

An evaluation of the efficacy of stand-alone adult basic  
education material targeting women:  
*The Women's Handbook.*

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# Introduction

This thesis evaluates a piece of educational printed material, *The Women's Handbook*, which was produced in the late 1990s as part of a joint project between the Midlands Women's Group (an NGO working around women's rights in the Midlands of KwaZulu-Natal), the Centre for Adult Education of the then University of Natal, and the national Commission on Gender Equality, a statutory body set up by the 1996 Constitution of South Africa.

As a member of the Centre for Adult Education's staff I was integrally involved in the process of conceptualising and developing the Handbook, and was the overall co-ordinator of the project.

As a result of the wide-spread changes in local government, as well as in development planning and processes, in the early 2000s the Centre and the Midlands Women's Group began considering the advisability of producing a revised edition. Although anecdotal evidence suggested that the Handbook had been widely used by the women to whom it had been distributed, it was decided that a thorough evaluation of the Handbook should be undertaken before any attempt was made to revise it.

This thesis is a record of this evaluation. It begins with a theoretical exploration of what it means to evaluate an intervention, and uses this to argue that an evaluation of the Handbook requires a consideration of its theoretical underpinnings and of best practice in the field of materials development for adults with low levels of education, as well its use and impact. It then moves on to look at the Handbook in some detail, including the rationale for its development. The use and impact of the Handbook is then discussed, after which an attempt is made to identify the theoretical underpinnings of the Handbook. Best practice both in terms of product and process is discussed, and the Handbook compared to this. The concluding chapter then attempts to account for the findings.

In its structure at least, then, this is not a 'typical' thesis. The review of pertinent literature, for example, is not contained in a single chapter, but rather dealt with within the appropriate chapter.

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# Chapter 1:

## Finding a research position from which to evaluate the Women's Handbook

Firstly, I take this opportunity to thank you for affording me the opportunity to read the Womens (sic) Hand Book.

I have found it absolutely interesting and informative. I have never read a book with so much of valuable information.

I have not completed the book and have already solved two of my problems thus far. I have also spoken to my friends about the book and they have asked me to request from you copies of the book.

I would appreciate it if you could forward me copies (if possible) of the Womens Hand Book so that I could distribute it to the Womens Groups in Raisethorpe.

(Letter to the Midlands Women's Group, 3 August 1999).

From the time the English version of the Women's Handbook was first distributed in the second half of 1999 (the Zulu version was only completed some time later), ordinary women have been expressing their appreciation of it. Fieldwork staff at the Midlands Women's Group, the non-governmental organisation (NGO) which developed the book in partnership with the Centre for Adult Education (University of KwaZulu-Natal<sup>1</sup>) and the Commission on Gender Equality, have been told literally hundreds of stories about how helpful women have found it, and how they have used it.

The Handbook has also been met with acclaim by community leaders, development workers and academics. The Deputy Mayor of Pietermaritzburg (a woman) has said of it 'Information is useless unless it can be accessed, but the answers are in this book', and has called for it to be widely distributed until every woman has a copy in her possession (Letter to the Midlands Women's Group, 15 December 2002). The then vice-chancellor and principal of the University of Natal, Prof. Brenda Gourley, said in a letter written to a member of the Reference Group which oversaw the development of the Handbook:

For too long, women have suffered exploitation and deprivation as a result of a lack of information and access to support structures and other resources. I see this book as being an invaluable agent of empowerment in this regard (Letter to Prof. John Aitchison, 8 September 1999).

The KwaZulu-Natal Gender Commissioner, Beatrice Ngcobo, has also argued that the Handbook is a means to 'make real' the rights of women:

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted at the time that the Women's Handbook project was started, the Centre for Adult Education formed a part of the University of Natal. This institution merged in 2004 with the University of Durban-Westville to create the University of KwaZulu-Natal, of which the Centre thus now forms a part.

The Handbook is one of the best tools that help to make the rights of people real in general, particularly for all women urban/rural...It would be the best and valuable tool for the country as a whole and for every South African (Letter to the Midlands Women's Group, 8 January 2003).

A formal review of the Handbook appeared in the feminist academic journal, *Agenda*, during 2000. The review was written by the director of a legal advice office in Durban, and was extremely positive about the Handbook itself as well as the process used to develop it. The reviewer said that having the Handbook was like having 'an advice office in your home without the hassles of telephoning, travelling and waiting in long queues only to be told what is in this book' and said that the book was 'now a means to promoting social development' (Naidoo 2000:109).

Is *The Women's Handbook* really worthy of these accolades? Has it lived up to expectations? Has it actually been read by the ordinary women for whom it was developed? Have they actually used it? And has this helped? These are the questions explored in this thesis.

