

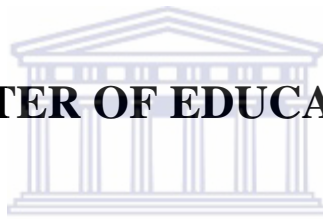
# **TEACHING READING IN MULTILINGUAL CLASSES**

by

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A mini thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF EDUCATION**



*UNIVERSITY of the*

University of the Western Cape

Faculty of Education

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# DECLARATION

I, **Eunice. S. Manasse**, the undersigned, hereby declare that the contents of this dissertation constitute my own original work which has not previously been presented to another institution either in part or as a whole for the purposes of obtaining a degree. Where I have used the work of others, I have duly acknowledged and referenced it accordingly.

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**Date:** .....

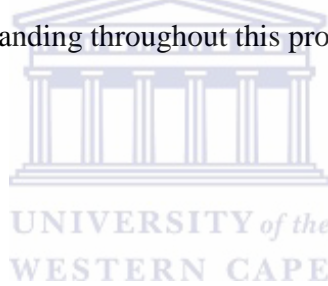


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I would also like to thank the members of my family for their prayers and constant support throughout this process.

Lastly, I would like to thank my dear husband, Joel and my sons for their constant support, love, encouragement and understanding throughout this process.



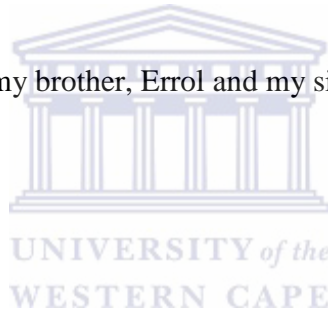
# DEDICATION

To my late mother, Mrs. Hannie Williams whose support, encouragement and help have inspired me to continue reading in this area of interest and my chosen profession. To my father, Mr. Paul Williams whose values imparted such as personal discipline and support have contributed to my completion of this product.

To my mother-in-law, Mrs. Elizabeth Manasse and my father-in-law, Mr. Ernest Manasse for their constant supporting prayers and words of encouragement.

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## ABSTRACT

Literacy is a powerful instrument of development in any society. It is also a vital tool every learner needs to achieve academic success. There is a positive relationship between literacy levels and the language of learning and teaching. In other words, learners taught in their home language are likely to achieve better academic literacy than those taught in a foreign language. In a multilingual country like South Africa where the majority of learners are taught in an additional language, it is crucial to understand how teachers develop learners' literacy skills, especially in the Foundation Phase which forms a basis for subsequent academic and independent reading.

This qualitative study investigated the teaching of reading in Grade 3 multilingual classes in one school in the Western Cape. It focused on the teaching strategies employed by teachers in teaching reading, the challenges teachers encountered in teaching reading to multilingual classrooms and the resources available to enhance reading in these classes. Data were collected by means of classroom observations and interviews with teachers.

The findings of the study show that teachers experience problems with regard to the teaching of reading in Grade 3 classes. Firstly, learners have no competence in English which is the main language of learning and teaching and this has a negative impact on their reading abilities. Secondly, while code switching is one of the popular strategies in facilitating teaching and learning, it may be problematic in multilingual classrooms in that it may exclude other learners from the content explained in a different language. Thirdly, print rich environments enhance learners' reading skills, but many underprivileged schools lack multilingual materials. The study concludes that teacher development is essential for the development of literacy in schools.

## ACRONYMS:

<b>ACE</b>	Advanced Certificate in Education
<b>DE</b>	Diploma in Education
<b>DoE</b>	Department of Education
<b>FAL</b>	First Additional Language
<b>FVR</b>	Free Voluntary Reading
<b>HDE</b>	Higher Diploma in Education
<b>HL</b>	Home Language
<b>HOD</b>	Head of Department
<b>KWL</b>	What we Know, what we Want to find out, what we have Learned
<b>LOLT</b>	Language of Learning and Teaching
<b>NCS</b>	National Curriculum Statement
<b>NICRO</b>	National Institute of Crime Prevention and Reintegration of Offender
<b>RNCS</b>	Revised National Curriculum Statement
<b>PIRLS</b>	Progress in International Reading and Literacy Strategy
<b>RSA</b>	Republic of South Africa
<b>TIMSS</b>	Third International Mathematics and Science Study
<b>WCED</b>	Western Cape Education Department

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# CHAPTER ONE: CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

## 1.1 Introduction

This study focuses on the teaching of reading to Grade 3 multilingual classes in one primary school in the Western Cape. In this chapter I give an overview of the research problem by exploring language matters pertaining to the choice of the Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT) in the community space surrounding the school where research was conducted. This chapter also deals with the research questions underpinning the study and provides a rationale for the study. It further discusses the significance of the study and gives an outline of subsequent chapters. Finally, it gives a brief description of key words used throughout the study.

## 1.2 Background and Context

There are various definitions of reading. Many scholars refer to reading as an interactive and social process in which readers use information from the printed text along with what is in their heads to construct meaning in a given situational context (Pike et al., 1997). Others define reading as a complex skill which involves a number of language dimensions which require the coordination of interrelated sources of information (Ekwall and Shanker, 1989). The Progress International Reading and Literacy Strategy (PIRLS) defines reading as the ability to understand and use those written language forms whereby young readers can construct meaning from a variety of texts (PIRLS, 2006). PIRLS (2006) found that early literacy activities at home are crucial in developing learners' reading abilities at school. What can be deduced from the various definitions is that successful reading leads to comprehension of information or the construction of meaning from the text. In other words, the reader should be able to make sense of the reading text and be able to apply the knowledge in different situations and contexts.

There are a number of challenges with regard to developing learners' reading skills in many schools. For example, according to Richek et al. (2002) the growth of poverty and the loss of family values have a negative influence on learners' reading skills. In other

words, many families are unable to invest on reading materials for their children due to poverty.

Reading has become such a vital skill that teachers with adequate training become extremely important, especially in primary schools. In the South African context literacy development is a priority due to learners' poor achievement in national literacy assessments. Therefore, in order to compete globally developing learners' reading skills becomes essential in the Foundation Phase as academic achievement depends on a solid reading foundation. Learners depend on teachers to develop the necessary skills and strategies to read fluently, independently and with comprehension. As such, this study is motivated from a personal goal to understand how teachers develop Grade 3 learners' reading skills in classes where learners come from diverse language backgrounds.

According to the National Reading Strategy (NRS) of the Department of Education (DoE) (2008) many teachers in South Africa have an under-developed understanding of teaching literacy, reading and writing. In other words many teachers have limited knowledge of teaching reading. For example, teachers in the Foundation Phase tend to use the group reading method while there are other methodologies such as shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, reading aloud and other teaching methods that can be explored. Group reading does not cater for individual learners' abilities and reading levels, especially if it is the only method used to teach reading. This is echoed by the NRS (2008) which clearly states that one method is not compliant to the learning styles of all learners. The NRS (2008) further reveals that many Foundation Phase teachers have not been trained explicitly to teach reading. For this reason they find it extremely challenging to assist learners with reading difficulties. As a result, the teaching of reading in primary schools, especially in the Foundation Phase has become a contentious debate and a topic for discussion at national level.

The Guidelines for the Foundation Phase Curriculum emphasise that it is the core responsibility of the teacher to ensure that learners can read and write independently by the end of Grade 3, although no particular methodology is prescribed (NCS 2002). It is,

however, suggested by the Curriculum Review Committee (2008) that teachers should be using a combination of methods to achieve their goal to develop independent reading skills.

Research shows that learners in South African schools, especially in the Intermediate Phase are lagging behind in comparison to their international counterparts. The poor literacy achievement of South African learners is clearly spelt out in the Progress International Reading and Literacy Strategy (PIRLS) report (2001 & 2006) and in the results of the Third International Maths and Science Study (TIMSS) of 2001. The PIRLS (2001) and TIMSS (2001) reports highlight factors such as lack of resources, infrastructure such as libraries and the learners' lack of interest to read. Perhaps easy access to television, movies through DVD's, music videos, i.e. forms of personal entertainment are immediately gratifying to learners and can be enjoyed in a "social context" rather than reading books.

Furthermore, Macdonald (1990) speaks of language demands that bear heavily on learners, especially in a context where the medium of instruction is not the home language of learners. Thus the medium of instruction puts such learners at a disadvantage in comparison to those who learn in their home languages. She further states that at the end of the Foundation Phase children worldwide are generally regarded as being able to read independently. It therefore becomes the responsibility of teachers in the Foundation Phase (Grades 1 - 3) to help each learner master the techniques of reading as comprehensively as possible. This furthermore requires teachers to cultivate the 'right' attitude to reading as these attitudes may positively or negatively influence the learners' literacy development. In other words, the reading teacher should be passionate, innovative, dedicated and committed to try different reading approaches that are inclusive to all learners. This implies that teachers should constantly reflect on their teaching practices and undergo in-service training in order to be effective in their classrooms.

### **1.3 Language, Politics and the community space**

In order to understand and explore the challenges that Foundation Phase teachers face when developing independent reading in multilingual settings, it is necessary to give a brief historical overview of the school in which the research was conducted. This overview intends to depict a picture of the community in which the research school is located in order to highlight the influence of politics and language debates on the development of the community space and how this space in turn affects reading in this context.

### **1.3.1 The community space**

The research school is situated on the Southern suburbs of Cape Town and thus has an identity and culture associated and characterised by a political history. The learners from this school come from families that have roots in an area called District Six. In the 1950s and 1960s District Six housed most of the so-called coloured communities in Cape Town. It was no paradise: it was overcrowded, housing was inadequate, and a slum-like atmosphere prevailed. Yet, to some 40 000 people it was home. The extended family took care of many of the social and economic needs of the community. It provided support and a sense of security and belonging (National Institute of Crime Prevention and Reintegration of Offender - NICRO, 1990).

This situation was however changed when the National Party came into power in 1948 and it resulted in the implementation of racial segregation under the banner of apartheid which classified people to work and live differently. In 1966 District Six was officially declared a White group area (Hall, 2001). This declaration brought about the forceful process of eviction of a dynamic community and displaced them to segregated townships on the Cape Flats. The area where this school is situated was one of these townships that was established under the Group Areas Act (1950).

The establishment of the Lavender Hill community gave birth to an assortment of cultures, with Afrikaans being the predominant language. Afrikaans mainly served as a means of communication and the language of social, political and economic interaction.

In 1977, with the establishment of the first schools in Lavender Hill, Afrikaans was the only Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT). English was introduced as a second language only in the last term of grade 2 by means of listening skills. Formal English was introduced as a subject in grade 4, but still remained without much importance to the community of Lavender Hill as Afrikaans was used to accomplish internal administrative tasks and to communicate at school. Afrikaans in this specific school was then the Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT).

### **1.3.2 Impact of Democracy and Globalization on the community space**

In 1994 South Africa became a democratic country and with this the hopes and aspirations of this community for a better and improved future were raised. It was envisaged that democracy opens doors and provides access to resources denied for decades and indeed the new government had noble intentions if one takes the South African Constitution (1996) into consideration. For example, free compulsory schooling, declaring eleven official languages and access to the best schools were introduced. Language became the vehicle through which parents perceived the advantages of democracy would be accessible. Parents in the community began to encourage their children to learn English to improve their economic position and to achieve their goals in competing for good positions in the job market locally and globally.

This perception of the advantage of being fluent in English was further exacerbated by the influence of globalisation and technology. For example, most computer programmes are in English and the medium of instruction in most higher education sectors is English. English is a global language, the form of communication in the business world and therefore an antithesis to the official language policy was experienced in communities such as this one.

A growing interest to learn English by way of evening classes to get well paid jobs and for business purposes increased tremendously. Further, democracy in South Africa became a spatial process which transcends local and national geographical spaces. The post-modern society is described as a society on the move, a phenomenon the



anthropologist, Appadurai (1996) would describe as 'flows'. In most African countries there is a large-scale migration from rural to urban areas and a lot of trans-national migration across countries, due to recent socio-economic and socio-political trends. Democracy in South Africa thus became a powerful drawing card on the African continent for those nations plagued by poverty, unemployment and civil wars. Thus migration to South Africa became increasingly popular.

Migration to South Africa results in young children being granted access to schools where they are expected to become familiar with academic subjects different to those they were exposed to in their country of origin and where a new and unfamiliar language is used. They are expected to learn this language in order to participate in academic and cognitive learning. It is the new language that serves as the medium of instruction.

This community space has not escaped the impact of globalisation, migration and trans-national flows and especially the school context is deeply affected by challenges brought about by these trans-national flows. Consequently, the development of reading and the teaching of reading in the Foundation Phase become more complex especially if teachers are not skilled or equipped to deal with learners who are not home language speakers of the medium of instruction. Such a situation could have significant implications for learners from other African nationalities.

### **1.3.3 Globalization, migration of foreigners and the impact on the community space**

After 1994 an influx of foreigners to South Africa brought about a major shift in the education system such as the one in Lavender Hill. The specific school and community were compelled to accommodate learners from Tanzania, Kenya, Burundi, Malawi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo and from other provinces, including the Eastern Cape. English started to enjoy a new status in this once predominantly Afrikaans community and school.

The increasing importance of English in terms of accommodating these learners from Anglophone and Francophone countries resulted in the school becoming an institution

where English has predominantly become the Language of Learning and Teaching. The shift, however, brought educational challenges as the school had to admit learners from different sociolinguistic and cultural backgrounds. The levels of proficiency in English for the purpose of formal learning in the schools with a different language background are generally not adequate (Webb 2002). This is the case at this specific school where I conducted my research..

#### **1.3.4 The convergence between community and school spaces**

The specific school currently has an enrolment of about 950 learners and 26 teachers. The majority of these teachers are mainly Afrikaans speakers (English First Additional Language) users with the task of teaching English as a home language. Each grade consists of 3 classes with two of those classes having English as the Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT). The ratio per class is as follows:

LOLT – English = 47: 1

LOLT – Afrikaans = 30: 1

The pupil-teacher ratio indicates that there are more learners taught through the medium of English. This situation can be attributed to parents' preference of English for socio-economic reasons as mentioned above.

This particular research school introduced a parallel system of teaching; one being Afrikaans as the Language of Learning and Teaching with English being the additional language. The other option was English as the Language of Learning and Teaching and Afrikaans being the First Additional Language (FAL). The interest of English as a Language of Learning and Teaching increased after 1994.

