great degree of price calculation, prioritizing items and budgeting what they will buy at Boxer Superstores. This was going to happen when the father returns from work at the end of the week and gives them money to buy. There was a friendly discussion. They were also guided by the normal amount allocated to buy food that the father gives them at the end of the month.

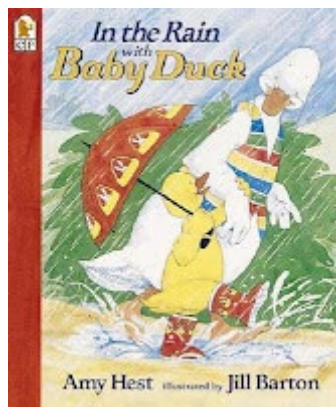
Figure 5: The Boxer Superstores Price list.



The mother and the children were actually budgeting how much will be spent on various items, including transport to Pietermaritzburg and back from Mthwalo. It was interesting to listen to the discussion which concluded that it must be only one girl who goes to

town instead of two girls. This was to save on transportation money and to add to the grocery items. Financial literacy was used during this activity. Johnson (2010) states that financial literacy use involves the use of numbers, these numbers are used to write out amounts and for purposes of budgeting as well as calculating expenses. While financial literacy is clear in this particular activity, other uses are involved as well like: interactional and instrumental uses. Thereafter it was homework time which is the educational use of literacy. The mother (Parent 1) pulled out a booklet to do reading just before they started with school work. Reading was done from a photocopied and stapled booklet with the story “In the rain with Baby Duck”.

**Figure 6: Cover pager of the book read by Child 1 together with Parent 1**



Child 1 was given this booklet to read to her mother and me. Her reading was quite impressive. The mother (Parent 1) continuously interrupted the child (Child 1). She wanted her to focus on punctuation, spelling and reading speed. There were crucial elements of metacognitive activities involved, though. Wray (1994) cites Brown (1980) who lists these metacognitive activities as:

- Clarifying one’s purposes for reading, that is, understanding the explicit and implicit demands of a particular reading task
- Identifying the important aspects of a text

- Focusing attention on the above principal aspects rather than on relatively trivial aspects
- Monitoring ongoing activities to determine whether comprehension is taking place
- Engaging in self-questioning to check whether the aims are being achieved
- Taking corrective action if and when failures in comprehension are detected.

(Wray, 1994, p. 63)

The above lists of activities may not have been achieved as listed above, because some cannot be measured through an observation. But some were, it was interesting to notice that at the end of the reading exercise there was an engagement between the mother and the child on what was read. There was an exchange of ideas in both English and isiZulu. Anderson and Morrison (2007) would view this latter observation as supporting the child's learning and Johnson (2010) the educational use of literacy while Christie and Roskos (2009) would view this activity as developing literacy skills in through every day experiences with others. This is what Christie and Roskos (2009) would argue that literacy acquisition is a social, constructive purpose that begins early in life (01).

Family 2 (Child 2 and Parent 2) sat on the grass mat and were doing the child's maths homework. The mother assisted her by explaining the maths problem and then they worked on finding the answer together. There was no other clear evidence that showed active reading. Both families had some literacy practices that I observed. These were sending sms messages using the cell phone, while the reading of the Bible was also cited as one but I did not stay for the night prayers, the preparations for such were done in my presence.

## 4.8 Conclusion

There was evidence of commitment from the side of both parents. Their role was clearly to encourage, motivate and help their children to learn. Interest and willingness were evident in the manner in which they showed dedication to the work of their children at home. Resources like books and other print materials were not readily available. The major benefit of the learning family was that learning and re-enrolment into the education system by the parents served as the means to redress the imbalances of the past. Parents' attendance at school prepared them, in a way to cope, with their children's school work, while it also prepared them for job opportunities and enhanced their children's chances for a better educational life. There was evidence of family literacy practices that were in place. There were print materials in the form of worksheets and school text books that were brought by children from school to the home. These books enhance and improve the reading practices of the children have the potential to make these children habitual and independent readers. Reading in the homes is confined mainly to school textbooks and to newspapers when they are available. There should be various reading materials in the form of exciting novels and interesting non-fiction.