Although there are indications, as has already been described, that the Handbook was warmly received, no thorough evaluation of the use and impact of the Handbook was undertaken prior to this study, although such an evaluation had always been intended. For example, the *Funding Proposal* proposed different means for evaluating the Project, including an internal evaluation and evaluative workshops with women 'to assess whether and how the Handbooks have been used, and whether they have made any contribution to the lives of women'. Sadly, this did not in fact happen, primarily because of budgetary constraints. Thus this thesis is the first real 'evaluation' of the Handbook. But what does this actually mean in practice?

## What is evaluation?

Whilst on the surface this appears a relatively simply question, there has been in fact considerable debate about the answer, particularly as regards the relationship between research and evaluation. As Robson (2000:9) points out, there is 'often heated debate about whether evaluation is a separable activity from research; or a particular kind of research; or whether it is sometimes research and sometimes not'.

Most practitioners, however, recognise that evaluation has an emphasis on *judging* something, with the aim of then doing something about this judgement, and this makes it different from pure research, whatever other similarities there might be:

[Evaluation is] an elastic word that stretches to cover judgements of many kinds (Weiss 1972:1).

To evaluate is to assess the worth or value of something (Robson 2000:3).

[Evaluation is] the provision of information about specified issues upon which judgements are based and from which decisions for action are taken (Morrison 1993:2).

What, then, are the similarities between evaluation and research? What has led so many to argue that evaluation is simply one type of research?

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:38) point out that both evaluation and research use the methodology and methods of social science research in general, including:

- the need to clarify the purpose of the investigation
- the need to operationalise this purpose
- the need to address principles of research design, including, for example, identifying key questions and appropriate methods and instruments, taking due care of ethical issues and issues of reliability and validity, data analysis, and reporting and interpreting results.

Thus *the way one does evaluation* is one of the things that makes it so difficult to distinguish from research that many argue that it is simply one kind of research, as does Michael Patton, one of the leading practitioners in the field:

I use the term evaluation quite broadly to include any effort to increase human effectiveness through systematic data-based enquiry. Human beings are engaged in all kinds of efforts to make the world a better place...In these and other efforts...the question of whether the people involved are accomplishing what they want to accomplish arises. When one examines and judges accomplishments and effectiveness, one is engaged in evaluation. When this examination of effectiveness is conducted systematically and empirically through careful data collection and thoughtful analysis, one is engaged in evaluation research (1990:11).

But a number of leading writers in the field (including Patton) argue that it is not only the use of research methods that makes the distinction between evaluation and research difficult - it is also the role of theory and knowledge. Clarke makes the following link between evaluation and knowledge:

Evaluation is presented as a form of applied social research, the primary purpose of which is not to discover new knowledge, as is the case with basic research, but to study the effectiveness with which existing knowledge is used to inform and guide practical action (1999:2).

Clarke argues strongly for the pivotal role of theory in evaluation, and says this is often neglected in writings about evaluation, which tend to simply focus on methods. He points out that there are two kinds of theories at play here - theory about evaluation itself; and theory that informs a particular evaluation of a particular intervention. This is what makes evaluation different from, for example, periodic inspection, systematic monitoring and auditing (1999:31).

Clarke draws on a number of other significant writers in his argument, including Patton (1989), Chen (1990), Fitz-Gibbon and Morris (1996), and Weiss (1997), who represent a growing body of practitioners arguing for theory-based evaluation. But the argument for theory-based (or theory-driven) evaluation is not in fact a new one. In 1981, Chen and Rossi argued that the 'official-goal-fixed-approach' (in which the evaluator concentrated on a fairly limited number of outcomes prescribed by the programme planners) current at the time should be replaced with a 'multi-goal, theory-driven approach'. And Wholey (1987) asserted that it was impossible to properly evaluate a programme unless you understood its underlying theoretical basis.

It seems clear then, that this evaluation should be an examination of the effectiveness of *The Women's Handbook* intervention, drawing on evaluation theory but also informed by the theory underpinning the Handbook project, and conducted, in Michael Patton's words, 'systematically and empirically through careful data collection and thoughtful analysis' (1990:11).

But what should this specific evaluation examine? How should it be done? And am I the appropriate person to undertake it?

## What should an evaluation examine?

Robson (2000:11) has summarised the history of the field of evaluation as 'short, hectic and somewhat chaotic'. He argues that after a concentration on experimental and semi-experimental designs in the 1960s there was a shift to a more use-led approach, heavily influenced by the work of Weiss and Patton. This was followed by the 'paradigm wars' between practitioners with very different views about how evaluation should be conducted, which was in turn succeeded by the 'fourth-generation' evaluation propounded by Guba and Lincoln (also called 'naturalistic' or 'constructivist'). Currently, argues Robson, there is a trend towards a more pluralistic approach, in which different models are synthesised. This shift within the field of evaluation itself has profoundly affected the question of what an evaluation should be looking at.

One of the first and, according to Clarke (1999:7), most popular, fundamental and enduring, attempts to distinguish between different types of evaluation was Scriven's (1967) distinction between formative and summative evaluation, which required an examination of different aspects of an intervention.