With two parallel systems in place, the Lavender Hillers opted for English as the main language of Learning and Teaching although many did not speak it at home. The above pupil-teacher ratio indicates that there are more learners in the English medium class. This situation placed enormous language and conceptual demands **on these learners'** literacy development as they are learning in an additional language (Macdonald 1990).

### **1.3.5 Changes in reading after democracy**

In the old dispensation the national political vision and the national curricula were ideally the wheels in driving paths of separation between races by creating different groups of dominant and subordinate positions in social, political and economic spheres. As apartheid crumbled in the early 1990's things began to change as Jansen (1999) states that with the collapse of apartheid inevitable a critical turning point in the curriculum arose. Nzimande (1997) refers to how progressive academics in an extraordinary method began with a curriculum reconstruction in anticipation of a new democratic state. The purpose of the process was mainly to lay the foundations for single national core syllabi to remove overtly racist and other insensitive languages from existing syllabi (The National Curriculum Statement, 2005).

The new democratic governments' key strategy and challenge was the transformation of the school curriculum in the form of Curriculum 2005 (C2005). Curriculum 2005 was implemented in 1997. The new Curriculum emerged with new policies and consists of three design features which are outcomes-based, integrated knowledge and learner-centred pedagogy (NCS, 2005). The transition to the new curriculum brought about inequity to a wide range of learners who ranged from disadvantaged to privileged backgrounds. According to Christie (1999) and Harber (2001) the sophistication of new policies has widened the gap between historically advantaged and disadvantaged schools.

The disadvantaged schools are faced with immense social constraints such as extensive poverty, high rates of unemployment, poor public services such as libraries, lack of parent involvement and under-resourced schools (overcrowded classrooms, few library facilities, and inadequate learning materials). The above constraints are issues heard of by the advantaged schools but not experienced. Curriculum 2005 therefore was implemented with greater ease at the former Model C schools than at the majority of disadvantaged schools because they are much better resourced (DoE 2000). The former Model C schools are in the fortunate position of having good parent involvement and financial

support which are gained through their high school fees policy. Therefore, contextual and socio-economic challenges faced by the schools would undoubtedly impact on reading strategies. The motivation to teach and learn how to read independently might be unique to particular contexts, but it could explain or highlight reasons for low reading scores at schools such as Lavender Hill.

#### **1.4 The purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study is to investigate, in the light of the above-mentioned situation, the effectiveness of the methods used by teachers in promoting independent reading to learners in a multilingual context where the majority are not home language speakers of English. Furthermore, I shall attempt to explore the challenges teachers face in teaching reading to English Additional Language users in one primary school in the Western Cape.

The study focuses on two Grade 3 learners and teachers as this is the end of the Foundation Phase. In the next grade, Grade 4 the learners should have adequate and independent reading skills as they begin to learn new academic subjects that require them to display competence in terms of language use, reading for learning and understanding and academic concepts. In view of the above, the study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

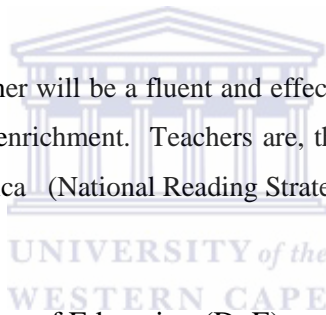
1. To observe and analyse different teaching methodologies employed by Grade 3 teachers in teaching reading in multilingual classes.
2. To identify challenges experienced by teachers in promoting reading to learners whose home language is not English.
3. To observe and describe the reading environment in selected Grade 3 classes.
4. To suggest intervention strategies with regard to promoting reading in multilingual classrooms.

#### **1.5 Motivation for the study**

There are problems with regard to literacy levels at national and international levels. However, some countries, mostly the developed countries do well in literacy development while most of the developing countries often experience a literacy crisis. (Brock 1998). For example, the Australian Education Union Summary in Reading Today (2005) clearly states that although Australia performs well in literacy in comparison with other countries, their education authorities, however, announced a crisis in their literacy system (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training & Youth Affairs, 2005).

South Africa as a developing country currently experiences the same kind of turmoil in the education system pertaining to learners' reading levels and effective literacy skills. To address this challenge the Department of Education (DOE) declared a national vision for the reading strategy as follows:

Every South African learner will be a fluent and effective reader who reads to learn, and reads for enjoyment and enrichment. Teachers are, therefore, key to the transformation of education in South Africa (National Reading Strategy, 2008).



In 2001 and 2004 the Department of Education (DoE) conducted the systemic evaluations to establish literacy levels in primary schools targeting Grade 3 and Grade 6 learners. The test exposed the learners to language activities that unfolded the components of listening, reading, spelling and writing simultaneously. The test was supervised by invigilators appointed by the Department of Education. In order to be graded as a functional reading school, it is required that a school obtains a reading score level of above 50%. The results of these tests show very low reading ability in our country confirming that large numbers of our learners lack proper reading skills. The results of the systemic evaluation of Grade 3 learners done by the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) show low literacy levels in the research school i.e. the learners were unable to read independently at their level.

Furthermore, an international evaluation namely the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS 2006) which is a comparative study on reading was conducted in

40 countries in which South Africa fared the worst in their samples of Grade 4 and Grade 5 learners. According to the PLRLS (2006) report 80% of South Africa's Grade 4 and Grade 5 learners have not attained the most basic reading skills.

The former Minister of Education, Ms Naledi Pandor called on all teachers of literacy to focus on firm Foundations for Learning with foci on effective reading and writing skills (DoE 2008). As stated in the Government Gazette of 14 March 2008, the Foundations for Learning Campaign is a four –year campaign (2008 – 2011) to create a national focus to improve the reading, writing and numeracy abilities of all South African children. In order to obtain its objectives and expectations, every teacher must have sufficient resources to ensure effective teaching and learning of Literacy.

According to the NCS (2008), South Africa faces many challenges in achieving their vision i.e. promoting literacy. These challenges include lack of reading books at home, lack of books in African languages, and many others. Some classrooms have no books and classes which have set readers, have them at the wrong level. All these challenges could prevent and impact adversely on the development of learners' reading skills.

Also, the Language of Learning and Teaching in the research school could further influence the above-mentioned situation. At this school, the majority of learners come from different language backgrounds but they are taught in English. Although the learners are supported through an intensive programme to enable them to read and write in a language that is not their home language, they are still not coping with reading (NCS 2008). In other words, these learners continue to lack the ability to read and write effectively and independently at the end of the Grade 3.

In the light of the above, this study investigates the factors underlying poor reading performance at this Cape Flats School. It explores teachers' pedagogical strategies in order to understand how they deal with reading lessons in two Grade 3 multilingual classrooms i.e. in classrooms with learners speaking different languages, although they

are all taught in English. The study is based on this broad research question that has other sub-questions to be addressed:

**How do teachers develop learners' independent reading skills where there is a mismatch between their home language and the Language of Teaching and Learning (LOLT)?**

To unpack this research question, the following sub-questions are raised:

1. What challenges do teachers experience in teaching reading in multilingual classes?
2. What teaching strategies do teachers employ to teach reading to Grade 3 learners who are not home language speakers of English?
3. What reading materials are available to promote learners' independent reading skills in Grade 3 multilingual classes?

## **1.6 The scope of the study**

The study will be limited to Grade 3 learners and teachers. It focuses on the development of independent reading in Grade 3. It acknowledges the importance of other literacy skills such as listening, speaking, language and grammar as well as writing. However, in order to proceed academically, reading progress remains a crucial stumbling block in our endeavours towards functional literacy in the everyday life of learners. As a result, the study is limited to exploring the development of independent reading in Grade 3.

## **1.7 Significance of the study**

This study will be significant to all teachers, especially those in the Foundation Phase in terms of highlighting the challenges experienced in teaching reading in multilingual classrooms. Furthermore, it could shed light on the particular challenges that teachers face when teaching reading to learners from other African nationalities.

It will be of great value to the specific school and teachers as it might shed light on their current classroom practices as a basis to improve their strategies when teaching reading in their classrooms.

Finally, the study will be useful to the Department of Education in terms of highlighting challenges with regard to teaching reading in a diverse community of learners, as well as intervention strategies that can be used to improve the current situation.

## **1.8 Definition of key terms**

In order to facilitate a common understanding of certain terms used in this study, a brief operational definition of each term is given below:

### **English**

English is one of the eleven official languages of South Africa. It is used as the main Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT) in the majority of schools and institutions of higher education in this country. In many black schools it is used as a LOLT from Grade 4. It has become a vehicle for power struggle among the different social groups due to its hegemonic status. It is the main LOLT in the two Grade classes involved in this study.

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### **First Additional Language (FAL)**

The First Additional Language assumes that learners do not necessarily have the knowledge of the language when they start their schooling. In many South African schools English is taught as a First Additional Language (FAL) to learners who do not speak it as a home language (HL). In this particular study English is the FAL to the majority of learners and teachers although it is used a Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT).

### **Home Language (HL)**

The Home Language (HL) refers to the language that the learners come to school with and are able to understand and speak. In the context of this study, many learners speak different home languages (namely Afrikaans, isiXhosa, French and Shona) which are not used in their classrooms as LOLT.



## **Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT)**

The Language of Learning and Teaching is the main language used for teaching and learning. In the two classes involved in this research English is used as the LOLT.

## **Multilingual classroom**

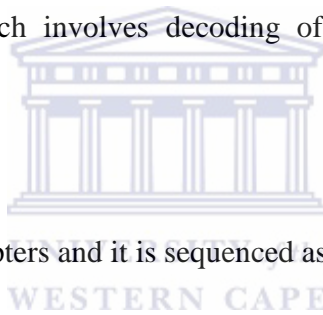
The multilingual classroom consists of learners from different cultural and language backgrounds who speak different home languages. In this study learners have different home languages, namely, Afrikaans, English, French, isiXhosa and Shona.

## **Reading**

Reading is one of the language skills that have to be developed for academic literacy. It is an interactive process which involves decoding of texts for meaning making or comprehension.

## **1.9 Chapter outline**

This thesis consists of five chapters and it is sequenced as follows:



Chapter one introduces the study. It highlights the purpose of the research by means of the background and context. A description of the study as well as the scope and limitations of the study is included. The first chapter serves as an introductory explanation of the main research question, the background and context on which this study is based.

Chapter two reviews literature concerned with reading proficiency and independent reading. It also discusses the challenges experienced with regard to teaching reading.

Chapter three focuses on the research paradigm and the data collection techniques which were used in this study. It outlines the qualitative approach and provides theory to substantiate the choice for the methodology and design of the study.

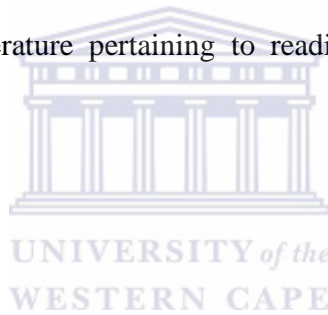
Chapter four presents and analyses collected data. It gives a brief explanation of the data analysis process which gave rise to research findings.

Chapter five presents the research findings, conclusions and highlights recommendations for improving reading in multilingual settings.

### 1.10 Summary

In summary this chapter discusses the research problem in relation to the challenges teachers experienced in dealing with learners who are English First Additional Language users in a multilingual context. It gives the research questions underpinning the problem under investigation. The rationale and the significance of the study are discussed.

The next chapter reviews literature pertaining to reading in general and the various approaches to reading.



## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

The essential focus of this chapter is to discuss teaching methods and approaches that enable learners to read fluently, independently and with comprehension. In addition, it focuses on challenges experienced by teachers in teaching reading to learners whose home languages are different from the Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT). The

literature reviewed in this chapter draws on theories of classroom interaction with emphasis on developing reading competency. It focuses on definitions of reading with reference to traditional and cognitive views of reading. It also reviews perceptions of reading and how these perceptions or definitions have developed over time.

## 2.2 The Reading Process

Reading is a vital skill that learners need in order to achieve academic success (Carrell, 1989). It is essential in the school environment as academic achievement depends on a solid reading foundation. Subsequently, reading is an important skill to master at school and for those who do manage to develop this skill, it leads towards academic success. More importantly the lack of reading with comprehension could be connected with social construction of identities, because teachers normally view those learners who can read with comprehension as academically competent.

In addition learners depend on teachers to develop the necessary skills and strategies needed to read fluently, independently and with comprehension. However, learning to read at school seems to be a complex and contested issue as there are manifold views on how to optimally teach reading (Gibbons, 2002). Luke and Freebody (1990), however, argue that the appropriate reading method is not the issue to debate, but that reading programmes should emphasise different 'literacies' i.e. that learners need to take on different roles as they read text. Therefore, reading is a complex interactive skill that includes a meaning construction process, involving both decoding processes and comprehending processes (Perkins 2005).

Goodman (1967) refers to three kinds of knowledge on which readers draw to gain meaning from a text; semantic knowledge which is knowledge of the world, syntactic knowledge which is knowledge of the structure of language and graphophonic knowledge which refers to knowledge of sound-letter relationship. Further, Silberstein (1987) refers to the skill in reading as dependent on the interaction between linguistic knowledge and knowledge of the world. So too, Spink (1989) sees reading as a process involving the perception of the words, the comprehension of the text and a reaction to what is read. Further, reading is a rich, complex activity and process requiring readers to engage with

different texts through various strategies that are vital in formal learning (De Jong, 2000). Additionally, Pretorius (2003) argues that the ability to read includes the ability to construct meaning from the written word as we live in a world where the written word is important. Smith (2005) perceives reading as a process in which information from the text and the reader's background knowledge operate to generate meaning. Therefore, based on the previously mentioned viewpoints, reading is more than just a text and is also dependent on aspects of personal or cultural knowledge about the text either in relation to the content or text type.

Moreover, Cummins (1996) states that being able to read in one's home language is one of the most crucial elements in learning to read. In other words, the learners' home language skills facilitate reading in the first additional language. This supports the idea that literacy problems exist when the learners do not know the language used in teaching reading and writing (Pinnock, 2009). As stated earlier, the learners in this study are learning to read through their additional language, English. Their teachers are also not home language speakers of English and this situation raises some questions on how teachers and learners interact for effective reading. Thus the purpose of the study is to explore how teachers teach independent reading in a diverse multilingual and multicultural setting in grade 3 at a specific school. In the next section I explore some viewpoints on the reading process.