Parents felt that there should be a library in the area that will assist parents and children as well as the larger community to access books and various print materials. The school must also keep books and circulate them to homes through children. It was mentioned that the school must have its own library as well. The reading done in the school should encourage reading for meaning as opposed to reading in groups where the teacher does not have an opportunity to assess each individual child as a reader. There were very few examples of materials read by both parents and children. This confirms there was no variety of print materials that could be used to effectively assist readers in their path to independent reading. There was some evidence of some form of metacognitive activities involved in reading done in both of the homes.

The following chapter will provide an in-depth discussion about the data presented in this chapter. The next chapter will also draw conclusions as well as make recommendations on how the reading culture can be enhanced and developed within a learning family.

## Chapter 5: Discussion and recommendations

### 5.1 Introduction

The findings of this study concur with the view of Chall *et al.* (1990) which states that the success of a child at school depends on the relationship that exists between the family and the school, the child as a learner and the school as the context in which learning takes place. However, this study further found that the relationship between the child and the parent can play even a bigger role in increasing the child's chances of academic success at school, particularly when both the child and the parent are involved in some form of formal education. This section discusses and interprets the findings of this study. The purpose of this study was, firstly, to examine the role played by parents in promoting the reading culture in their children. Secondly, it was to explore how a learning family can enhance this reading culture, ultimately for the benefit of the child, the school, the home and the community. Thirdly, this study was undertaken to determine whether there is a mutually beneficial reciprocity that contributes to promoting a reading culture in a learning family. This study hopes to contribute to the body of knowledge about family literacy by looking at another new dimension, the learning family. In the context of this study a learning family refers to a family where the child and biological parent, a caregiver or a surrogate parent are involved in formal education. This particular study looked at two learning families where the children were enrolled in a public primary school at the foundation phase level. The parents were registered as learners in a local public adult learning centre in the same area of Mthwalo.

It is befitting to conclude this study by reiterating the research questions that guided this study and subsequently discuss how this study has answered each of these questions.

- What are the perceived benefits to parents or caregivers and children as a learning family through the development of a reading culture?

- What is the role played by parents or caregivers in promoting the reading culture?
- What competency do these parents have to support their children in developing or cultivating the culture of reading?

In attempting to answer the above research questions, this study adopted an interpretivist research paradigm which pronounces that cultures can be understood by studying what people think about their ideas and meanings that are important to them. The interpretivist or constructivist paradigm has a clear purpose which is to understand, describe and interpret phenomena. This was a case study of two learning families in the Mthwalo area. I opted for a case study because case studies are a common way to do a qualitative research. Professor S.B. Merriam (personal communication,2010) describes the case study as an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system. The bounded system in this study was the two parents and their two children, herein defined as two single entities called 'learning families'.

The study was a qualitative research study as it sought to describe, decode, translate and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain naturally occurring phenomena in the social world. The choice of the qualitative approach allowed for the systematic collection, organization, and interpretation of textual data derived from talk and observation. Qualitative research inquiry further allowed a closer encounter and interaction between the participants and the researcher.

The qualitative approach was suitable for the exploration of meanings of the social phenomena as experienced by the participants themselves, looking at a wide variety of settings like the economic, political and social. One distinct characteristic of the qualitative research design which guided this study was a small non-random sample. The sample selection in this study was purposeful. The major or primary sources of information were: firstly, the two parents or caregivers who were enrolled in the Public Adult Learning Centre at Mthwalo as learners in the AET class; secondly, the two children who were selected for this study were those who were children of the enrolled

parents at the Public Adult Learning Centre in Mthwalo. These participants made up the learning family which I have briefly described in the preceding paragraphs.

The methods of data collection were in-depth interviews and observation. These were individually structured interviews of all the participants. The observations were done in the homes of the participants.

## **5.2 The perceived benefits for parents and children functioning as a learning family**

One of the perceived benefits for parents and children functioning as a learning family is that it provides quality family time: Parents have an opportunity to discuss school related work with their children. It is during the reading time that parents ask their children how their day was like at school and they also have an opportunity to sow cultural seeds for their children. In the midst of hectic days where parents are engaged in various livelihood activities, there is engagement within the families where they discuss the home situation and the expectations of the parents. Children also get the opportunity to express their wishes, challenges and concerns about general issues, including the reading that takes place at school. This family time also helps to improve the mother and child relationship.

Motivating children to learn is another major benefit. This study has revealed the parents' achievement in the adult centre. The parents were very clear that their late re-engagement in education was to be able to compete fairly in the saturated job market with a recognized school qualification. They have also said that they would not want their children to fall into the same situation which they experienced as young people. The results indicate, too, that there is an established educational connection between the child and the mother in the context of these learning families.