*Formative* evaluation has as its main objective to inform the development of an intervention. Formative evaluations thus tend to focus on *process*. It is generally conducted at an early stage in a new intervention and/or during the intervention. Herman et al (1987:12-13) suggest three possible points at which such an evaluation might be useful - at the point where it is conceptualised, at the planning phase, and during implementation. Patton (1994) suggests that it be termed 'developmental evaluation' where the ultimate goal of the intervention is not known.

*Summative* evaluation is conducted at the end. It is a kind of 'end-of-term' report about what the programme or intervention has achieved, and focuses on the outcomes of the programme, and whether its goals have been met (Robson 2000:51).

Robson argues that this typology is not particularly helpful, since in practice it is very rare to find either a purely formative or a purely summative evaluation. Generally, a summative evaluation will usually be premised on some intention to change or improve the intervention, whilst a formative evaluation will include some exploration of the effects of the intervention (2000:51).

Chen (1996:130) calls Scriven's typology 'both inspiring and useful', but argues that the changing field requires a broader conceptual framework which makes allowances for this overlap between the strictly formative (process) and the strictly summative (outcomes). He suggests the following typology (1996:123), in which he correlates the function of the evaluation (to improve or assess) with the stages of the intervention:

		Evaluation functions	
		Improvement	Assessment
Programme stages	Process	<i>Process-improvement evaluation</i>	<i>Process-assessment evaluation</i>
	Outcome	<i>Outcome-improvement evaluation</i>	<i>Outcome-assessment evaluation</i>

Chen's typology thus does not limit evaluation of the process only to its improvement; or evaluation of the outcomes only to an overall assessment of the effectiveness of the intervention. Rather, both process and outcomes can be both judged (assessed) and improved.

Chen argues that these different types of evaluation, with different foci and different intentions, can be purposively mixed in a single evaluation (Clarke 1999:13).

But Scriven's and Chen's categorisations are not the only typologies that have been attempted. Rather, numerous writers and practitioners have suggested a variety of possible models or categories, each with a different focus.

In the 1970s, the Evaluation Research Society suggested 6 categories of evaluation - formative, summative (renamed impact evaluation), front-end analysis (conducted before an intervention is introduced), evaluability assessment (assessing whether and how an intervention should be evaluated), intervention monitoring, and evaluation of evaluation (Clarke 1999:13-14). These different categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive (Clarke 1999:14).

Herman, Morris and Fitz-Gibbon, all from the Centre for the Study of Evaluation at the University of California, produced a tool-kit for evaluators in 1987 (reprinted in 1989), which attempted to give both experienced and new evaluators a range of tools that could be used to conduct evaluations. In their *Evaluator's Handbook*, the first volume of the toolkit, they argued that the field of evaluation had evolved rapidly since the late 1960s, with several different 'models' of evaluation having evolved, although, again, these are not mutually exclusive:

Model	Emphasis
Goal-oriented evaluation	To assess student [or client] progress/effectiveness of education [or other] innovations
Decision-oriented evaluation	To facilitate intelligent judgements by decision-makers
Responsive evaluation	To depict programme processes and the value perspectives of key people involved in the programme
Evaluation research	To explain effects, identify the causes of these effects, and generate generalizations about programme effectiveness
Goal-free evaluation	To assess effects using criteria apart from the programme's own conceptual framework, especially the extent to which real clients' needs are met.
Advocacy-adversary evaluation	Is derived from the argumentation of two contrasting points of view
Utilisation-oriented evaluation	Is structured to maximise the utilisation of its findings by specific stakeholders and users

(Herman, Morris and Fitz-Gibbon 1987:10)

Patton, in his more recent, highly influential work *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods* (1990:115-122), also identifies a number of different evaluation models (many of which echo those listed above), which he says are not so much recipes as frameworks to help evaluators know what steps to follow and what issues to consider in designing and implementing a study:

- **Goals-based evaluation**, possibly the first model of evaluation, which looks at the extent to which an intervention attained clear and specific objectives (usually those determined by the intervention planners).
- **Goals-free evaluation**, an alternative to this, in which the evaluator looks at the *actual* effects of the intervention, and evaluates the importance of these, without first looking at the *intended* objectives (and generally not even knowing what these are).
- What Patton terms '*connoisseurship*' evaluation, in which the evaluator's perceptions and expertise are paramount, rather than the stakeholders'. The evaluator determines what will be evaluated, drawing on his/her own judgement and expertise.
- **Utilisation-focused evaluation**, which Patton (who developed it) argues is more of a strategy than a model, which focuses on the use of the evaluation. The evaluator starts with the question 'What difference will this study make?'

Patton also identifies responsive evaluation, which he says emphasises the importance of personalising and humanising the evaluation process.

These attempts to categorise different types of evaluation are only really useful in that they provide a basis from which to argue what to focus on and what to neglect in any particular evaluation. For example, an evaluator (or the commissioners of an evaluation) may decide to focus only on whether the specified goals and objectives of an intervention have been reached, and justify this by arguing that they are doing goal-based or goal-oriented evaluation.