### **2.3 Viewpoints on reading**

Kilfoil and Van Der Walt (1998) states that research in reading up to the 1970's focused mostly on the text and that meaning was in the text and independent of the reader. Therefore, if learners display deficient skills in reading with comprehension it was

attributed to difficulties with language structures and lexicon. Reading with comprehension was thus a product to be acquired and as a result, the assumption was that reading texts was a decontextualised skill that learners are expected to acquire without prior knowledge being important. Reading as decontextualised product or skill to be

mastered emerged from psycholinguistics during the 1960's (Kilfoil and Van Der Walt 1998). However, from the late 1960's psycholinguists have put forward several theories about reading and the focus has shifted from product to process and the active role of the reader was emphasised. These studies however focused mostly on first language research and reading.

Goodman (1967) viewed reading as a selective and information-processing skill. According to him first language users read titles, first sentences or select paragraphs firstly and formulate certain expectations of the content. These expectations can be changed as readers sample more of the text and as such expectations can be confirmed or adjusted. Subsequently, according to Goodman (1967) the successful first language reader does not read word-for-word nor do they utilise all the textual clues. As a result, reading with comprehension requires discerning what information to select and to process that information in order to make sense of the text, a skill that might not be entirely possible for second language readers who might be able to read and understand individual sentences, paragraphs and titles but may not be able to predict or select relevant information to process. Therefore, making expectations, confirming or adjusting these expectations about the text might be challenging.

As elaboration on Goodman's reading theory, Kolars (1969) viewed reading as incidentally visual. He argues that reading is more than words on paper and only a part of the meaning of the text. The remainder is the reader reading the text. As such readers make sense of what they read because of their prior knowledge of reading and of the topic. Therefore, personal background and cultural knowledge about the text play a major role in successfully reading with comprehension. As a result, the reader is a text participant who connects with the text making meaning from the text based on their own background knowledge, including knowledge of the world, cultural knowledge and knowledge of the text structure. Consequently, reading is a skill that incorporates the text and the active text participant i.e. the reader.

Furthermore, Clark and Silberstein (1977) provide practical application to the notion of reading as a skill. For them reading is purposeful and therefore readers use different reading strategies for different purposes. Moreover, the aim of teaching reading should be on the development of skills that would enable readers to extract meaning from any text. Therefore, teachers should use a skills-based reading approach that concentrates on meaning and teaching learners to comprehend chunks of information, not individual sentences. As a result, this approach to reading puts less emphasis on the reader as participant in meaning making of reading text.

Coady (1979) puts emphasis on reading as an interactive process. This interactive reading process is dependent on interrelated factors such as cognitive abilities, background knowledge and processing skills. Therefore, an underlying principle is that the text does not carry complete meaning in itself but provides direction for listeners or readers on how they should retrieve or construct meaning from their own 'previously acquired knowledge (Carrell and Eisterhold, 1983:556).

Moreover, Kilfoil and Van der Walt (1997) refer to reading as the ability to comprehend the written word in a variety of texts. They mention certain criteria of what reading is as well as the processes to successful reading. According to them:

1. Reading is an interaction between reader and the text
2. Reading is selective because the human brain has a limited ability to process information.
3. Reading is purposeful
4. Reading involves different reading speeds
5. Reading is an individual activity

Foetsch (1998) views reading as the ability to pronounce and identify words in order to bring meaning to the text. For Foetsch (1998) reading is therefore much more than an act of encoding print. According to him reading involves the manner in which the learner pronounces the print as well as the ability to attach meaning to words.

Pretorius (2002) conceptualises reading as a cognitive linguistic activity that involves numerous skills such as decoding and comprehension. Decoding according to him is the process of attaching meaning to the written word whereas comprehension is the understanding process assigned to the whole text. Perkins (2005) believes that learners should be interested in reading books in order to acquire knowledge and develop the skills of creating, interpreting and evaluating text.

All the above views of reading mention texts, written words and interaction as key aspects of reading. This implies that teachers should keep in mind and acknowledge young learners' previous knowledge in planning their teaching programmes. The reading plan should be designed to the learners' abilities and needs as some children may have some experiences of print as they enter Grade R. This means that they have been exposed to books and print in an informal manner. For example, some parents, especially middle class parents buy books and stimulate their children to print at home. However, there could be a mismatch between those who 'have' and the 'have nots' as learners from poorer backgrounds might not be exposed to print material and as such find it challenging to engage with the technology of written script i.e. sound-symbol, left to right directionality and alphabet knowledge particularly at the start of the Foundation Phase when background knowledge is essential.

Further, Krashen (1993) refers to Free Voluntary Reading (FVR) as the foundation of language education with sustained silent reading and self-selected reading as powerful tools in promoting independent reading skills. Research by Krashen (1993) clearly indicates that learners using Free Voluntary Reading (FVR) produce better results in reading comprehension tests than learners exposed to the traditional skill-based reading instruction assigned from basal reader and direct instruction in grammar, vocabulary, reading comprehension and spelling. This implies that one learns to read better through extensive reading (i.e. learn by reading). Krashen (1993) recommends Free Voluntary Reading (FVR) as a means of enhancing learners' reading skills and their interest in reading. Free Voluntary Reading (FVR) may be implemented with success where there is an adequate provision of reading materials and exposure to a reading environment and

culture. It can also yield better cognitive results if the learners have competence in the language used in teaching reading. In addition, teachers' pedagogical strategies or methods can influence learners' independent reading. In other words, teachers who make use of interactive teaching methods are more likely to influence their learners' reading skills positively than those who use traditional methods which do not encourage active learner participation. Hence I distinguish between the traditional and cognitive views on reading in the next section.

## 2.4. Reading: traditional and cognitive views

There are two views of reading, namely the traditional and cognitive views (Dole, 1991: Rummelhart, 1997). According to the traditional view of reading, readers acquire hierarchically ordered skills that direct towards comprehension ability (Dole 1991). In support of this view, Nunan (1991) refers to reading as a process of decoding a series of written symbols into their aural equivalents in expediting meaning to text. This process is referred to as the "bottom-up" view of reading (Nunan 1991).

On the other hand, the cognitive view of reading is a direct opposite of the traditional view as it takes the reader into consideration as a participant in meaning-making of text and as such it is viewed as a 'top-down' model approach to reading. According to Dole et al. (1991) cognitive views of reading comprehensions stress the interactive nature of reading. The section that follows discusses these two views to reading.

### 2.4.1 Traditional View

The traditional approach to reading views the reader as a passive decoder in that the reader has to progress through various stages, namely from one letter to another, then to phrases and lastly to sentences. This indicates that meaning stems from the bottom (text) to the top where the reader decodes it. According to the traditionalist this is the method that assists children in learning how to read (Dole et al, 1991).



In order for children to be able to read they need the vital skills such as phonic and visual short-term memory skills. A vital skill of reading is the ability and capacity to follow an argument in a text. Urquhart and Weir (1986) refer to this as the text-driven approach of reading. They furthermore argue that the text-driven approach is a more appropriate approach to reading. McCarthy (1999) on the other hand, refers to this traditional view as the ‘outside-in’ process. This means that learners interpret the printed text and then take it in.

However, the shortcomings of such an approach are evident in the reading of narratives, particularly in poetry. In thinking back on my own experience in terms of analysing poetry, I clearly remember how teachers used to tell us what the text meant. I can still remember the feeling of disempowerment when told that my interpretation was incorrect.

Day and Bamford (2002) state that the traditional approach tends to overlook the larger context of learners’ attitudes towards reading. Further, it does not recognise the reader as a participant in the meaning making of the text. It assumes that all learners will interpret the text in a similar fashion, and that texts are value-free and neutral.

#### **2.4.2 Cognitive View**

On the other hand, the cognitive view of reading referred to as the ‘top-down’ model is in disagreement with the ‘bottom-up’ model. This view acknowledges the reader as text-participant, who samples the text, predicts and confirms or rejects predictions and as such the text is not only words on paper that has to be taken in and universally understood by readers. Advocates of this view to reading, acknowledges the background knowledge of readers as an important meaning-making factor (Carrell and Eisterhold 1983). Therefore, a top-down process involves the reader’s ability to draw on prior knowledge to predict what they might find in a text and to construct meaning while they read. This prior knowledge is referred to as schemata. Rumelhart (1997) describes schemata as “building blocks of cognition”. Therefore, schemata theory of reading falls within the cognitive view of reading. Spivey and Mellon (1989) reiterate this notion, saying the reader

actively builds a mental representation by combining new information with previously acquired knowledge.

Rumelhart (1977) furthermore states that if a learner's schemata are incomplete, the learner may have problems in processing and understanding the text. Block (1992) speaks of the metacognitive view of reading which involves thinking about what one is doing while reading. This means that strategic readers attempt to identify the purpose and the form of the text. They think about the general character and features of the form of the text. They then attempt to project the author's purpose for writing the specific text while they are reading it and make predictions about what will occur next (Klein, et.al, 1991). Likewise, Maxwell and Meiser (1997) argue that emphasis has shifted from the text to interactions between text and reader. Text provides a multitude of possibilities for interpretation.

In the light of the above, the development of comprehension is a vital outcome of reading. According to Cunningham and Allington (1999) learners' comprehension of text depends on how teachers construct lessons and activities in order to stimulate learners' thinking skills. They argue that thinking is inevitable in reading as it stimulates learners to make meaning of the reading text. Urquhart and Weir (1986) refer to the top-down approach as the reader-driven approach. On a cautionary note, there should not be a breakdown between the traditional and the cognitive view of reading when promoting effective reading but teachers should rather opt for integration between these two reading processes (Dole et al, 1991).

## **2.5 Reading as an interactive process**

Reading is an activity with a purpose (Byrnes, 1998). Reading is an interactive process that goes on between the reader and the text, resulting in comprehension and composition. Reading includes several levels of comprehension that includes:

- ◆ the ability to understand words
- ◆ the ability to use a range of strategies to identify the meanings of words;
- ◆ the ability to go beyond the text

- ◆ the ability to interrogate the text for specific items of information;
- ◆ the ability to compare and appreciate texts.

Central to any reading experience is the interaction between reader and text. Learners must be able to read, understand and write about the content of the text. Teachers should encourage learners to talk about their personal reading experiences with other readers, and present the content of books that have been read orally to the class. (Carrell, 1989).

Based on the previous discussion, teacher- learner interaction is seen as a vital tool in the classroom for effective teaching of reading. Brophy and Good (1986) state that effective teachers in handling the learners' responses to questions should emphasize and train all learners to respond, even if the response is negative. They recommend that teachers should therefore monitor the success of the learners carefully and intervene where necessary. Bruner (1986) refers to this effective teacher-pupil interaction as 'scaffolding' that enables children to operate at higher levels of cognitive functioning.

Additionally, Gibbons (2002) refers to scaffolding as a special kind of tool that assists learners to develop new skills, concepts and levels of understanding on the road towards independent reading. Moreover, the special assistance is temporary in directing learners to eventually do the similar reading task on their own. Rose (2005) refers to scaffolding as crucial in moving learners into reading independently and writing academically. Both Rose and Gibbons draw their scaffolding theory from the Vygostskyan model of scaffolding. The term "scaffolding" refers to the provision of support in the teaching-learning process. Bruner (1978) describes scaffolding as the steps taken to carry out a task by the learner with the necessary support.

In the classroom scaffolding refers to a special kind of assisting learners in acquiring new skills and levels of understanding. Scaffolding occurs in various ways such as teacher-learner or learner-learner interaction or through the provision of facilities and resources that support learning. Scaffolding is thus the temporary assistance by which the teacher supports the learner until the learner is able to execute a similar task alone. Scaffolding is future-

orientated and developmental in that what a child can do with support today, she or he can do alone tomorrow (Vygotsky, 1978).

In teaching reading learners can be scaffolded through shared and guided reading. The teacher should explain anything that will increase learners' understanding of the text. For example, mentioning of the types of text (fiction/non-fiction), the characters, the setting and key words will enable the learners to link the text to their own knowledge and experiences. For learners to read better teachers should focus on sight words and sentence construction during reading lessons. Teaching word and sentence skills explicitly will eventually encourage learners to practise reading the text independently.

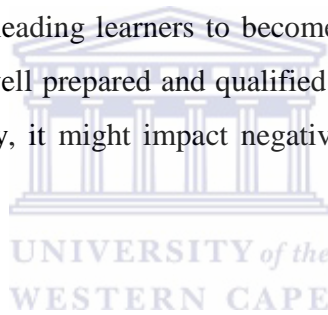
Therefore, scaffolding is a necessary tool in the teaching-learning process, particularly in the lower grades where learners are still grappling with reading and writing. It becomes even a great necessity when learners are beginning to read, especially in a language in which they have limited competence.

## **2.6 Factors influencing reading**

A growing body of research and discussions highlight a deepening reading crisis both nationally and internationally (Moore and Hart, 2007). Sukhraj et al. (2000) reports on an audit that found 17% of teachers were unqualified, over 50% of schools lack school libraries and adequate infrastructure, overcrowded classes and learner backgrounds characterised by minimal interaction with print material. This audit was conducted in the Western Cape. Furthermore, Pretorius (2002) highlights teaching practice in the first three years of schooling that focuses on decoding skills at the expense of comprehension with the result that many learners resort to 'barking at print', i.e. reading with accurate pronunciation but with little understanding of what they have read (Macdonald, 1990). These factors could pose serious challenges for learners' reading development and academic success at school. The objective of teaching reading is to help learners to understand the message encoded in print. The next section discusses some of the factors which influence learners' reading skills.

### **2.6.1 Learners' prior knowledge**

According to Harrison (1996) learners' prior learning and background knowledge contributes largely to their literacy development and only a small percentage is obtained at school. This could have severe consequences for the development of reading at schools, especially for learners coming from impoverished socio-economic, but more importantly print material impoverished backgrounds. Stanovich (1986) maintains that school environments can benefit those learners who are already rich in literacy experience to become richer and those poorer to remain poorer. In other words the materials and methods, used by the teacher, as well as the environment of the whole school and how conducive it is for literacy development contribute largely to the learners' literacy skills. Barr (1984) and Adams (1990) concur that the role of the teacher is most significant in leading learners to become effective independent readers. However, if teachers are not well prepared and qualified to teach reading based on solid scaffolding or schemata theory, it might impact negatively on reading development of learners in their classes.