The results of this study show that the children are dependent on their parents for help. The results revealed that children prefer the home environment to do reading because it is safe and no one will make a mockery of their reading in the event that they make

mistakes. It can now be mentioned that learning is a two way activity. The learning family learns from each other. Whilst the children are generally more advanced than their parents, mothers still have a lot of experience that they use in order to help their children learn to read. They demonstrate how reading is done and also correct their children when they make mistakes while reading and children like that parental intervention. Lauglo (2001) argues that women who have completed literacy programmes become more deeply engaged in supporting their children's education in more than one way. I concur with the above statement, as the findings in this study revealed that the parents who were participants in this study had completed ABET Level 4. They served as motivators to their children and they worked towards enhancing and instilling the culture of reading and schooling in their children.

It is critical to confine these discussions within relevant and applicable terms which talk directly to practices within the family members which can potentially enhance the culture of reading. This discussion point is based on the claim that children who live in reading homes will be readers, and that children need to be encouraged to read. Parents should also be trained in home tutoring. One other critical finding suggests that parents should also be trained in how to read to children or listen to their children reading. There is ample opportunity that parents have to understand their children's learning difficulties.

Social learning theory posits that people learn from observing other people. By definition, such observations take place in a social setting, as stated by Merriam and Caffarella (1991). Therefore, the role of the learning family should be such that it (the learning family) provides the social engagements that are conducive to learning, and should further provide the proper context for learning to take place. This study has seen that there is an advantage if both the parent and the child are consciously involved in formal learning, as both parties then become equipped with necessary skills to improve literacy. The literacy skills gained in ABET should not be underestimated as it provides the springboard for further learning of the parent as both a learner and as the mentor to their children. This study acknowledges that parents are the first teachers of their children. This study has revealed that parents, particularly mothers, play a major role in

teaching and mentoring, as well as guiding their children on the road to becoming self-sufficient and habitual readers.

Emanating from the previous paragraph, the study has further found that parents have an open opportunity to directly contribute to children's learning and to connect with the school. The discussion of homework, reading the instructions from the child's homework book is a perfect example, is a major benefit for the learning family. It has been mentioned that the home is the first learning environment of the child. This study found that, generally, homes lack having structured or scheduled family literacy practices that would invariably promote the culture of reading. It can also be concluded that poor families should be assisted to develop the culture of reading in their homes whilst also being mindful of the social factors which are barriers to learning like: unemployment, poverty, homelessness, and sicknesses. Notwithstanding the external factors like unemployment, the parents, particularly mothers, have a major role to play in the teaching and development of their children as readers.

Another benefit is the sharing of learning experiences. Gadsden (2004) discusses the reciprocal relationships which results in knowledge transfer. The learning family creates time for the family to learn together. Mothers are used as resources because of the human capital they have. The extended family also benefits from the mother as well. This particular study found that one family had everyone, including the father, engaged in formal learning. All family members ask for assistance from the mother, including siblings who are in the higher school grades.

It has been mentioned in the preceding chapters that it is important to discuss the education system of South Africa in the context of the political history of the region. There are numerous challenges facing black, rural South Africans and these are far from over, particularly when it comes to school resources and libraries. When analyzing the parents' responses, one understands that there is a great need to have libraries at schools and in the communities in order improve access to resources and assist children develop a reading culture. Similar results have been found and outlined in

Sokhulu (2005) where it is reiterated that there are no times set aside by most families for literacy practices such as homework sessions or story times or reading times.

### **5.3 The role of parents in promoting the reading culture**

Parents have a responsibility to promote the culture of reading in their children in the formative years of their schooling. There are numerous types of contributions that parents can make in developing a home environment that is friendly to learning. This study has proved that parents play the mentoring role in the education of their children in general and reading in particular. In their responses parents were aware that they need to take the leading role in providing a learning atmosphere at home. Parents need to provide reading materials. They were aware that there is a huge shortage of reading materials at schools and in the community of Mthwalo in general. This study concedes that in the face of unemployment and the unavailability of basic services, the provision of books can be a challenge. Parents suggested that there must be mobile libraries, where they can borrow books. Building a library in the area may prove to be a worthless exercise based on the history of the area, the level of education, and all the other negative socio-economic circumstances. This expression does not suggest that libraries are worthless assets in communities, but the expression prioritizes water, sanitations, houses and employment.