Regardless of which particular model of evaluation one might choose to embrace, clearly, if one accepts the argument for theory-driven evaluation, the examination of theory is always required. What does this involve? Fitz-Gibbon and Morris (1996:178) give the following explanation of a theory-driven approach:

The term "theory-based" evaluation...means an evaluation based on a model, theory or philosophy about how the program works; a model, theory or philosophy which indicates the causal relationships supposedly operating in the program.

One of the primary tasks of the evaluator, then, is to discover the theory underlying the intervention being evaluated - which is not always easy, says Clarke (1999:31) because the theory behind a programme/intervention is not always explicit or articulated.

What then should this evaluation of the Handbook examine? Clearly, this depends on its intention. The Handbook project was conceptualised from the start as a project which would be evaluated in order to inform a second phase of the project. Originally, this second phase was to be the roll-out of the book to other parts of South Africa by the Commission on Gender Equality, a Handbook project partner; this never transpired, and this evaluation was undertaken, in part, to test whether a revised edition should be produced for the Midlands.

I would argue that this evaluation of the Handbook is thus both summative (it comes after the creation of, and distribution of, the Handbook, and is intended to assess its overall effectiveness - i.e. its outcomes); and formative (it feeds into a process of revising the Handbook); or, in Chen's typology, a combination of all four of his categories of evaluation, since it judges both process and outcome with a view to improving these. It is also intended to facilitate intelligent judgement by decision-makers ('Decision-oriented evaluation'); to explain the effects, identify the causes of these effects, and generate generalisations about the effectiveness of the Handbook project ('Evaluation research'). I sincerely hope it is structured to maximise its use by stakeholders (and readers!) ('Utilisation-oriented evaluation'). It also requires, as discussed above, a consideration of the theory underpinning the Handbook project and Handbook itself.

Thus this evaluation requires, as I see it, an examination of outcome, process and theory:

1. I need to assess the extent to which the project succeeded in its aim (outcome) - whether women have indeed used the book. In doing this, I need to distinguish between women reading the book; understanding the book; and using the information in the book for practical purposes - i.e. taking action.
2. I need to attempt some kind of explanation for my findings. In doing this, I will need to consider the correctness of the assumptions/appropriateness of the theory which underpinned the Handbook project and the extent to which the Handbook and the Handbook project complied with the received wisdom of these theoretical positions. This requires reflecting critically on the Handbook, not only as a product, but as a process. To what extent did this process of developing the book conform with the requirements of the theoretical paradigm/s within which it falls? To what extent does the Handbook as a product reflect the requirements of the theoretical paradigm/s within which it falls? And what does this then say about such best practice?

## How should an evaluation be done?

As we have seen, it is generally argued by practitioners in the field that evaluation overlaps significantly with research and/or is a particular kind of research, especially as regards methodology and methods. Arguments about how evaluation should be done have thus been heavily influenced by debates about methodology and methods within research since evaluation became an accepted, distinct field in the early 1960s, as is apparent from the move away from the experimental model of doing evaluation to the 'naturalistic', 'constructivist' 'fourth-generation' evaluation proposed by Guba and Lincoln. The current plethora of different 'models' of evaluation of necessity allows for a plethora of research methods, and many writers suggest that there is no one way to 'do' evaluation.

Herman, Morris and Fitz-Gibbon, from the Centre for the Study of Evaluation at the University of California, for example, argued that their tool-kit for evaluators did not use one or the other model or method, since each was appropriate for particular circumstances and had its own strengths and weaknesses. (Herman, Morris and Fitz-Gibbon 1987:9, 11). They also argued that both quantitative and qualitative research methods could be used in these models, noting that there had been a shift in the two decades prior to their publication of the kit from using primarily quantitative methods to using a range of qualitative and quantitative methods.

Indeed, many more recent writers on evaluation have argued for the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods in data collection and analysis, and there is a growing body of work arguing for qualitative evaluation. For example, Moris and Copestake suggest that qualitative enquiry is more useful than quantitative enquiry when evaluating a project with explicit process goals; that, in fact, it is very difficult to do this quantitatively because it is hard to prove that any change is 'unambiguously' the result of the intervention being evaluated:

To do so with any degree of statistical confidence, it is necessary to have data stretching back over time, and a large enough sample of observations...to permit reliable statistical analysis of the extent to which changes in target variables can be explained by what may be a very large set of endogenous and exogenous variables (1993:23-24).

Michael Patton is a well-known proponent of qualitative methods, but argues that

There are no rigid rules that can be provided for making data collection and methods decisions in evaluation. There is no recipe or formula to follow. Lee J. Cronbach [one of the earliest writers on evaluation] has observed that designing an evaluation is as much art as science (Patton 1990:13).

However, Schratz and Walker (1995) argue forcefully that the debate about qualitative versus quantitative is not about which methods are good or bad or helpful or not:

...we do not see 'qualitative methods' as a set of alternative devices to be found in the researcher's toolbox, but as quite different in character and practice from other methods (1995:2).