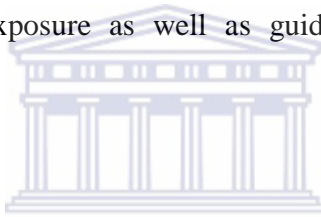
### **2.6.2 Class size**

Stallings et al. (1977) mention organisational issues such as smaller classes which influence the learners' ability to read. Effective classroom organization that promotes an atmosphere where the learners are comfortable and aware of what options they have in the completion of their tasks are most likely to produce better and effective reading results (Wray and Medwell, 2002). From experience it is difficult to be an effective teacher of reading if the class total is bigger than the class space. This makes good classroom conduct and organization impossible and difficult. Teachers facing such situations find it extremely difficult to promote group tasks and produce good reading results.

### **2.6.3 Types of reading tasks**

Wray and Medwell (2002) claim that the types of reading tasks impact on the learner's ability to effectively and successfully complete such tasks. Brophy and Good (1986) are in agreement and state that effective teachers will go the extra mile to match reading tasks according to the learning abilities of the particular learners. They propose group tasks as effective, but with teacher directed activities that will expose all members of the class to the same content at different levels. In addition, Wray and Medwell (2002) argue that task content, which refers to the nature of the tasks set for the learners can influence their achievement. As a result, teachers must take extra care and ensure that the type of tasks match the needs of the learners in order for reading comprehension to develop.

Teachers are required to effectively manage reading groups. Kilfoil and Van der Walt (1997) refer to teachers as managers who communicate with learners and arrange sufficient opportunities for exposure as well as guiding them through the reading activities.



Subsequently, teachers have to take more control by selecting reading materials that interest the learners. It is therefore imperative for teachers to frequently monitor and note strengths and weaknesses of the learners. In doing so, the effective teacher will make a point of the ability of each learner in the class. Gibbons (2002) states that when teachers plan for reading, the activities should assist readers to understand the text they are reading and to develop good reading strategies to read any other texts.

However, not all children's reading abilities in a class are at the same level. As a result, many teachers in the Foundation Phase usually place all learners according to reading ability and achievement groups. The different reading ability groups allow the teacher to prepare her reading lessons appropriately and according to the needs of the groups. The learners are able to read and progress at the level of their peers. This promotes learners' confidence to read out loud as they feel comfortable in their groups. On the other hand, Cunningham and Allington (1999) argue that the ability grouping may become problematic in that there is little evidence that worksheet activities improve the children's

reading and writing ability. They suggest that a variety of literacy materials be used during guided reading to develop the children's reading and thinking strategies. Using one basal reader may not be challenging to the bright children while they also do not assist struggling readers with reading. Bright children need to be provided with more challenging books to stimulate their thinking skills.

## **2.7 Developing learners' reading skills**

Firstly, teaching reading entails a variety of attitudes and beliefs by the teachers (Carolls, 1999). For example, teachers have to be passionate about their work. It is imperative for literacy teachers to attain a positive attitude when teaching reading and writing skills to young children. Having the correct attitude and passion leads to great promotion point in literacy.

Secondly, teachers should understand deeply what reading is in order for them to teach it sensibly and effectively. In addition, Carolls (1999) argues that reading is not merely being able to make sounds out of print, as this is the most common misunderstanding of reading, it actually means being able to make sense out of print. In order to acquire the ability to make sense out of print, beginning readers need the process of knowledge of language. The more familiar children are with the world, with language and with print, the easier it is to read (Carolls, 1999). This implies that learners who learn to read in an additional language may experience some difficulties as they have to master the language before they can make sense of the reading text.

Thirdly, learners need rhyme, rhythm and repetition in their early reading texts (Carolls, 1999). These aspects build a natural bridge between the familiar languages of the written word. They also need exposure to the best-written language possible. The choice of books is important in that it determines the children's interest in reading and their level of comprehension of the chosen text. As stated above, reading in an unfamiliar language may pose some reading problems for learners. Also, if there are no reading materials available, the learners' reading abilities will be retarded.

Lastly, learners need teachers who will make connections between learning to write and learning to read. In accordance with the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS 2002) learners write different kinds of factual and imaginative texts for a wide range of purposes. Therefore, learning to read happens faster when learners are given the opportunity to write and allow them to read what other learners write. It promotes a special connection between reading and writing if teachers write with and in front of learners. This, according to Carolls (1999), will cultivate an eagerness to read since the learners have contributed to the creation of the story.

There are various approaches to develop learners' reading skills, namely shared reading, guided reading and reading aloud. These approaches are discussed below.

### **2.7.1. Shared reading**

Shared reading is a process in which the children and teacher read together. It is a whole class activity where the teacher and learners share a complete text, such as a story. The focus is on modelling and teaching reading skills. It provides an opportunity for the learners to read with insight and comprehension. In this strategy, children develop the critical understanding and techniques steering them in the direction of independent reading.

According to Perkins (2005: 6) reading is a shared activity and talking is a vital component of the reading process. It enables the learner to listen for information, to communicate confidently and effectively and to read and view the written text for information and enjoyment. This corresponds with Learning Outcome 3 (Reading and Viewing), which requires the learner to read and view for information and enjoyment (National Curriculum Statement (NCS), 2002). In acquiring these skills the learner develops the ability to write different kinds of factual and imaginative texts by using language to think and reason appropriately by using sounds.



### **2.7.2 Guided reading**

Cunningham and Allington (1999) refer to guided reading as a strategy where teachers demonstrate to children the important things to be done while they read, allowing them to do all the work. The teacher only assists when needed. This promotes learners' reading, thinking and comprehension skills effectively. Assistance and intervention from teachers occur when learners struggle with words or do not understand the meanings of words. During guided reading the learners sit in small groups and read the same text with the teacher. I agree With Cunningham and Allington in the notion of guided reading. From my personal experience, guided reading gives the teacher the opportunity to target various reading skills and strategies. The strategies include phonics, sight word recognition, comprehension, knowledge of sentence structure and punctuation.



### **2.7.3 Reading aloud**

To my understanding reading aloud is simply reading stories to learners. The teacher selects and reads stories that will appeal to the learners. This method works well when it is done regularly. Being a teacher myself I find this method effective in that it broadens the learners' general knowledge, vocabulary and language competence. It takes the learners beyond their immediate experiences. Therefore I concur with Carolls (1999) that teaching reading is to tell stories to children. Reading aloud to them enables them to understand how stories start and finish. Therefore, the more children listen to stories, the more knowledge of the world and of language they will gain. In seeing the print and listening to rhymes, learners acquire the skill to predict and unlock the print in order to make meaning of the text.

### **2.7.4 Exposure to literacy material**

Many schools in the Western Cape use basal readers during guided reading periods. It becomes problematic to master the art of reading if only one basal reader is used for

guided reading as it only targets average readers at specific levels. Basal readers are the reading series that the school chose for use during reading lessons. The school, through the different publishers, purchases these books. The reading books are graded in stages to accommodate differentiation of reading ability.

Classrooms should be equipped with a wide range of reading materials and should provide a print rich environment, such as wall charts and reading strips that expose the learners to more than one language e.g. English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa. Such an environment will improve the learners' reading ability. Teachers should also provide a variety of texts to accommodate the needs and interests of all learners. The wide range of texts in classrooms presents the learners with opportunities to explore and discover knowledge, skills and information by engaging with one another.

Learners' reading skills can also be developed through the provision of fun books in every classroom so that reading for pleasure may be a priority (Anderson, 2005). Having taught for more than twenty years, I have witnessed how learners enjoy listening to a variety of fun stories read or told by the teacher. The teacher's voice acts as the tool to portray the characters and the appropriate atmosphere. To develop to early literacy children should be inspired to express themselves by telling their own stories. This can lead to creative writing by learners.

Learners should be encouraged to express themselves in writing and to read what they have written to each other e.g. their views on life, loss, their hopes and dreams. Teachers should create a space and a good atmosphere for reading so that they can assess their learners' reading comprehension appropriately (Anderson, 2005). There are many types of reading comprehension assessments that teachers could use. One type involves having learners read a passage and then having to answer factual questions about the text. Another entails learners answering inferential questions about implied information in the text. A third type is when learners are required to fill in missing words from a passage. And fourthly is a type when learners must retell the story in their own words (Wren 2004).

## **2.8 Summary**

The literature reviewed in this chapter indicates that reading is an important and crucial cognitive and linguistic skill that needs to be developed in young learners. It provides a platform upon which all other learning takes place. If a child is able to read fluently and with comprehension, he will naturally fare well in all his other learning areas. Developing a love for reading in young learners is giving them one of the greatest gifts in life. Reading must be done in an environment where learners are able to develop the skills necessary to understand and enjoy different texts. The reading space should be conducive to purposeful interaction in order to develop learners' independent reading. This calls for innovative and inclusive teaching strategies which accommodate learners of different reading abilities and language and cultural backgrounds.

In the next chapter I focus on research methodology to explain and describe how data were collected in order to address the research questions stated in Chapter one.

  
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## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

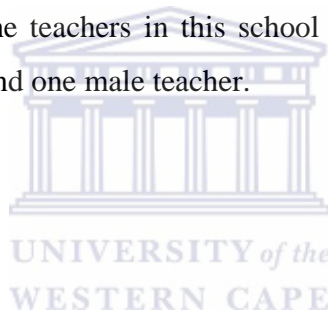
### **3.1 Introduction**

As stated in Chapter one, the main aim of the study is to investigate how teachers develop learners' independent reading skills where there is a mismatch between the learners' home language and the Language of Learning and Teaching. This chapter describes the research site and participants of the study. It also gives an account of the research design and research procedures implemented to explore and investigate the reading process in multilingual classrooms.

### **3.2 Research site**

A brief description of the research site is given in Chapter one. The description focuses mainly on the socio-economic status of the community in which the research school is situated and the language issues following the birth of the democratic South Africa. The description given in this chapter highlights the school demographics where the research was conducted.

The study was conducted at a primary school situated on the Southern suburbs of Cape Town. This particular school has a total enrolment of 1 245 learners. The majority of the learners come from low socio-economic backgrounds where unemployment, poverty and crime prevail. As many schools in South Africa accommodate a diverse population of learners, this school is also a multicultural and multilingual space with immigrant learners from neighbouring countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zimbabwe. The majority of the teachers in this school are females. The management team consists of five females and one male teacher.



### **3.3 Research design**

This study makes use of a qualitative research design in order to explore the effectiveness of the reading strategies used by the teachers. Thus a qualitative methodology was followed and qualitative data were collected to explore and understand how Grade 3 teachers interact with their learners when teaching reading during language lessons.

Merriam (1998) defines qualitative research as a broad spectrum covering numerous forms of investigation under one umbrella to assist us in understanding the meaning of social phenomena without disrupting the natural setting. The purpose is to collect data without disturbing the natural setting and to analyse and interpret the data.

Patton (1985) explains qualitative research as an effort to understand the uniqueness of situations in a specific framework and the interactions that it entails. Researchers therefore observe participants in their natural settings by studying their activities, for example, looking at what their lives are like, what is meaningful to them and what their world looks like.

Patton (1985) furthermore states that this understanding in itself is not necessarily an attempt to predict the future, but rather attempts to realize the nature of the setting from the participants' perspective and not the researcher's. This notion of understanding from the perception of the participants would allow for any preconceived ideas I may have, as I am a teacher at this particular school.

Denzin (1994) refers to qualitative research as a tool that covers a spectrum of techniques, which includes observation, interviewing and documentary analysis that may be used in a wide range of disciplines. Qualitative data must therefore be analysed, interpreted and then it must be presented in a valid manner as it is not quantifiable. Data collected using the qualitative approach ought to be valid and authentic though dependability remains uncertain, because of the accusations so easily levelled against qualitative researchers who according to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000), detect only "the loudest bangs or the brightest lights". For the purpose of this thesis qualitative measures only are selected, despite the fact that the method's shortcomings are numerous.

Sherman and Webb (1988) on the other hand state that a qualitative research entails a direct concern with experience as qualitative researchers are interested in how they make sense of their world. According to them qualitative researchers are interested to discover how people have constructed these meanings.

Qualitative research entails different characteristics. For example, Guba and Lincoln (1981) perceive the role of the researcher as the instrument that is capable of processing, clarifying and summarizing data immediately as the study develops. For Merriam (1998) the researcher's role is a key instrument in collecting and analysing data by using different techniques and instruments.

Another characteristic of qualitative research is that it usually entails fieldwork whereby the researcher physically goes to the people and spends some time amongst them to observe their daily activities in their natural settings. In this case the researcher becomes personally involved and familiar with the occurrence being studied (Merriam, 1998). I was already personally involved or an insider and consequently my involvement posed various challenges as my colleagues became reluctant to accept me as a researcher in their classrooms.

Another characteristic of a qualitative research or study is that it consists of richly descriptive details where the researcher employs to formulate the collected data as far as possible in the participants' own direct words (Merriam, 1998). In order to be able to transcribe these detailed descriptions the researcher relies amongst others on the assistance of videotapes, documents and recordings and so on to verify the findings of the study.

Henne (1949) also found qualitative research useful in the investigation of young readers' literacy skills as it takes into consideration factors such as reading abilities which quantitative research ignores.

The relevance of the qualitative approach in this study lies in its flexibility in allowing the researcher to become an instrument in observing how Grade 3 teachers interact with their learners during reading lessons. In other words, it provided me with better insight into the teaching of reading by acquiring richer descriptions and thoughtful responses from the teachers, classroom observations and document analysis. It also enabled me to get a deeper understanding of how teachers conducted reading lessons in multilingual classrooms as I was interested to know or understand how teachers make sense of reading methods they employed to accommodate foreign learners in teaching reading. Therefore, exploring the interaction between teachers and learners through a qualitative approach facilitated my understanding and interpretation of issues regarding the teaching of reading in a multi-cultural classroom environment. It also allowed me to understand my

colleagues' attitudes and beliefs about reading that might in turn foster a collegial support to each other.

### **3.4 Research subjects**

This study followed a purposive sampling because the research subjects were mainly selected to achieve the purpose of the study. Babbie and Mouton (2005) refer to purposive sample as a method that increases transferability and maximizes the range of information that is obtainable from the study. They furthermore state that sampling is purposeful and directed at certain inclusive criteria. According to Payze (2004) when a study follows a qualitative research design, it is permissible to comprise a small sample size. This requirement is relevant to this study as there were only three teachers and 72 learners involved.