Given the minimum availability of reading resources parents still teach their children to read and the study showed that parents:

- motivate their children to engage in school work
- guide children in carrying out tasks
- support children in areas where children need assistance
- mentor children by taking the lead as they also do their own school projects
- correct children when they pronounce or punctuate incorrectly

- provide alternative reading strategies for their children with specific reference to spelling and pronunciation

The parental roles given above reflect a high degree of commitment of parents to their children's development in general and reading in particular. That is why parents further suggest that the old newspapers should be made available to the community for free as a reading supplement.

Christie and Roskos (2009) play can be a vital activity that promotes reading, learning and development of the child. Notwithstanding the challenge of unemployment, traditional games can be used to substitute books. Mlabalaba, card games and monopoly can be used. The folk tales can be a useful substitution. The next section will discuss the level of parental competency required to develop the reading culture.

#### **5.4 Parent competency to support their children in developing a culture of reading**

The parents interviewed in this study were in a higher educational level than their children. This was one advantage. Parents need to possess a higher educational level in order to deal with the technical aspects of the children's reading. Other than the competency level, the parents should also demonstrate (but not be limited to) the following:

- literacy in the language used in reading,
- competency as a reader in a language, and
- Be habitual readers themselves

#### **5.5 Conclusions**

This study can conclude that there are benefits that are linked to a learning family. Parents serve as the role models, motivators, mentors and teachers in the home

environments. Parents assume the leading role in the education of their children which can translate into programmes that can develop the culture of reading. This can only be achieved effectively if parents have attained a level of education that is significantly higher than that of their children, which means that parents must have a slightly higher level of reading competency in order for them to adequately develop and cultivate the culture of reading. Parents have the will to ensure that their children attain better education which far surpasses what they have attained. The parents also agreed that there must be access to reading materials. This could be achieved by making reading materials available through the school or through a mobile library.

I am also of the view that the school assumes that parents are competent readers and that parents are literate. This particular area opens further opportunities for research looking at what role do schools play in ensuring that parents are better equipped to deal with reading activities. I also would like to point out that this may not necessarily be the role of the school only; even the PALC should equip their learners who are parents to be able to deal with parent-child reading activities.

This research focused on parents and children, referred to as the learning family. The aimed of the study was to investigate the reciprocal value of the learning family. The parents and the children were all enrolled as learners in an educational institution. The children and the parents were all in the foundation phase of education. This research saw a direct relationship between the education of the child in this phase and the parent in the same phase. Parents appeared to possess more life experience that they use to influence their children's learning, while children are encouraged by parental involvement in formal education programmes. Taking this a step further, children learn from their parents. Parents are able to go and find reading material for their children. Most literature states that parents are the first teachers of their children. The preceding sentence assumes that all parents are involved in a certain form of teaching of their children. This includes all forms of informal and non-formal education. The forms of education mentioned incorporate teaching the child values, norms, culture, religion, traditions, etc. These can be taught or the child can observe and inherit as the child

grows. This brings these forms of learning and teaching closer to the socio-cultural theory, the zone of proximal development, communities of practice and legitimate peripheral participation.

**Reading** within the learning family needs to be encouraged to move beyond homework-related activities of structured reading activities where parents and children consciously engage in reading activities. In order to develop habitual readers, families need to extend literacy acquisition beyond the use of books to play. Christie and Roskos (2009) claim that “play can serve literacy by providing settings that promote literacy activity, skills and strategy” (p3). The role of the learning family is, firstly, to create an environment for reading and an opportunity for structured interaction between the child and the parent. Christie and Roskos (2009) indicate that play environments can be engineered and enriched to enhance literacy experience with young children. Secondly, the role of the learning family is to create structured programmes that will encourage habitual reading practices for formal learning or formal use of literacy. Thirdly, the role of the learning family is to find resources that will ensure accessibility and availability of the reading materials. These should not be limited to books only but can include board games and educational movies.