Schatz and Walker argue that it has become convention for writers on research methods to describe these as somehow context-free, as if one could just pick and choose those which are most appropriate to the moment. Rather, there should be 'critical justification for the adoption and practice of particular research methods' (Ibid:12). They want writing about research to be reflexive - 'Reflexive in the sense that it provides us with ways of talking about research on practice that treats research itself as practice' (Ibid:13).

Thus the method one uses to evaluate something must be seen in context, must be placed within a particular research paradigm. So from which research paradigm should this evaluation be undertaken?

## Research paradigms

The final decades of the last century were characterised by an assertion among many social theorists across disciplines that positivism - that notion that there is objective truth, 'facts' which are open to measurement and control - if not dead, was certainly critically wounded. At the same time, the Enlightenment project came to be increasingly criticised (Weiler 1988:25; Apple in Lather 1991:vii; Lather 1991:7).

This critique of modernity involved a fundamental shift in ways of thinking about the world, and also in ways of studying it, and resulted in a kind of increased ferment in debate about the nature of research, ways of generating knowledge, ways of legitimating it, and the relationship between theory and practice.

Within this debate, I would argue, two broad trends emerged. On the one hand, the postmodernist movement called into question the possibility of asking or answering big questions in its rejection of 'metanarratives' and 'metatheories' as 'totalizing', and argued that reality is fragmented and multiple and personal identity fragile and ever-changing. On the other, neo-Marxists, feminists, and many others within broadly liberatory movements, questioned the ability of postmodernism to adequately explain oppression (see, for example, Kelly (2000:7), who argues that 'Postmodernism's refusal to analyse society as an entity and its determination to concentrate on the local situation means it is unable to understand women's oppression'; and Hickey (2000:163) who says 'Postmodernism is ...a liberal rhetoric for the twenty-first century'). The politics of postmodernism was called into question, with some arguing that postmodernism fosters nihilism, relativism and political irresponsibility, and is especially dangerous for the marginalised (Lather 1991:37). Postmodernism has also been criticised for its failure to address action:

In terms of acting in the world, the derision of metatheory and the lack of any effective theory of agency undercuts efforts towards reasoned action and community and/or collective purpose (Lather 1991:40).

Thus, at the same time as the invasion of postmodernism into the social sciences, and not always in direct opposition to it but often out of a growing disquiet about aspects of it, in particular its 'irredeemable political ambivalence' (Lather 1991:31), came the development of overtly praxis-oriented methodologies for looking at the world and its multiple oppressions. In many cases these grew out of existing emancipatory/critical theoretical paradigms (for

example, Marxism and feminism), whilst in others they emerged as emancipatory streams in otherwise politically ambivalent methodologies (for example, action research).

Patti Lather (1991:7) presents the following grid of ‘postpositivist inquiry’, drawing on Habermas’ (1971) thesis of the three categories of human interest that underscore knowledge claims, to which she adds postmodernism’s deconstruction premise:

Positivism	Postpositivist inquiry		
Predict	Understand	Emancipate	Deconstruct
positivism	interpretive naturalistic constructivist phenomenological hermeneutic	critical neo-Marxist feminist praxis-oriented educative Freirian participatory action research	postructural postmodern post-paradigmatic diaspora

I would argue that, given the emancipatory aim of the Handbook, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, together with my personal commitment to the emancipatory project, emancipatory inquiry offers the most appropriate paradigm for undertaking its evaluation.

## Emancipatory research

Emancipatory research can be broadly defined as research aiming to cause some kind of change for the benefit of the oppressed or unfree. Within this broad category, two distinct streams are apparent - that which aims to do this only through the *product* of the research (i.e. the findings), and that which focuses on the *process* of the research as well, in the sense that it is this very process which leads to emancipation.

I intend below to look at four of the emancipatory research approaches I believe hold greatest import for this study.

## Emancipatory action research

Action research has been defined by Cohen and Manion (1994:186 quoted in Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2000:226-227) as ‘a small-scale intervention in the functioning of the real world and a close examination of the effects of such an intervention’. One of the critical components of action research is the involvement of those actually doing the work in the research process:

It is not research done on other people. Action research is research by particular people on their own work, to help them improve what they do, including how they work with others (Kemmis and McTaggart 1992:227).

Action research, in and of itself, is not necessarily emancipatory, and has been criticised by Lather (1991:56) amongst others for its often ahistorical and apolitical approach. However, in the last decade an overtly emancipatory stream of action research has emerged.

[E]mancipatory action research ... is collaborative, critical and self-critical inquiry by practitioners ... into a major problem or issue or concern in their own practice. They own the problem and feel responsible and accountable for solving it through teamwork and through following a cyclical process of:

1. Strategic planning;
2. Action, i.e. implementing the plan;
3. Observation, evaluation and self-evaluation;
4. Critical and self-critical reflection on the results of points 1-3 and making decisions for the next cycle of action research (Zuber-Skerrit 1996:3).