As mentioned above, the participants of the study were three female teachers, aged between 40 and 59 years old. The two teachers were English Home Language teachers, teacher M and teacher L. Although they taught English Home Language, they were not home language speakers of English.

Teacher M (HOD) was the more experienced participant who had taught in the Foundation Phase for more than 20 years and holds a Diploma in Education (DE). On the other hand, teacher L holds a Higher Diploma in Education (HDE) with more than 5 years of teaching experience. Both teachers were teaching Grade 3 classes through the medium of English.

The third participant was a Grade one teacher who also holds the portfolio of second Head of Department (HOD) of the Foundation Phase. She had more than 15 years teaching experience and holds a Diploma in Education as well as an Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE). The total number of teachers who participated in the study is shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: No. of teachers involved in the study**

<b>Number of teachers: 3</b>		
<b>1</b>	Grade 3	Teacher and HOD
<b>2</b>	Grade 3	Teacher
<b>3</b>	Grade 1	Teacher and HOD

There were 72 Grade 3 learners involved in the study. There were 35 learners in class A (Teacher M) and 37 in class B (Teacher L). The learners' ages ranged between 9 and 12 years. The learners came from different language backgrounds as illustrated in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Learners' Home Languages**

<b>LANGUAGES IN GRADE 3 CLASSES: CLASSES A &amp; B</b>					
English	Afrikaans	IsiXhosa	Shona	French	Total
A: 6	14	10	4	1	35
B: 2	17	13	3	2	37
<b>Total: 8</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>72</b>

The above table presents the diversity of learners in both classrooms (A and B) in terms of their home languages. The teachers were faced with multilingual classes although they were not competent in many of the learners' home languages.

### **3.5 Data collection techniques**

Mertens (2005) states that many types of data collection methods can be used in qualitative studies for triangulation purposes. The purpose of triangulation in qualitative research is to increase the credibility and validity of the results. Several scholars have different definitions of triangulation. Cohen and Manion (1986) define triangulation as an "attempt to map out, or explain more fully the richness and complexity of human behavior by studying it from more than one standpoint." Altrichter et al. (2008) contend



that triangulation "gives a more detailed and balanced picture of the situation." According to O'Donoghue and Punch (2003) triangulation is a "method of cross-checking data from multiple sources to search for regularities in the research data. Denzin (1978) on the other hand identified triangulation by stating that it involves time, space, and persons. Triangulation is the use of more than one type of research in order to address the research questions.

In order to achieve my research aims I made use of questionnaires, interviews, script and text analysis and classroom observations to observe the extent to which teachers' teaching strategies promote learners' reading proficiency in Grade 3. These research techniques were also used to identify reading problems encountered by learners. The next section discusses the data collection techniques that I chose for the purpose of this study.

### **3.5.1 Questionnaires**

The purpose of the questionnaires was merely to capture teachers' profiles with regard to their age, gender, language background, qualifications and their teaching experience as shown on Appendix D. Questionnaires were distributed to two of the Grade 3 teachers, one being the Head of Department as well as the second Head of Department who teaches a Grade 1 class.

### **3.5.2 Interviews**

In most qualitative research studies, according to Merriam (1998) the data are collected through interviews. The most common form of interview entails the scenario of one person to another where the one person gets information from another. Denscombe (1998) refers to the person-to person interview as semi or unstructured interviews that is a one-to-one variety that involves a meeting between one researcher and one informant. Denscombe (1998) furthermore states that the popularity of semi-structured interviews stems from the fact that it is easy to arrange, fairly straightforward and relatively easy to control.

The interview structure as suggested by Merriman (1998) is shown below. The continuum shows the different types of levels of interview questions.

**Table 3: Interview Structure Continuum**

<b>Highly structures/standardized</b>	<b>Semi-structured</b>	<b>Unstructured/Informal</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Wording of questions predetermined</li> <li>◆ Order of questions predetermined</li> <li>◆ Oral form of a survey</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Mix of more- and less-structured questions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Open-ended questions</li> <li>◆ Flexible, exploratory</li> <li>◆ More like a conversation</li> </ul>

The use of interviews for the study was necessary to locate vital information that I was unable to attain during the observation process. The interviews were conducted with Grade 3 teachers to determine the teachers' perception regarding reading strategies and learners' reading abilities. The interviews were carried out in a familiar environment, i.e. the classrooms of the teachers. In doing so in a comfortable surrounding and asking fairly informal questions the participants appeared to be more relaxed and less conscious of the formal classroom environment.

Before the start of the interviews, I assured the participants of the confidentiality of the interviews. The role of the researcher was to ask questions in line with the research questions stated in the first chapter and according to the planned research agenda. During the interview I strived to establish a neutral relationship with the specific participants in order to avoid the possibility of influencing their answers. The interview process assisted me in gaining valuable data regarding the participants' roles in reading. The required outcome was rich as the researcher gained a much deeper sense and perception of the reading strategies employed by **the teachers. The scheduled interviews were set in motion as I explained the purpose of the research.** Short and explicit questions were

posed to the participants in order to avoid ambiguity. The questions were prompt and limited in an effort not to lead the answers in a specific way.

The interviews were used to identify the content, structure and organisation of the lessons observed and about the knowledge underpinning them. The interviews were planned, arranged and conducted for twenty minutes with each participant. The interview questions were semi-structured and aimed at eliciting the following information (see Appendix C):

- How teachers planned and monitored their reading lessons.
- The teaching strategies employed by teachers in reading lessons.
- Teachers' rationale for using such teaching strategies.
- Challenges experienced by teachers in teaching reading in multilingual classrooms.
- Teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards reading lessons.

The interviews were conducted with three teachers. Two of the teachers were Grade 3 classroom teachers. One of the Grade 3 teachers also holds the position of HOD in the Foundation Phase. The third teacher is a Grade 1 teacher who also holds the position of HOD in the Foundation Phase. She was interviewed to establish her role and support to her team with regard to literacy development, specifically in the Foundation Phase. The interviews were not tape recorded as teachers did not allow me to use a tape recorder. Although I had planned to make use of a tape recorder, I had to take notes in order to oblige with the preferences of my subjects and also to comply with research ethics.

After the interviews I transcribed the collected data and the transcripts were given to the participants to verify. I set time aside to become familiar with data collected during the interviews in order to have a sense of the interview texts on which to base my analysis. The transcription process may appear to be a simple and easy activity but on the contrary it is exceptionally deceptive. It was challenging and time consuming as I had to work with my fieldnotes and identify similar patterns emerging from various sources.

### 3.5.3. Classroom observations

According to Merriam (1998) observation is a common research tool which enables us to understand how people behave in their daily activities. Through observations human beings make sense of the world as they interact with one another through conversations. The classroom observation approach is therefore a valuable and effective tool as it provides the researcher the opportunity to witness activities firsthand and makes it possible to record behaviour as it happens.

According to Kidder (1981: p.264) observation is a research tool with the following characteristics:

1. It serves a formulated research purpose.
2. It is planned deliberately.
3. It is recorded systematically.
4. It is subjected to check and controls on validity and reliability.

Observation provides a firsthand encounter with the activities of the participants. It therefore gives the researcher the opportunity to use his/her own knowledge to interpret the collected data according to what has been seen. According to Merriam (1998) observation is an excellent technique in collecting firsthand evidence especially when the participants are not willing to talk about the matter under study.

This study set out to observe the Grade 3 teachers and learners in their physical environment which is the classroom, to make sense of the activities and interactions during reading lessons. The content of the conversation, in this case, between learners and teachers during reading lessons as well as the behaviour that added meaning to the data were noted during classroom observation. The role of the teacher in teaching young learners to become independent readers and the manner of engagement towards effective teaching were studied. The study attempted to determine the challenges **the teachers** experienced in teaching reading to learners who are not home language speakers of English and to observe the reading materials that were available to promote independent

reading in Grade 3. I also observed different reading activities used by the teachers. The reading activities observed, included letter sounds, the use of flashcards, the use of sequencing activities, reading to the class, phonic exercises, learners reading aloud, etc.

It was fairly easy for me to gain the trust of the participants, as I am a well-known member of staff and could immediately start with the process of observation. Four weeks were used for extensive classroom observation. During the first two weeks of observation the teachers were observed to establish their teaching strategies during classroom action. During this time I observed and looked at different aspects of the reading lessons. The observation focused on the following:

- (i) The nature of the tasks and activities given to the learners and how they were differentiated according to the needs of the different learners.
- (ii) The classroom environment regarding literacy development was observed including the kind of texts and materials used and the techniques used by the teachers to demonstrate literate behaviour.
- (iii) The kinds of questions the teacher asked the learners, the responses of the learners and how the teachers drew the learners' attention to the literacy tasks at hand.
- (iv) The methods the teachers used in which they encouraged the readers to become independent as well as the homework system to support literacy.

After the second day in the first week of observation I gained familiarity with the participants and commenced with writing down raw data of what was observed. The notes that were taken down during the observation were recorded in detail. It was an extremely intricate process for me as I also needed to rely on memory to recount the sessions.

During the third and fourth week of observation I looked at differences and similarities with regard to teaching approaches. In this regard I gave particular attention to the

content regarding differentiation and follow up activities given to the learners. I kept a diary of my field notes as I proceeded with the observations.

### **3.5.4 Document analysis**

LeCompte and Preissle (1993) define the term, “documents” as artifacts while other writers call it available materials. Hodder (1994) on the other hand refers to documents and artifacts as physical material. Merriam (1998) refers to documents as a wide range of written and physical material significant for the purpose of the study at hand. In this study, the term “document” is used to refer to learners’ scripts and books in which they wrote their work.

In order to establish similarities and differences regarding the learners’ reading abilities, I also analysed some reading materials and learners’ written work. The script and text analysis included a range of reading materials used in the classroom as well as the assessment scripts done by the learners and evaluated by the teachers. The Grade 3 learners’ assessment scripts, reading activities and reading books were analyzed to understand the learners’ reading abilities and comprehension.

I analysed three sets of learner assessments scripts of each class. The compilation of the assessment scripts comprised of the listening and written comprehension, oral presentation, reading and formal written work. All the activities in the assessment scripts were in line with the learning outcomes and assessment standards as stated in the policies of the National Curriculum Statement (NCS).

I furthermore evaluated the available reading books and basal readers to ascertain differentiation and grading to suit the needs of the different learners. Field notes from the collected data gained from the analysis regarding the above were summarised for data analysis purposes.

### **3.6 Research limitations**

The participants in the classes were comfortable and at ease with me as they were familiar with me because I am a known member of staff. I could therefore enter the natural setting without any disruption. Being a member of staff, responsible for my registered class prevented me from observing lessons for the whole day. The times scheduled to visit the classes was limited to 90 minutes per day during the reading sessions for four weeks. During the class visits a supervisor was then in charge of my class.

Another limitation for me was the assessment period of the school. During this time no observation could take place as the teachers were busy with administration tasks rather than formal teaching. The school is an active organization busy with all kinds of projects that made it impossible for me to collect data at scheduled times.

The absenteeism of teachers was a great limitation to the research. Teachers were also scheduled to attend meetings and workshops arranged by the Department of Education (DoE). The school days were then usually shortened to accommodate the teachers so that they could attend meetings and workshops timeously. It was then not possible for me to collect data on those specific days.

### **3.7 Reflexivity**

Reflexivity in the research process means an awareness of our own and other world views and their influence on the project at hand. One way to foster reflexivity is for researchers to 'reflect self-consciously on their research, to question one's own assumptions and to work to make your values an explicit part of the process' Tolich & Davidson (1999). This can be done by asking who is watching whom and why. According to Nightingale and Cromby, (1999) reflexivity urges us to explore the ways in which the researcher is involved with a particular study.

In the case of this particular study I explored this journey through personal reflexivity. Personal reflexivity allowed me to reflect on my internal debate about my experiences, challenges and interactions in the two classes I observed as well as in the school. I began to have a different perception and understanding of certain issues that impacted on the teaching-learning process. Through my research journey I developed an understanding of issues of inclusivity in terms of language and culture in our school.

### **3.8 Ethical considerations**

Before the start of the research, an application was made to the school management team to conduct the study at the school (see Appendix A). As the research was done at the school where I am member of staff, permission was obtained from the principal of the specific school. Consent forms were sent out to the parents and guardians of the learners as they were too young to sign an informed consent form as illustrated in Appendices A, B and C.

Guarantee was given to the teachers, learners, parents and guardians of their participation being voluntary, which implied that they could stop participation from the study at any time. Confidentiality was ensured to all participants at all times. They were aware that all data would be safe.

The names of the participants and the school involved in the study were not mentioned in any written reports, including the thesis. Pseudonyms were used to replace the actual names and no other personally identifying information was be used. The participants were promised that the results of the study would be made available to them at the end of the research period.

### **3.9 Summary**

This chapter focused on the research approach and the methodology used to collect data. The qualitative research design was followed. Interviews, questionnaires, classroom



observations and text analysis were the main tools for collecting data. The collected data are presented and analysed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses data regarding the reading strategies employed by Grade 3 teachers towards independent reading in a multilingual context. It involves a close assessment of the teachers at work during literacy lessons with the aim of understanding more clearly how two Grade 3 teachers help young learners to become independent readers. It also seeks to establish what challenges the teachers experienced in teaching reading to learners who are not mother tongue speakers of English. Lastly the study aims to find out what reading materials are available to promote reading in Grade 3 classes.

Different sources of evidence were used to draw inferences about the reading and teaching practices. Firstly, a questionnaire was used to obtain a background profile asking about qualifications and experience of the teachers. Secondly, interviews with the teachers were used to allow them to describe their practices as well as offering reasons for using it and thirdly classroom practice and reading activities checked against my observations of classroom teaching and practice.

I analysed the transcribed data of the interviews and the field notes taken during observations by developing codes for the raw data. The data was then later re-coded and consigned into categories. Three broad themes emerged from data analysis, namely teachers' pedagogical approaches, reading materials and the classroom environment and challenges experienced by teachers in teaching reading in multilingual classrooms. These themes are discussed under different sub-themes in order to give a coherent description and interpretation of the analysed data. As a starting point, I present teachers' professional data which were collected by means of a questionnaire. I then present data emerging from interviews and classroom observations in the different sub-themes.