It has emerged from this study that the level of reading competency of parents and care givers has a direct impact on the reading skills of their children. I have cited literature that specifically described the significant role that the parents play in the educational growth of their children. I would like to restate Basset-Grundy (2004), as cited in Knaflic (2005), who describes the process of parental and children’s learning interactions as one of the most important steps amongst many in the process of reciprocating where children help motivate their parents in parental learning and vice versa. Morrow (1995) and Desmond (2004) say parents are the first teachers of their children. This study found that children are dependent on their mothers to give them guidance. This study found that the reason why parents re-enrolled as learners is because they want to be better people. They want to be able to compete in the saturated job market of South Africa having a recognized qualification. This research also found that parents want to

be role models to their children. The parental success in education serves as motivation to their children. This study has also found that the daughters have a sense of pride in their mother as learners. The study sought to find the mutually beneficial reciprocity that exists between the parent and the child as learners. The study found that there is mutually beneficial reciprocal interrelationship.

It needs to be noted that as both families are speakers of IsiZulu and come from a largely oral culture, there were issues that the study noted on the challenges related to the monolingual nature of families. I mentioned that Mgqwashu (2007) attributes the challenges related to reading to the country's adoption of the multilingual language policy where learning and teaching needs to place in mother tongue at the foundation level of schooling. It is upon this language policy that I continuously cite Pretorius (2002) attributes low reading levels to the deleterious policies and practices of apartheid education which, in the view of the author, are dysfunctional. The apartheid education has resulted in inferior education for the majority of black people in South Africa. The parents under discussion are the direct products of the apartheid education. These parents suffered multiple effects of apartheid, like their geographical location. This makes them to be out of touch of useful resources like libraries. It cannot be overemphasized that parents said that they do not want their daughter to suffer the same way as they did, i.e. of dropping out from school and receive inferior education. Parents would have been better able to share reading experiences in isiZulu more than they do in English. This conclusion is not suggesting that reading must be confined to a language. The conclusion suggests that fluency in the home language would be preferred before children begin any formal language.

It cannot be dismissed out-right that most of the reading that took place in the learning community under discussion was in English in which the parents were not as fluent nor as influential as they were in their mother tongue. This situation calls for what has been recommended in this thesis that PALCs and schools need to empower the parents with necessary skills to deal with the education of their children in general and reading in particular. The similar idea was expressed in Auerbach (1995) who cites Simich-

Dudgeon (1987) suggesting activities that could help parents improve the culture of reading amongst members of the family, particularly the younger members of the family:

- Develop programmes to empower parents to be readers to their children
- Set time aside at schools and at homes for reading and discussion on what has been learnt
- Set time at homes and at schools where information gained from reading will be shared
- Encourage pupils to read
- Provide parents with grade-appropriate materials
- Assist parents to promote good reading habits
- Give parents guidelines to assist children with homework
- Train parents for home tutoring
- Train parents on how to read to children and to listen to their children reading
- Encourage parents to communicate with schools

It has been stated in the preceding chapters that if family reading practices are not improved, then the gap between the skilled and the unskilled readers, as claimed by Pretorius (2002), will continue to widen. Pretorius (2002) concludes by saying that unless the reading problems of students are addressed, the failure rates in education institutions will continue to rise.

Sokhulu (2005) adds that there is "... the need for adult participants to enhance their own literacies whilst providing an environment which enhances the literacies of their own children" (p. 4). This study found that parents had to re-enter the schooling system because they wanted to improve their educational background for the benefit of their children and for better employment opportunities. Pretorius (2002) argues that "The ability to construct meaning during reading, to access written information independently, to acquire, to consolidate and utilize knowledge from print information, is a strong determinant of academic success" (p. 79). It is the same academic success that parents are referring to when they say they are striving for better education for their children

because they do not want to have their children suffer similar negative life experiences as they did. The family background is the greatest contributing factor in children's academic development in general and school achievement in particular.

Desmond (2006) makes a claim that children learn from those around them, a key element of social literacy theory. Mason and Krashen (1997) further purport that it is the ability to read that mainly governs an individual's quest for, and acquisition of, knowledge and his overall level of awareness. Therefore, to promote reading in the homes and family environments I concur with the views shared by Gascoigne (1995) which point out that the role played by parents in mediating reading as cultural practice in the home is of great value.

The foregoing claim in Desmond (2006) is in line with the findings of the research conducted by Cairney and Langbien (1989) which illustrated that early literacy experiences of children are deeply embedded in the social relationships that children experience at home and at school. This study adopted the socio-cultural theory approach which emphasized the significance of others in the development of the individual, as discussed in Vygotsky *et al.* (1962). I would like to acknowledge that this study was also informed by the concept of the zone of proximal development, which emphasizes what a learner can do and cannot do as an individual, as well the idea of communities of practice. These theories and concepts has been referred to in detail in the discussion section of this study. The emphasis given by these theories as well as the findings of this study further illustrate that language is socially situated.