The task, as Marx suggests in his *Theses on Feuerbach*, is not merely to understand and interpret the world but to change it. Action research is a powerful tool for change and improvement at the local level (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2000:226).

Thus what characterises action research is primarily its methodology, rather than its emancipatory intent per se. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:228) identify the following principles and characteristics of action research, drawn from Hult and Lenning (1980:241-250) and McKernan (1991:32-3). Action research:

- makes for practical problem solving as well as expanding scientific knowledge;
- enhances the competencies of participants;
- is collaborative;
- is undertaken directly *in situ*;
- uses feedback from data in an ongoing cyclical process;
- seeks to understand particular complex social situations;
- seeks to understand the processes of change within social systems;
- is undertaken within an agreed framework of ethics;
- seeks to improve the quality of human actions;
- focuses on those problems that are of immediate concern to practitioners;
- is participatory;
- frequently uses case studies;
- tends to avoid the paradigm of research that isolates and controls variables;
- is formative, such that the definition of the problem, the aims and methodology may alter during the process of action research;
- includes evaluation and reflection;
- is methodologically eclectic;
- contributes to the science of education;
- strives to render the research usable and shareable by participants;
- is dialogical and celebrates discourse;
- has a critical purpose in some forms;
- strives to be emancipatory.

## **Feminist research**

Patti Lather (1991) argues that whilst feminist research is by no means monolithic, all of it places gender at the centre of the research:

Feminist researchers see gender as a basic organizing principle which profoundly shapes/mediates the concrete conditions of our lives (1991:71).

The ideological goal of feminist research in the human sciences, she says, is to correct both the invisibility and the distortion of female experience; and to do so in order to help end women's unequal position in society. Thus feminist research is in and of itself emancipatory. However, as Lather argues, this agenda does not necessarily lead to a shift in research methodology - much early feminist research used conventional research paradigms - but a stream of more self-consciously innovative methodology has emerged. This stream sees the process of doing the research as being as important as the outcome, since the process should raise the consciousness of the participants towards transformative social action.

Another influential feminist writer, Kathy Weiler (1988), identifies the critical departure point of feminist research as not a focus on gender, but rather that women researchers must begin by defining themselves as women:

This starting point reflects central insights about the relationship of power, knowledge and language and calls into question the intellectual tradition not only of positivism, but of Western thought (1988:58).

Thus the methodology, assumptions and language of the male intellectual tradition (conflated by feminists with Western positivism) have come under increasing scrutiny by feminist researchers.

Weiler identifies three major themes in this new feminist methodology.

Firstly, feminist researchers begin their investigation of the social world from the position of their own subjective oppression. Thus they have a sensitivity to issues of power which comes from being subordinate.

Thus feminists recognize that their vision of social reality and their definition of what is important emerge from their own position in society. Feminist research, like critical Marxist research, thus rejects the desirability, or even the possibility of value-free research (1988:58).

Secondly, feminist researchers emphasise lived experience and the significance of everyday life, expressed in the famous feminist slogan, 'the personal is political'. This emphasis has led to a rejection of positivism and a new interest in social interactionist approaches, focusing on the relationship between the woman researcher and the woman subject. Feminist research should thus emphasise the everyday experiences of women, and should locate the researcher herself in terms of her own subjectivity.

One of the major goals of feminist research is for both women as researchers and women as the objects of research to come to understand and explore their own consciousness and material conditions of existence through dialogue (1988:63).

Thirdly, feminist research is politically committed:

In rejecting the possibility of value-free research, feminists instead assert their commitment to changing the position of women and therefore to changing society (1988:59).

Weiler argues strongly that a feminist methodology needs to 'admit and employ resources like intuition, emotions, and feelings, in both the researcher and the researched'. This is clearly a major departure from traditional male positivist research which rejects emotion as subjective and hence 'unscientific' (1988:63).

Weiler argues that this methodology is a useful tool in examining the relationship between structural oppression and the realities of individual lives, and thus has far wider applicability than merely studying gender oppression. She adds the warning that in grounding feminist research in gender, feminist researchers should not lose sight of other oppressions, in particular race and class.

### **Participatory research**

Emerging in the 1970s, and drawing on the work of Paulo Freire, participatory research emphasises

...the mobilisation and empowerment of ordinary, especially oppressed, people, through the creation, ownership and use of research. The intention is to demystify research and place it in the hands of the researched (Duke 1995:31).

The similarities between this approach and a feminist approach is thus obvious, although feminist research, as we have seen, emphasises gender and gender oppression.

Duke argues that participatory research poses a number of questions about research and research methods, including whether community empowerment and action is a valid research output, the generation, ownership and use of research, and the subject-object relationship (1995:31). Such questions have not yet had a significant impact on the more 'traditional' interpretive research approach. The Institut Canadien de l'Education Adultes (ICEA) and Canadian Association for Adult Education (CAAE) have pointed out that within the field of adult education, participatory research (and action research), at least during the 1990s, was often not recognised within Universities as 'real research' because it is seen as 'more of a community development practice than a relevant research strategy', and is often rejected by journal review boards and promotion committees (1995:182). (This is, incidentally, in keeping with my own experience).