## **4.2 Teachers' professional information**

The Head of Department (HOD) of the Foundation Phase teaches a Grade 1 class but was interviewed in order to validate information collected from the two Grade 3 teachers in terms of literacy development. This participant has more than 10 years experience in teaching in the Foundation Phase and qualified at an ex - Department of Education and Training Teachers' Training College. She is an Afrikaans home language speaker. Teacher M, also Head of Department (HOD) has more than 20 years teaching experience in the Foundation Phase and qualified at an ex - Department of Education and Training Centre and the Teacher L has 4 years experience teaching in the Foundation and qualified with a university degree. All three are female participants.

Teacher M (HOD) is the manager of her Grade 3 class where the LOLT is English. She speaks Afrikaans as a home language. Teacher L (post level 1) also teaches in English but her home language is isiXhosa. The third participant (HOD) manages a Grade 1 class. Their LOLT is Afrikaans which is also the home language of the teacher.

The teachers' qualifications and experience are adequate for the grade levels they are teaching, especially the two Heads of Department. In other words, all the teachers are familiar with the NCS requirements and how to implement them.

## **4.3 Teachers' pedagogical approaches**

In this section I present and analyse the teaching approaches that were used by the two teachers in teaching reading in their classrooms. The teachers' pedagogical strategies are discussed under the following sub-themes: use of reading themes, types of reading activities, teacher exchange, assessment activities and language use.

### **4.3.1 Use of reading themes**

It was noted that both teachers used themes in all the learning areas. For example, the topic in one of the classes was pollution while the other class was busy with the National Symbols and the Anthem. This is what the teachers said about the topics (in her own words):

Teacher M: 'Our topic is Pollution but specifically how pollution affected birds and the fishes. All the information is "teach" to them during the Life Orientation periods. With this we integrate our lessons to all Learning Areas.

Teacher L: 'We are busy with the National Symbols. We use the information in all subjects'

The themes used by the teachers are first being taught as a content subject in this case in the Life Orientation learning area. Once the learners have a good understanding of the content the teachers use the story to do reading lessons. Teacher M used her topic and made use of guided reading. According to her this method consolidated what had been taught. Teacher L used her theme and consolidated her lesson through a reading aloud lesson.

Teacher M made use of guided reading by grouping her class in small groups of eight learners. Each learner had a copy of the same reading text. The learners were grouped in more or less the same reading ability groups. She targeted various reading skills. She focused on phonics, knowledge of sentence structure and comprehension in this particular lesson. She helped learners to sound out unfamiliar words and assisted them to use the context of the story and sentence to guess the meaning of the words. She questioned the learners to establish whether they understood what they had read.

This method of integration seems to be an advantage in a multilingual classroom as it gives the immigrant learners the opportunity to become fluent in English by engaging with the text and listening to the story. The integration of all the subjects appears to help the learners develop confidence and fluency in reading while consolidating the content

knowledge in a particular learning area. It also provides opportunities for meaningful interactions between the learners and teacher. As I am part of the staff I made use of integration as well. By exposing the learners to non-fiction and fiction material exposes learners to issues beyond their immediate experiences and develops their reading skills.

One of Teacher L's lesson was a reading aloud lesson. She called all the learners to the mat. She started her lesson by triggering learners' prior knowledge by asking questions. By doing so, she wanted learners to make links between what they already know and the new information. She explained difficult words by using a dictionary to make sure that her explanations were correct. As she is not a home language speaker of English, making use of a dictionary assisted her in acquiring new vocabulary.

She started reading the story while the learners were listening. During reading she stopped a few times to ask learners questions. This was done to make sure that they followed the logic of what was read. She read with expression and animation. This was done to attract the attention of the learners. After reading she questioned them to make sure that they understood the context of the reading text. Teacher L maintains in reading different texts aloud, learners will develop a love for reading as well as to read for enjoyment.

From the two lessons observed (guided and reading aloud) I noticed that teachers tried to develop learners' language skills and assisted them to learn new vocabulary. I also noticed that the two methods are valuable and effective in multilingual classes as it gives the learners an opportunity to learn the LOLT through listening and speaking.

#### **4.3.2 Types of reading activities**

A vast range of activities such as group reading, paired reading, reading by the teacher while the learners were listening and silent reading were observed and this clearly suggests a wide range of teaching strategies employed by both teachers. The lessons

observed in both classes involved the teaching of letter sounds. There were, however, some differences in the approach to reading activities.

Teacher M [Afrikaans speaking] who has more than twenty years teaching experience approached her lessons by giving the learners a background sketch of the lesson. For example, in one of her lessons she asked leading questions about birds such as the following:

Q1: With what are birds' feet covered?

Q2: With what body part do birds eat, build nests and feed their young?

Thereafter she introduced the story *Amazing birds* to the learners. She started off by reading the story to the whole class while the learners were listening. This was done more than once. Each learner received a copy of the story to read. Unfamiliar words were taken out of the text. The learners wrote the words down. Dictionary work followed where learners looked for meanings of the words. Learners did an activity that consisted of a word box with words such as *beak, scales, heavy, species*, etc. The activity required them to complete the sentences by choosing the correct word. The same words from the reading text then became the spelling and sound words.

Teacher L [isiXhosa speaking] with more than five years of teaching experience followed the same approach to some extent. Her story was *The life of Mister Nelson Mandela*. She started her lesson by giving each learner a copy of the story. She read the story once while the learners were listening. She continued by asking the learners questions from the text.

Q1: "Where did the young Nelson work?"

Q2: "How long was he in prison?" etc.

She continued by writing the following sounds on the board: [ea, oi, ai, ei, sh, th]. She pointed to the sounds while the learners pronounced them. This was done repetitively.

Several learners got an opportunity to build words. After several words (such as *meat*, *rain*, *coin*, *field*, etc.) given by the learners, sentences were built. At this stage no mention was made of the written text. Learners received an activity where it was required of them to write only one word of the above given sounds.

Deducing from the various activities done in the two classrooms, it appeared that both teachers were incorporating various language skills in teaching reading, namely listening, speaking, writing and language use, etc. Such an approach is in line with the NCS (2005) requirements of language teaching. However, the teachers' and learners' limited competence in the LOLT seemed to be a challenge in supporting learners from language groups other than Afrikaans and isiXhosa.

#### **4.3.3 Teacher exchange**

The lessons of both teachers that were observed included teacher exchange, i.e. class teachers had to leave their registered class to read a story in another class as a strategy to teach reading proficiency. For example, the Grade 7 teacher went to the Grade 1 class, the Grade 5 teacher to the Grade 3 class, etc. During this session the learners were exposed to different teachers who did reading lessons with them. This was done every morning for half an hour and the following steps were recommended as an endeavour to practically implement the reading programme.

Day 1: Teacher reads text to class. The text is repeated once/twice.

Day 2: Questions are posed and answered orally.

Day 3: A list of [10-15] spelling words from text are compiled. Learners revise spelling words. They spell out audibly. Learners are issued with a copy of the text.

Day 4: Words are written on the writing board. Learners transcribe them into their books.

Teacher reads text once more while learners "follow". The learners read the text as a class [audibly and silently], in groups and as individuals at random.

Day 5: Spelling test and written comprehension are given.

As an incentive and motivation strategy, certificates are issued to those learners who have scored 100% for 5 tests. I found the above method to be an effective way of introducing different genres such as everyday life stories, folktales, fantasy, etc. The learners found it extremely enjoyable to listen to stories that were read by a different teacher than their class teacher. Group reading is encouraged in this method. It encourages learners not only to listen to the teacher but also to listen and learn from each other. In other words, this method is a scaffolding process whereby good readers assist other learners in a relaxed and non-threatening manner. However, the reading lessons were conducted mainly in English and other languages were excluded. In other words, teacher exchange did not contribute towards multilingual development and inclusivity in the classrooms instead it supported monolingual competence in English.

#### **4.3.4 Assessment activities**

During my observations I also managed to look at the reading assessment strategy used by the two teachers. Both the teachers monitored the entire class by walking around and checking the work in progress. I found that both teachers set differentiated tasks according to the needs of the learners. Individual spelling tests were observed and reading was conducted in ability groups where books were matched to the learners' abilities. The teachers offered the same language use and structure activities to all the learners. The questions were differentiated in that they consisted of simple questions as well as advanced questions in order to accommodate all the learners. This was evident in the learners' reading and language assessment tasks. According to Cunningham and Allington (1999) however, the ability grouping may become problematic in that there is little evidence that worksheet activities improve the children's reading and writing ability.

Both teachers encouraged the learners to participate in discussions by asking questions (how, what and why). Cunningham and Allington (1999) state that KWL (What we Know, what we Want to find out, what we have Learned) is one of the most popular and



flexible strategies in guiding children in thinking and it works extremely well with informational text.

These types of questions clearly made the learners aware of literacy uses and led them to think about what they were reading and writing and also engaged them in reading lessons through scaffolding. Scaffolding according to Gibbons (2002) is a temporary help by teachers until the learner is able to work without assistance and is vital for tasks to be completed successfully.

The clear difference between the two teachers is that teacher M used a wider range of questions including questions such as how the learners made literacy decisions, what reading cues they used and how they expressed themselves to show their comprehension levels. It is evident that she played a vital role in steering her learners towards independent and fluent reading skills. Her strategy correlates with Barr's (1984) and Adams' (1990) claim that the role of the teacher is most significant in leading learners to become effective independent readers.

With regard to writing, both teachers used a range of writing activities which included letter formation, copying words from the writing board written by the teacher, sounding out and spelling of words and writing personal views. Both teachers allowed the learners to do some handwriting practice and to copy from the writing board.

In both the reading and writing lessons teacher M was capable of providing a wider range of literacy instruction activities that highlighted the texts as setting for developing literacy skills. She also put a lot of emphasis on scribing for these learners. These activities encouraged the learners to focus on a range of basic reading and writing skills. According to Byrnes (1998) the composition of texts depends on a wide range of skills that unlock the key to early literacy. These skills should inspire children to express themselves and encourage them to tell and write their own stories.

Unlike teacher M, teacher L focused more on descriptions and spelling activities. This can be attributed to her fewer years of teaching experience than teacher M. This observation confirms that learning to read happens faster when learners are given the opportunity to write if teachers support them in writing (Carolls, 1999). Such writing activities cultivate an eagerness to read since learners have contributed to **the creation of** the story.

Some of the activities were appropriate and easy for English home language speakers who participated actively in them. It was clear that learners who were not home language speakers of English were unable to make sense of some of the reading text, e.g. *The life of Mister Nelson Mandela*. On another occasion teacher L let the learners read the story, *Our Country*. After a lengthy discussion and questions, she provided the learners with key words [*president, national anthem, provinces, cultures, etc.*] and instructed them to do functional writing. They relied on previous knowledge and they were required to write two paragraphs of five sentences each. The first additional English speaking learners battled with the written activity and were unable to formulate grammatically sound sentences. This is evident in the sample of one of the learner's written work as shown in the following example.

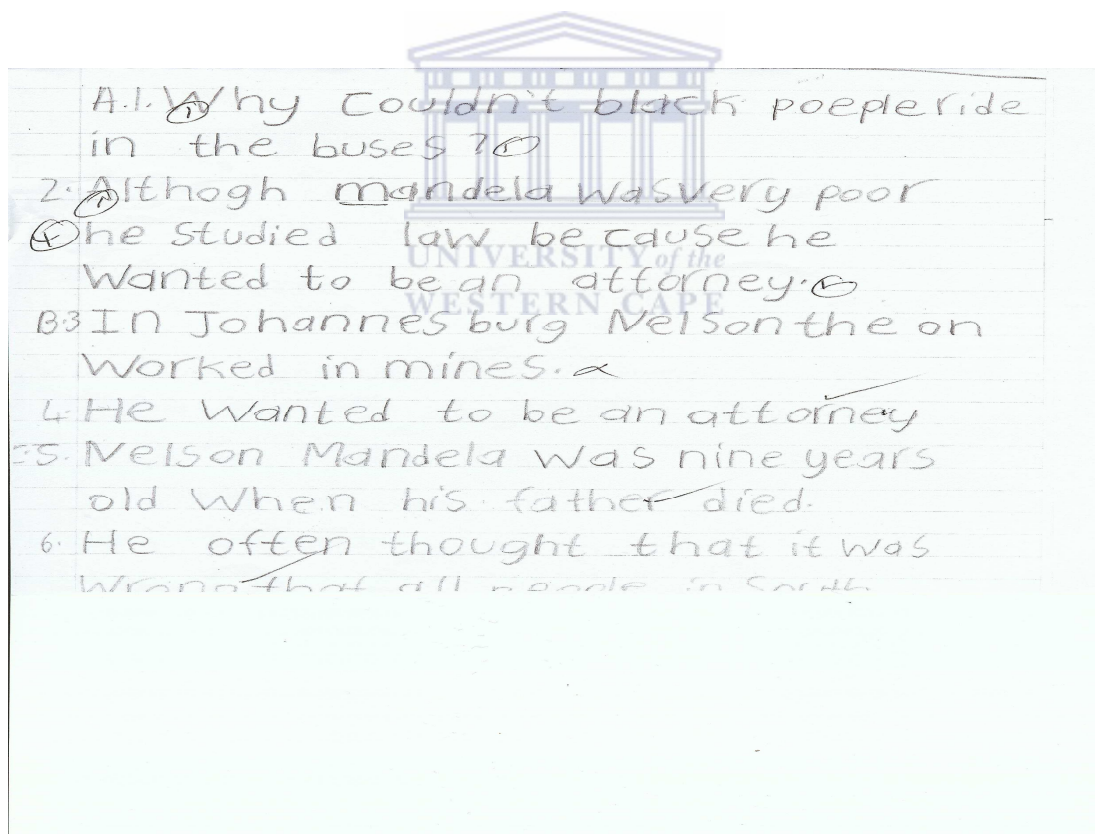
**Figure 1: Sample of Learners' work 1**



of understanding of the reading text and underdeveloped writing skills. The learner's work does not make sense at all and it indicates that the learner has not yet grasped the basic language skills of reading and writing and proper word/sentence construction. This raises a number of concerns in terms of how the specific learner makes sense of other subject content given that all the subjects are taught through the medium of English.