It emerged from this study that social interaction plays a significant role in development in general. Vygotsky (1962) argues that parents, caregivers, peers and the culture at large are responsible for the development of higher order functions. This study found that there was evidence of effective family interaction. Children state that certain methods of reading are preferred and that some form of guidance is required when they read. The children mentioned that when they make mistakes during their reading, they are immediately corrected by the teacher, their classmates and parents, depending on

the environment in which the reading took place. Parents also attest that they correct their children when they make mistakes when reading. It is upon the basis of such findings and others that this study states that the socio-cultural theory is important because it embraces the contributions that society makes in the development of the individual. Socio-cultural theory stresses the interaction between developing people and the culture in which they live.

Emanating from Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, it emerged from this study that Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of communities of practice also has relevance for the development of the culture of reading and learning within the learning family. Lave and Wenger (1991) posit that groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do, learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. Though these theorists are adamant that learning in this type of interaction is not necessarily intentional, it is my belief that there is greater significance on structured reading interactions that need to take place in the learning family. The home environment is the central domain in which the learning and social interaction take place. Reading is the practice central to the interaction of the learning family.

The study further found that children were dependant on their mothers to give guidance and assistance on reading problems and other school related projects. This assistance was sought when they could not master certain tasks on their own. This dependency is directly related to the concept of the zone of proximal development. It was the children themselves who stated that, when certain reading and homework tasks became difficult, they would ask their mothers for assistance. The parents, as well, reiterated the same saying that when children have problems, they ask for help. This is the social level of interaction. The inference made was that when children do not ask for help, it is when they feel comfortable that they can cope on their own at the individual level. The latter statement could not be proven in this study as to when and how they know that they are coping with the tasks that they do not seek assistance. Central to these theories and the findings of this research is that the relationship between individuals in the process of development is crucial.

The foregoing discussion in the previous paragraphs is central to the social learning theory. Merriam and Caffarella (1991) state that this theory "... posits that people learn from observing other people, by definition, such observations take place in a social setting" (p. 134). It can also be learnt from Lave and Wenger (1991) in their discussion of the communities of practice that parents or caregivers have the potential to develop a community of readers and writers. These theorists provide a further positive perspective on this study of the role of the learning family in developing the culture of reading. What the study has found was that parents, besides being the first teachers of their children, are also involved in some sort of social engineering. This is based on the role parents play in the cultural and educational transference that take place in the home environment. There was evidence of the transactions between parents and children. In support of the views and the findings discussed here, I would like to reiterate what Handel and Goldsmith (1994) stated:

Family Reading offers permanent gifts. It provides enjoyable and nourishing reading experiences for adults. It also undoubtedly provides rich literacy experiences for children. It deepens relationships between adults and children. By regarding the family as learning unit engaged in shared literacy experiences, Family Reading offers benefits to all members of the family. (p. 150)

It is within a similar context that I further reiterate what Barton and Hamilton (2000) describe as "... structured, patterned contexts within which literacy is used" (p. 11). Family literacy practices can, therefore, be associated with all literacy events that take place in the home environment. This study has emerged with the finding that there are no structured programmes within the families that provide an enabling reading environment. Reading within the homes of the learning families is guided and informed by the amount and type of homework that is given to the children by the school. Therefore, it cannot be over-emphasized that the relationship between the school and the homes should be clearly defined and parents should be empowered to deal with the school tasks. This finding can further be related to the claim made by Morrow (1995)

who states that family literacy "... encompasses the ways parents, children and extended family members use literacy at home and in their community."

This study found that one needs to be consistently mindful of the family composition, economic status and educational background as well as the general exposure of a particular family. The economic status and the education background will determine the extent and type of support that can be given to the child's academic development. Parents who come from a low economic status, like the participants in this study, are unable to prioritize the purchasing of books and other reading materials. Parents mentioned that preference will be given to the purchase of food because of their economic status, unemployment and poverty. Contrary to this general view, Clark (1983) criticizes the view which looks at the family composition as a challenge to parental involvement in the education of their children and proclaims, instead, that it is the overall quality of the family's lifestyle that determines whether the children are well prepared for academically competent performance in the school environment. It is also evident in Sokhulu (2005) who claims that, "There is the need for adult participants to enhance their own literacies whilst providing an environment which enhances the literacies of their own children" (p. 4). This study found that, the level of parental involvement and commitment notwithstanding, the significance of economic status is immense.