Since the late 1980s, women theorists have been exploring the notion of feminist participatory research (Maguire, 1987; Fals-Borda, 1991; Joyappa and Martin, 1996; Auerbach, 1996). Miller (2002) summarises this approach as follows:

1) The participants understand gender-awareness exists at the core of the process yet recognize as critical the intersections with multiple systems of oppression - racism, classism, heterosexism, ageism, ableism, etc.

2) the researcher is not the holder of the knowledge - all the participants in the project contribute to the knowledge base, participate in creating knowledge, reflect on their changing experiences of self-knowledge, benefit from knowledge made evident through the spirals of theory and action

3) the participants are not objects who research is conducted on but rather the subjects of the inquiry who set the agenda, participate in the data collection and analysis, and control the use of the outcomes, including deciding what future actions to take or directions to go

4) the power relationships remain continuously under scrutiny and the process involves participants in the use, distribution, and/or transformation of power

5) the intricate links between research and action; theory and praxis; knowing and doing remain continuously acknowledged and developed in a spiral of activity involving planning, acting, observing and reflecting

6) the aim is '...to develop critical consciousness, to improve lives of those involved in the research process, and to transform fundamental societal structures and relationships' (Maguire 1987:3). (Miller 2002: Dissertation framework and methodological process, 1-2).

### **Praxis-oriented research**

Patti Lather (1991) in her influential work *Getting Smart: Feminist research and pedagogy with/in the Postmodern*, attempts to construct what she calls 'postpositivist, praxis-oriented research', which makes theory, method and praxis inseparable from each other (1991:x). To do this, she draws on three different streams of research theory, viz. feminist theory, neo-Marxist critical ethnography, and Freirian 'empowering' or participatory research, all of which have an openly emancipatory intent (51). Lather does not draw on action research, which she does not see as having this openly emancipatory intent. Indeed, she argues that the vast majority of action research operates as an ahistorical, apolitical value system (56). This may have been accurate at the time she was writing (early 1990s) but, as we have seen, a very well developed emancipatory action research tradition has since emerged.

Lather argues that:

the goal of emancipatory research is to encourage self-reflection and deeper understanding on the part of the researched at least as much as it is to generate empirically grounded theoretical knowledge (1991:60).

This does not differ greatly from the emancipatory research paradigms discussed above. Lather, however, tries to locate this kind of research within a postmodernist world, and wonders how it is possible for this kind of research to take place in a way in which the researcher is prevented from becoming impositional - the key issue is thus how the researcher maximises him or herself as a mediator between people's self-understandings and the need to critique these (because of the possibility of false consciousness à la Gramsci), and thus creates the space for transformative social action, whilst ensuring that the researcher's own beliefs, identities etc. do not adversely impact on the process.

Research which encourages self and social understanding and change-enhancing action on the part of 'developing progressive groups' requires research designs that allow us as researchers to reflect on how our value commitments insert themselves into our empirical work. Our own frameworks of

understanding need to be critically examined as we look for the tensions and contradictions they might entail (1991:80).

Quoting Comstock (1982:387) Lather thus argues that part of the researcher's task is to get research participants into 'a self-sustaining process of critical analysis and enlightened action'.

Ensuring that this kind of research does not take the concept of subjective research too far, does not simply become the expression of the researcher's own complex internal narrative, requires some kind of validation. Obviously this requires a rethinking of validation in the positivist sense. Lather uses Guba and Lincoln's (1981) minimum requirement of triangulation, reflexivity and face validity, but adds to this a fourth requirement in testing for validity, that of catalytic validity. Such validation is necessary not only to ensure that this kind of research is taken seriously, but also 'to protect our work from our passions and limitations'.

In adhering to the principle of triangulation - the process of using multiple data sources, research methods and theoretical schemes, so that pieces of information can be checked against each other - the researcher needs to consciously use designs which seek counter patterns as well as convergence. Likewise, reflexivity requires the researcher to ask hard questions of how and why the research is being done. Lather argues that researchers need to operate within a conscious context of theory building, and constantly probe and question theoretical assumptions:

Where are the weak points of the theoretical tradition we are operating from within? Are we extending theory? Revising it? Testing it? Corroborating it? (1991:67)

It is also a requirement of validity that the researcher allows the research to be shaped and reshaped by the research process, by using member checks or face validity. This means that the researcher must 'recycle' his or her description, emerging analysis and conclusions back through at least a sample of the respondents. Here, however, Lather points out that 'false consciousness' can limit the extent of usefulness of this process, since participants may be unable to move beyond the hegemonic determination of their own beliefs and attitudes<sup>2</sup>.

Finally, Lather argues for catalytic validity - the degree to which the research process re-orientes, focuses and energises the participants towards knowing reality so that they can transform it. This is in effect measuring what Freire called 'conscientization'.