However, very few learners showed some competence in terms of reading and writing, particularly those who had exposure to English at home. The following sample (in Figure 2) shows the learner's linguistic knowledge in terms of letter recognition, sound-symbol correspondence and grammatical conventions.

**Figure 2: Sample of Learners' work 2**



Some of these learners, however, experience problems with the written language. They do not always understand the instructions as their vocabulary is limited. Their sentences

are short with little variations. They tend to repeat the question instead of answering it. It is noted that the learners' experience problems with capital letters and punctuation.

According to Richek et al. (2002) it is important for people to be able to read at a certain level. They believe that learners must be taught that the written text is related to the spoken text. I concur with them as I firmly believe that learners must be encouraged to read in order to develop an interest in reading and to improve their writing skills. If they are constantly exposed to reading, they are likely to achieve better results in writing as it will enable them to identify the written symbols with the related language sounds. This shows that there is a close relationship between reading and writing.

#### **4.3.5 Language use**

Teacher M, the more experienced teacher spent more time in looking at the letter-sounds relations in the context of reading. She also used sound activities in leading the learners to make sense of letters and sounds that assisted towards independent reading. Teacher M engaged with her learners in activities that involved working with different texts, sentence and word levels. She constantly and actively assisted the learners to make the necessary connections between these levels.

Concerning communication in the classroom, Teacher M made use of code switching. After her instructions were given in English, she translated them into Afrikaans and asked one of the isiXhosa-speaking learners to translate the instruction into isiXhosa. These techniques worked to a certain extent, but left the foreign learners (e.g. learners from Zimbabwe, Malawi, Democratic Republic of Congo, etc.) at a disadvantage as they could not understand either Afrikaans or isiXhosa. Similarly, communication in Teacher L's class was in English and in isiXhosa. Her use of the two languages also excluded Afrikaans speaking learners and also learners from other countries as mentioned above.

In contrast, Teacher L concentrated more on paper-based activities that consisted of sounds and letters. Teacher L also used activities at only one of these levels. This method limits the learners to make explicit connections between levels.

It is evident that both teachers offered reading activities that involved a range of reading formats and activities. It is, however, clear that teacher M was more effective by offering more activities with a reading context than sentence level activities. She provided meaningful and essential skills to the learners in promoting independent reading. This substantiates what Byrnes (1998) is saying by referring to reading as an activity with a purpose. He furthermore refers to it as an interactive process that goes on between the reader and the text, resulting in comprehension and composition as discussed in Chapter 2.

Lots of time was spent on reading in both classes. In both samples the teachers read the instructions to the learners. This was even done during an assessment. The learners were not given the opportunity to read for themselves. Teachers gave the following reasons for this:

Teacher M: “You know, many of the learners can’t read. I can count on my hand who can read. Many of them don’t belong to a library”

Teacher L: “Hey, these kids, they can’t read”

The teacher’s comments are supported by the learners’ work (e.g. in Figure 1) which shows some of the learners’ poor literacy skills. In other words, some of the learners could not read at all, and this had a negative impact on their writing skills. In my observations I noticed that some of the learners did not have a clue of what was taking place in reading. Some of the learners attempted to copy from their friends as a coping strategy.

#### **4.4 Reading materials and classroom environment**

#### **4.4.1 Print environment**

According to the National Reading Strategy of the DoE, all Foundation Phase classrooms must be equipped with a reading or library corner. The reading corner must consist of exciting story books in a variety of languages as well as reference materials for learners and teachers. Reading skills of learners must be nurtured and this can be done through the provision of fun books in every classroom so that reading for pleasure can be prioritized (Anderson, 2005). The National Reading Strategy affirms that good and effective literacy development is possible in a text-rich environment as it encourages learners to perform better in reading.

During classroom observation for this study the literacy environment of the two samples were noted. Clear evidence of the teachers' effort to provide a text-rich environment was apparent. Both classes were decorated with effective wall charts that included the alphabet, word banks, charts that reflected phrases in English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa as well as a display of books. This implies that the teachers are aware of diversity, different languages and cultures in their classes. This means that they were aware of the multilingual nature of their classrooms. The rich print environment with words, sentences and phrases in English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa gives the learners a great opportunity to see the print in the different languages and present them with the meaning. An isiXhosa speaking learner is therefore able to read and understand what he reads in other languages and vice versa. The learners are able to understand easy words such as *mom, dad, brother, sister, cat, dog*, etc. in the three languages. However, teachers did not make use of this valuable linguistic resource in their teaching. That is, they never provided opportunities for their learners to read in other languages other than English.

The two teachers used the print environment differently. For instance, a good number of charts in teacher M's classroom had a specific function. Posters on the walls exposed the learners to various language aspects such as reading and writing. There were leaflets that instructed the learners on how to use dictionaries and the steps to care for books. This is

in contrast with teacher L where there were some charts that had no link to reading and merely serve to decorate the class. No functional signs and labels were visible.

While learners were busy with a literacy task, teacher M effectively directed them to wall charts displayed to guide and support them in their tasks. The learners were encouraged to make use of their alphabet cards to sound out a word. According to the teacher this method assisted her learners to master and spell difficult and unknown words. It also made reading and the use of different texts an important activity. This is in line with Perkins (2005) who states that learners need particular and appropriate strategies to ensure independent reading. They should be acquainted with the process of using the written language as a symbol and know how to manipulate the symbolic system in order to become independent readers.

#### **4.4.2 Reading books and the internet**

Although teachers had reading resources such as the basal readers, magazines, big books, story books (fiction and non-fiction) etc. in their classrooms, the resources were insufficient. They did not accommodate the needs of the learners who were not home language speakers of English. These resources were found in English and Afrikaans but did not cater for the French and isiXhosa speaking learners. I also noted during the interviews that many of the learners were not enrolled at a library. I was told that the library was too far and that it is dangerous to walk there. Parents are working late and are not eager to let their children cross a busy highway to the library. This means that they had limited reading at home as many households do not have access to books and the internet. Obviously if the learners are not exposed to reading materials, it is unlikely that they will develop an interest in reading.

The HOD mentioned that the learners were more concerned about other priorities such as television games and cell phones than spending time on reading. But the school and teachers do not do much to promote learner interest in reading classes. She is of the viewpoint that the school should implement a policy which focuses on literacy and



numeracy. She firmly believes if this policy could be implemented for two years it will shift the reading levels and interest of the learners to a more competent level. She argues that if all the learners are able to read competently they will automatically engage with the content subject at a more proficient level. She believes that such a policy can improve the weak results obtained during the systemic evaluation tests.

## **4.5 Challenges experienced by teachers in teaching reading**

### **4.5.1 Teachers' workload and limited reading time**

During the interview process both teachers were concerned about the overload of administrative tasks such as recording, the amount of tasks and the observations of learners during reading activities. According to them the heavy administrative duties they needed to execute allowed them very little time for effective teaching. They cited that this could possibly be the reason for the national reading dilemma our country is currently experiencing.

One of the participants stated that teachers are inundated with administration tasks and as such they neglect the teaching and reading periods and mostly use the time to complete the necessary administration duties. Furthermore, meetings that teachers needed to attend shortened the reading period as the day is shortened. She believed that the reading problem at the school could be solved with proper planning.

HOD: "Besides the allocated reading time, I feel that only 1 day per week should be allocated for just reading. During this time all possible reading strategies must be explored by the teachers. This is the only way that justice can be done to reading."

HOD: “I again wish that the school will drop everything for two to three years and focus only on reading and numeracy. This will really assist us in doing justice to all the necessary reading strategies. It will also give us time to remedy our current reading levels.”

The HOD was also concerned with the lack of interest in reading by learners at the school and that they are less focused on developing school reading skills and more interested in the modern technology such as cell phones and social network groups such as MXit and Facebook.

One of the participants viewed absenteeism of the learners as a major challenge in reading development of learners and stated that when learners returned they are disorientated as they had missed some classes. They lagged behind and had to make a great effort to get back on track.

The teachers’ responses above reveal that they are overwhelmed with a lot of demands in addition to their teaching load. It also appears that reading is not prioritized and well managed although the school has implemented its own teacher exchange programme as part of the one hour departmental reading time.

#### **4.5.2 Lack of support**

The Head of Department (HOD) of the Foundation Phase was greatly concerned about the learners who experienced barriers to learning as they did not adequately receive support from the Learning and Support teacher and Department of Education in assisting them to become fluent readers. The Learning and Support Teacher serves two schools per week. Each school is allocated only two days per week. The Friday per week is alternated so that each school is allocated three days per week forth nightly. During her visit she is assigned to four learners per class. There are ten Foundation Phase classes and much more learners than four per class with reading barriers. These four learners are

taken from their classes for only forty minutes to do remedial reading which according to the HOD is extremely inadequate. They also mentioned the paperwork involved for a learner to be seen by the Departmental officials.

In both classes the teachers stated that some learners could not cope with written activities. They are of the opinion that learners are unable to produce grammatically correct sentences due to lack of proficiency in English. They say that many learners attempt to copy from peers in order to complete their tasks. Apparently teachers allow this kind of behaviour as shown in the following interview excerpts:

Teacher M: “Ag, I just let him copy. I know he can’t and I cannot speak his language.”

Teacher L: “I do nothing. He can copy. I can’t help him. I don’t know that language. He is a new child from Malawi.”

Deducing from the above excerpts, it appears that teachers who do not share the same home language with their learners clearly exclude them from certain classroom activities. In fact, the teachers’ attitudes appear to be less supportive to learners experiencing learning difficulties, specifically those who do not share the same home language with the teachers. Teachers who have negative expectations of their learners or who display negative attitudes towards their learners in my opinion contribute towards the learners’ low self esteem and poor performance at school.

#### **4.5.3 Language barriers and classroom space**

The diversity of languages or multilingualism appeared to be a challenge to both teachers instead of being regarded as a resource. In other words, teachers did not capitalize on the learners’ home languages as a good foundation for learning English (LOLT). The teachers themselves seemed to be experiencing difficulties in English which they use as

the main LOLT. For example, the teachers mentioned their lack of proficiency in other languages as expressed in the following excerpts:

Teacher L: “Yho, I can’t understand these children. I speak isiXhosa. I sometimes struggle with the English.”

Teacher M: “My mother tongue is Afrikaans but I manage the English language well. I just have a problem with the foreign children because I am not able to speak their language. It is easy with the isiXhosa children because I ask one of the black learners who are fluent in English to translate for me so that everybody can understand.”

My presumption of the above is that both teachers are not mother tongue speakers of English. This implies that it could possibly leave the learners at a disadvantage. I believe where translations happened as in the class of Teacher M has its advantages as well as disadvantages. An advantage could be where children who are unable to understand a particular language at least get an opportunity to learn it. A disadvantage on the other hand is that it can result in the learners becoming so dependent on translation that they will never make an effort to learn the LOLT.

During my observations and interview sessions I have noted that both teachers made use of code switching during the literacy lessons when giving instructions and explanation as shown in the following examples:

Teacher M: “If I don’t code switch, the learners won’t know what to do. The children is *suppose* to be English speaking, but they have a limited vocabulary. Many a time they don’t understand what I am saying.”

Teacher L: “I do this to help them so that they can start with the work.”

I am therefore of the viewpoint that code switching facilitates learning. Using code switching as a learning tool consequently allows most of the class to commence with the

activity efficiently. It however leaves the French speakers at a disadvantage. They clearly had no clue of the activity and the teachers were unable to assist them. The results of their activity were consequently catastrophic as reflected in Figure 1.

With regard to classroom space, the teachers stated that overcrowded classes are impossible to teach reading effectively. Mention was made of the large classes which made it difficult to give individual attention during reading lessons. Due to frequent teacher absenteeism, teachers were burdened with extra learners from different classes. For example, during my observation sessions I noticed that one Grade 3 teacher had 15 extra learners in her class as one of the teachers was absent from school. The teacher was unable to use her mat for both groups to do guided or shared reading lessons. Such an unhealthy class environment made it impossible for the class teacher to conduct reading lessons effectively.



#### **4.5.4 Lack of resources**

Teachers complained about the lack of resources. During my observations there was no evidence of books in any of the foreign languages (such as Shona, French, etc.). There was a very small number of isiXhosa books which were not enough for all the learners. The English books were also not enough for the whole class and that prevented learners from taking them home to practise reading. Parents could not assist their children with reading as many families do not own books at all. Both teachers were concerned about the situation but had no recommendations as to how to overcome the problem. Obviously this situation had a negative influence on the learners' reading skills as they had limited reading opportunities in the classroom only.

Teachers were also concerned that learners had no access to libraries and the internet. As a result, the teachers had to make use of copies to ensure that each learner was issued with a reading text. It was noted that most activities were task based. This meant that the learners got very few projects due to lack of resources at school and at home and this

prevented learners from acquiring the much needed reading skills. The teachers had this to say about the lack of resources and its impact on the teaching-learning process:

Teacher M: “Oh no, it is too much of a hassle. The learners don’t have internet at home. The parents don’t help them, because they come home too late. This means that I must provide them with information.”

Teacher L: “Yho, I will never get the project. They don’t go to the library.”

The above excerpts indicate that the lack of resources had a negative impact on both the teachers and learners. Teachers had to improvise by providing learners certain reading texts and that did not encourage learners to read extensively and independently. Learners had to read only what was given to them by the teachers.



## 4.6 Summary

The themes that emerged from data analysis have to do with pedagogy, classroom reading environment and the challenges experienced by teachers in teaching Grade 3 multilingual classes. Reading is without a doubt the most vital linguistic skill that needs to be developed in learners. There is definitely no single method to teach reading successfully. It is imperative for teachers to have a sound knowledge of reading strategies and adequate resources. In the following chapter the research findings are discussed and recommendations with regard to the teaching of reading are given.



## CHAPTER FIVE: RESEARCH FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

### **5.1 Introduction**

Firstly this chapter presents the findings arising from this research project. The findings are based on close assessment of the work of the two teachers who were involved in the study. On the basis of the findings, the chapter offers some recommendations with regard to teaching reading in multilingual classes. Thereafter it outlines what is perceived to be major implications for future research.

## **5.2 Research findings**

The research findings of this study address the research questions and objectives stated in chapter one and they align with the analysis themes discussed in the previous chapter. I will present the findings according to the research questions that were given earlier, namely:

1. What challenges do teachers experience in teaching reading in multilingual classes?
2. What teaching strategies do teachers employ to teach reading to Grade 3 learners who are not home language speakers of English?
3. What reading materials are available to promote learners' independent reading skills in Grade 3 multilingual classes?