## **5.6 Recommendations**

This section on recommendations emanates from what has been discussed in the previous section. These recommendations are also informed by the findings derived from this research. These recommendations are not prescriptive but provide guidance. There are many possible role players who could be included as having the potential to provide the solutions that can enhance, develop, nurture and promote the culture of reading in families. These recommendations are also mindful of the fact that the government has set priorities which may far surpass the need to build a library. These could be houses, electricity, sanitation and running water. However, the education of the

children and members of the community still remains a priority. This study recommends that:

- a) Readable as well as age-appropriate reading material needs to be made available and accessible to children and parents both at home and at school.
- b) There should be more age-appropriate books available at schools and in public adult learning centres which should circulate among learners both in primary schools and PALCs.
- c) Communities must have adequately resourced libraries and, where limitations of such exist; mobile libraries should be an alternative.
- d) Media houses should also make provision for the distribution of old newspapers to children at schools and learners at public adult learning centres and thereby to the communities at large.
- e) There should be programmes developed to empower parents to be readers to their children. This should be done by schools.
- f) Schools should set aside time for reading and discussion on what has been read and learnt at home as well as at school.
- g) Homes should set aside time for reading and discussion on what has been read and learnt at school and at home as well.
- h) Parents should be provided with grade appropriate reading materials.
- i) The parents should be assisted to promote good reading habits by giving them (parents) the guidelines to assist their children with homework.
- j) Healthy discussions or effective workshops should take place where schools will outline what role the parents should play in developing the culture of reading. These should be aimed at empowering the parents.

The recommendations made above are mindful of the challenges that impact negatively on developing the culture of reading. Responses from parents were indicative, though not as explicit, on some of the following points. These may not have been direct responses but it can be inferred from them and drawn from observations that were made that the following barriers hinder the learning family in developing the culture of reading:

- Lack of appropriate literacy practices at homes: homes lack in structured or scheduled programmes that would create habitual readers and enhance the culture of reading. In most cases, literacy practices within the context of this study are confined to homework sessions.
- Monolingual families: this study found that most of the work done in schools and in public adult learning centres is done in English, while the dominant language in the homes of the learners from both sectors of learning is isiZulu.
- Low literacy levels of families: it would have been interesting to find out how illiterate parents would have responded to the questions. It would further have been interesting to listen to what challenges they would have posed with regard to the manner in which they think of how the culture of reading can be enhanced.
- Hours of work: though both parents are not in formal employment, they are engaged in activities that require them to work, like in the school as cooks. They participate in the school's nutritional programme. This has an impact on the family literacy practices as they sometime come home tired. They have to attend classes and still assist their children with homework. This is over and above the traditional roles of women, like cooking and washing, which they still have to do in their homes.
- Home environments which are not conducive to reading: it has been noted and mentioned in the preceding chapters that homes do not have tables for learners to sit on and do homework. They sit on the floor, grass-mats or on the bed to do their homework.

Finally the findings of this study indicated that the learning family has huge educational benefits to all members of the family. Children are encouraged in their own learning by the parents' direct involvement in education as learners. The study proved that the learning family has the educational reciprocal value to the benefit of both parents and children. The study concluded that mothers have a significant role to play in promoting the culture of reading and developing habitual readers. This can be adequately achieved through structured family reading programmes, increased level of reading

competency of the parents, availability of reading materials, and empowerment programmes given to parents to enable them to deal with the intensity and the dynamic nature of reading as a family practice.

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# ADDENDUM. 1: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



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1 August 2011

**Mr JS Mkhize (914367521)**  
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Faculty of Education  
Edgewood Campus

Dear Mr Mkhize

**PROTOCOL REFERENCE NUMBER: HSS/0666/011M**

**PROJECT TITLE: The role of the learning family in developing a reading culture among adults and children**

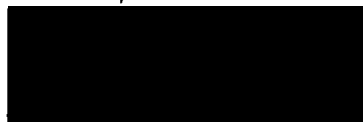
In response to your application dated 26 July 2011, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

**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: Ms Z Buthelezi & Dr P Rule  
cc. Ms T Mnisi, Faculty Research Office, Faculty of Education, Edgewood Campus