### **5.2.1 What challenges do teachers experience in teaching reading in multilingual classes?**

With regard to challenges experienced by teachers in teaching reading to multilingual classrooms, the following are the findings:

#### **5.2.1.1 The mismatch between the teachers' and learners' home languages and the LOLT has a negative impact on the teaching of reading**



The analysed data have shown that some learners from foreign countries (e.g. Malawi, DRC, etc) struggled to read in English. Unfortunately the teachers could not give them optimum support as they had no proficiency in the learners' home languages. On the contrary, those learners who shared the same home language as teachers (Afrikaans in class A –Teacher M and isiXhosa in class B – Teacher L) benefited through teachers' code switching and they could read better than the other groups.

#### **5.2.1.2 Teachers' administrative duties impact negatively on their teaching of reading**

Teachers were loaded with administrative duties as mentioned in Chapter 4. Despite the implementation of the teacher-swapping programme to improve literacy development, the teachers' workloads impacted negatively on this initiative. Teachers neglected their classes for other duties. This had negative effects on learners' reading, as they did not give enough support to learners' reading.

#### **5.2.1.3 Large classes prevent individual attention during reading lessons**

The large enrolment per class was found to be a major stumbling block to effective teaching of reading as teachers found it extremely problematic to do justice to it. It was not easy to divide the learners into manageable groups for individual attention due to large numbers. As a result, some learners were left unattended. This implies that it would be difficult for teachers to identify all learners with reading difficulties. Only the capable readers would make it in such conditions.

#### **5.2.1.4 Lack of support and inadequate teacher training impact negatively on the teaching of reading**

The lack of support from the departmental officials and the inadequate training in preparing the Foundation Phase teachers to implement the curriculum and to teach reading contributed to the learners' poor reading performance. Teachers believed that teaching reading was not necessary as learners could develop reading skills on their own.

Many teachers in the Foundation Phase have not been adequately trained to teach reading and find it difficult to help learners with reading difficulties. Therefore many teachers resorted to rote teaching as an option. This is due to lack of understanding of how learners develop independent reading.

Parents did not support their children in reading. This is due to a number of factors such as their low education and literacy levels, lack of reading materials at home and lack of time to get involved in their children's work.

## **5.2.2 What teaching strategies do teachers employ to teach reading to Grade 3 learners who are not home language speakers of English?**

### **5.2.2.1 Code-switching is a teaching resource in multilingual classrooms**

The teachers were facing challenges of multilingualism as their classes consisted of diverse groups of learners as mentioned in the first chapter. Teachers tended to make use of code switching to accommodate the learners who could not understand the language of learning and teaching. Although the use of code switching is one of the strategies that facilitate teaching where the teacher and learners have competence in more than one language, in the context of this study, however, code switching benefited some of the learners (Afrikaans and isiXhosa learners) and at the same time excluded other learners. For example, learners from Malawi and the Democratic Republic of Congo could not understand any of the two languages (i.e. Afrikaans and isiXhosa) and had no choice but to execute tasks that they were unable to read. They would either ask a fellow learner to assist or copy from another learner.

### **5.2.2.2 Teacher experiences and beliefs influence their teaching strategies**

There were some differences between the reading activities employed by the two teachers. Both teachers made use of phonic exercises and flashcards. The difference, however, was in the way lessons were presented. The more experienced teacher tended

to teach letter sounds within the context of the used text. She was consistent in her approach by always demonstrating to the learners how sounds and letters worked. She effectively entrenched her method of teaching reading into a wider context by making the learners aware of how reading and writing with comprehension contribute to communication. She furthermore used the whole text as the starting point from which skills such as vocabulary, the meaning of words, dictionary skills and the use of text features are taught. At all times she stated the purpose of using a specific text clearly, whereas the less experienced teacher was more likely to approach reading by giving individual sounds instead of full texts.

### **5.2.2.3 Teaching reading in context improves learners' reading and writing skills**

Both teachers used themes from published materials e.g. from Life Skills Learning Area and integrated the content in the Language Learning Area as a means of consolidating content that has already been taught to the learners. These learners showed more interest in reading, as they were familiar with the themes from other Learning Areas. They could relate to the texts and pictures they saw in the topics or themes extracted from different learning areas such as Life Skills.

### **5.2.2.4 Teachers' assessment strategies influence learners' reading abilities**

As mentioned in the previous chapter, both teachers used the same teaching strategies for all the learners in the class. The most common strategies were discussions, questions and answers. They also used the method of differentiation in the tasks by varying the questions to suit the abilities of the different ability groups in their classes. The tasks consisted of low to high order thinking questions. This situation, however, benefited those learners who could read at a higher level more than those who were experiencing reading difficulties. This implies that the teacher's planning should take into consideration the different capabilities of the learners, especially in diverse class groups.

Concerning assessment tools, both teachers had good knowledge of the requirements of the National Curriculum Statement and the assessment policy. The assessment tasks were in line with the learning outcomes and assessment standards for literacy as indicated in the policy document of the National Curriculum Statement (2002). This was evident in the assessment task as they integrated other learning areas in the tasks. They made use of different strategies to develop learners' reading skills through listening, speaking (oral), reading and viewing and writing. These activities assessed the learners' comprehension skills. However, the lack of adequate resources such as sufficient books, libraries and the internet and a reading culture hinder learners' reading development.

### **5.2.3 What reading materials are available to promote learners' independent reading skills in Grade 3 multilingual classes?**

#### **5.2.3.1 Lack of reading texts in different languages hinders learners' reading abilities**

The analyzed data reveal that the school had a shortage of reading materials in general hence the teachers resorted to photocopies. Apart from the lack of reading materials, the school had no library and other facilities such as the internet. The few reading materials are in English only. This prevented learners from exploring different reading texts to their advantage. In other words, the available reading materials promote monolingual reading in English.

#### **5.2.3.2 Classroom print environment**

The classrooms of both teachers were appropriately decorated with literacy wall charts that created a rich print environment conducive to learning. The classroom of the more experienced teacher, however, was differentiated by a richer emphasis on literacy that displayed phrases in English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa. **The displayed literacy on the walls was regularly brought to the learners' attention. The learners were constantly encouraged and reminded to make use of them to support their own writing skills.**

## **5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings of this study I would like to recommend the following with regards to teaching reading in Grade 3 multilingual classes:

### **5.3.1 Supply of teaching resources**

All schools should have a well-equipped library with a variety of books written in all the official languages in order to accommodate the diverse groups of learners. These books should be graded into different reading ability levels. Teachers with library qualifications as well as willing parents can be adequately trained to manage the library effectively. Timeslots for visitation should be known and clearly visible to staff members and learners.

### **5.3.2 Introduce reading programmes**

It is imperative that all schools cultivate and promote reading programmes to encourage independent reading. Good readers need access to good reading materials and learners therefore need the right to use books throughout the school year. The learners should be able to take books home to practice reading and develop independent reading and comprehension. Parents and the community need to value reading. Parents should be encouraged and constantly reminded by means of regular “parent-teacher-meetings” to read to their children.

### **5.3.3 Promote multilingual practices through inclusive language activities**

All classrooms should be equipped with sentences in the languages of the diverse learners. A rich print classroom environment with evidence of all the languages could possibly promote reading. It will also bridge the gap between the different cultures and languages and cultivate a love for reading amongst all learners.

Co-operative learning can be employed in order to accommodate all learners with different home languages. This can be done through group reading activities that incorporate all the languages spoken in the classroom. The speakers of those particular languages can be used as effective resources by providing translations or interpretations of the texts.

#### **5.3.4 Recognise the importance of home language education**

All learners should have the opportunity to learn in their home language. Schools should have a language policy that should address the needs of all learners in this regard. The language policies should ensure the right of learners. This implies creating language policy awareness among parents and other governmental officials.

#### **5.3.5 Teacher professional development and support**

All teachers should be relieved from unnecessary administration duties and spend more time teaching reading. Teachers need time to develop and understand methods of teaching literacy, reading and writing through in-service teacher training. They need to develop positive attitudes and should stimulate the reading process inside and outside the classroom. The Department of Education (DoE) officials need to be more visible and supportive in giving valuable guidelines for reading programmes and reading strategies to assist teachers in reading efficiency.

The more experienced teachers can guide the inexperienced teachers to become acquainted in knowledge and methodologies regarding strategies to promote independent reading. This support group could possibly increase the literacy level of the school.

#### **5.3.6 Teacher-pupil ratio**

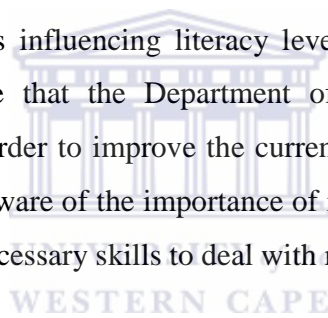
The teacher-pupil ratio should be reduced. Crowded classrooms obstruct effective teaching of reading. Smaller classes can facilitate progress in teaching reading. Teachers find it difficult to facilitate group reading as reading materials are insufficient for distribution to large classes. Large classes prevent teachers from giving individual

attention to learners. Teachers need individual assistants who can help them with reading lessons in their classrooms.

#### **5.4. Conclusion**

The study assessed the teachers' pedagogical strategies employed to promote independent reading in multilingual classrooms at a specific school. Data for this qualitative study were collected through observations and oral interviews. The findings of this study confirm that teachers experience difficulties in teaching reading to learners whose home languages differ from the language of learning and teaching.

With the numerous challenges influencing literacy levels, especially in disadvantaged communities, it is imperative that the Department of Education prioritises teacher development programmes in order to improve the current situation. Finally, all schools and teachers should be made aware of the importance of multilingualism and they should also be empowered with the necessary skills to deal with multilingual classrooms.



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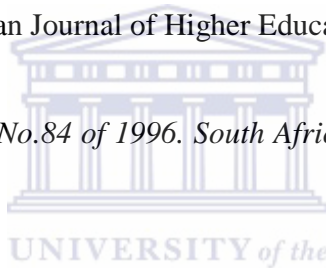
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## APPENDIX A: LETTER TO THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

XYZ Primary School  
Depsiton Crescent  
Lavender Hill  
7945

15 March 2009

Dear Madam/Sir

## REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT XYZ SCHOOL

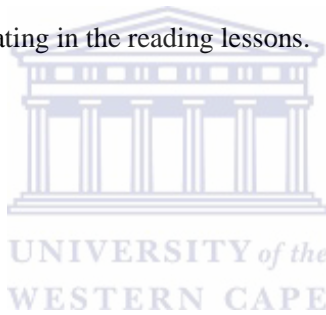
I am currently enrolled at the University of the Western Cape and studying towards a Masters Degree in Education (M.Ed). In order to fulfil all the requirements in this regard, I need to conduct research in an appropriate environment related to this study.

I hereby would like to humbly request permission to conduct research at XYZ school and would require access to two grade three classes for this purpose. During this process I would like to conduct interviews with grade three teachers and observe them during reading lessons in their classrooms. I shall also request written permission from the parents or guardians of the learners concerned as they will be participating in the reading lessons.

I thank you in anticipation.

Regards

Eunice. S. Manasse



## APPENDIX B

### CONSENT FROM PARTICIPANTS: TEACHERS

I ..... (name of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project. I give consent to participate in the project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

.....  
SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

.....  
DATE



UNIVERSITY of the

Potential subjects should be given time to read, understand and question the information given before consent is given.

## APPENDIX C: LETTER OF CONSENT TO PARENTS

Dear Parent/Guardian

I am a student at UWC who is doing a project about reading practices and strategies of Grade 3 teachers and learners. As part of my research I will be using your child in a class

context to observe reading lessons. I will not interview your child, but will be part of his/her class for a period of time whilst I am observing reading lessons. It is important for your child to participate as part of a class group so that we can improve her/his reading strategies.

Please know that no harm will happen to your child and the school if your child participates in this project. Please sign in the space provided below and return the reply slip to me at your earliest convenience.

Thank you for your assistance. If you require any further information please feel free to contact the school.



Yours sincerely

.....

Ms E.S. Manasse

## **REPLY SLIP**

I \_\_\_\_\_ give consent that my child  
\_\_\_\_\_ participates in this study. I understand that my child

will not be harmed in any way during this process. I also understand that their identity will remain anonymous.

Signature of parent: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## APPENDIX D: QUESTIONNAIRES AND INTERVIEW GUIDES

### QUESTIONNAIRE ADMINISTERED TO TWO TEACHERS

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. Age: Are you under 25?

25-29

30- 39

40-49

50-59

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2. How many years of teaching experience do you have?

1 year

2-5 years

6-10 years

More than 10 years

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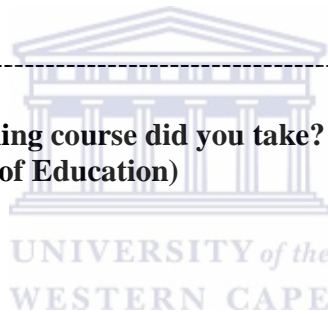
3. What type of teacher training course did you take?

DE (diploma of Education)

PGCE

Bed

Cert. Ed.



4. How many years of study did this involve?



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**5. In what year did you qualify as a teacher?**

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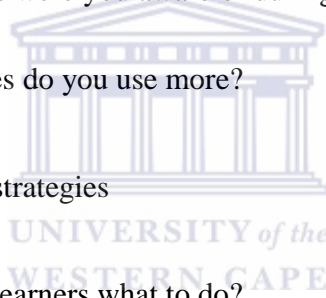
**6. Which grade are you teaching this year?**

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**INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

1. What do you think was significant about the teaching of reading in this session?
2. Do you usually do this?
3. Tell me more about the organization of your reading session.
4. Did things go as you planned?
5. Why did you organize the session in this way?
6. What teaching strategies were you aware of during the lesson?
7. Which of these strategies do you use more?
8. Why do you use these strategies
9. How did you show the learners what to do?
10. How did you monitor what was happening?
11. Did you want all the learners to learn the same thing?
12. Why do you have different aims for different learners?



# APPENDIX E:





UNIVERSITY *of the*  
WESTERN CAPE



UNIVERSITY *of the*  
WESTERN CAPE