As with action research and feminist research, Lather's praxis-oriented research model flies in the face of the positivist demand for researcher neutrality, since it is premised on the researcher actively involving him or herself in the action of transformation.

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Apple, in his introduction to Lather's book, insists that Lather believes that research must be premised on a deep respect for the intellectual and political capacities of the dispossessed. Given the political tenor of her work, it is very likely that she does so; however, she appears to be unable to reconcile this with the problem of false consciousness. I am likewise unable so to do.

## Research methods

As outlined above, many of the emancipatory research paradigms which have emerged in the last four decades have argued for particular research methods as well as a particular (emancipatory) approach (and as we have seen, Schratz and Walker argue that research methods should not be decontextualised). Briefly summarised, these include:

- use of small-scale research, including case studies
- reflection on the self as researcher
- involvement of the researched, both in the research process, and in its verification (i.e. testing whether the research was accurate by checking back with the participants).

Broadly speaking, these require qualitative rather than quantitative research methods.

Qualitative methods (in-depth/open-ended interviews and questionnaires, focus groups, and participatory research methods) have become increasingly popular, with interpretive research, neo-Marxist critical theory, phenomenology, ethnography, cultural studies, action research and feminist research all contributing to the development of such methods (Hake, 1995:159).

Increasingly, qualitative methods are being drawn on in evaluation, for many of the same reasons as such methods have become popular amongst certain 'pure' researchers - because these methods say something different, and allow something different, concerning power relations between the researcher (the evaluator) and researched (the stakeholders and/or beneficiaries); and because they are more useful in providing textured, detailed description, which is particularly important in understanding process and context, both of which are essential components of many evaluations.

Michael Patton developed *The Qualitative Evaluation Checklist* in 2003, which argues that three kinds of data collection be used in qualitative evaluation - in-depth, open-ended interviews; direct observation; and written documents (he initially identified these three sources in his *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*, first published in 1980, and republished in 1990):

**Interviews:** Open-ended questions and probes yield in-depth responses about people's experiences, perceptions, opinions, feelings, and knowledge. Data consists of verbatim quotations with sufficient context to be interpretable.

**Observations:** Fieldwork descriptions of activities, behaviors, actions, conversations, interpersonal interactions, organizational or community processes, or any other aspect of observable human experience. Data consist of field notes: rich, detailed descriptions, including the context within which the observations were made.

**Documents:** Written materials and other documents from organizational, clinical, or program records; memoranda and correspondence; official publications and reports; personal diaries, letters, artistic works, photographs and memorabilia; and written responses to open-ended surveys. Data consists of excerpts from documents captured in a way that records and preserves context (Patton 2003:2).

Patton argues that qualitative methods are useful in evaluations because 'they tell the program's story by capturing and communicating the participants' story' (Ibid:2).



The data sources Patton suggests be used are echoed by Weiss (1997:508), who argues that the evaluator should use four basic sources of information in determining theory. Documents such as internal reports, minutes of meetings and literature disseminated by the programme should be perused. In-depth interviews should be conducted with, for example, principal stakeholders in the intervention. Prior research, such as of social science theory, should be used in constructing programme theory. Finally, logical reasoning by the evaluator should be used to help identify the beliefs or assumptions underlying the intervention being evaluated.

Because of the research paradigm within in which I have argued this evaluation should be located, it is clear that qualitative, participatory methods are the most appropriate for this study. These place the research participants (those people involved in the project, as well as the ordinary women to whom the Handbook was distributed) at the centre:

In contrast to the traditional deductive approach used in quantitative approaches, qualitative methods are inductive. The researcher or evaluator strives to describe and understand the program or particular aspects of it as a whole...the evaluator tries to understand the meaning of a program and its outcomes from the participants' perspectives. The emphasis is on detailed description and in-depth understanding as it emerges from direct contact and experience with the program and its participants (Herman, Morris and Fitz-Gibbon 1987:21).

I have attempted to comply with Lather's (1991) requirements for ensuring the validity of research. I have thus used multiple data sources and research methods in considering the elements I have argued need to be examined, and checked these against each other. I have attempted to be reflexive, and to critically reflect (and self-critically reflect) on both the project and this evaluation. I have engaged in face validity checks to the extent that I have discussed my findings with members of the Midlands Women's Group who have been involved in the Handbook project since its inception. In terms of 'catalytic validity' - the requirement that the research process re-orient, focuses and energises the participants towards knowing reality so that they can transform it - I believe it has done so in my case; and in feeding the results of this evaluation back into the process, I hope it does so for others.

I have drawn largely on the suggested methods proposed by Patton (1990; 2003) - in-depth, open-ended interviews; field observation (although more in the form of focus groups than direct observation) and my own personal experience as the co-ordinator of the Handbook Project; and documents (both those related to the Handbook Project, and written responses to open-ended surveys). I have also heeded Weiss' (1997:508) advice that an evaluator use documents, people, prior research, and logical reasoning to uncover the theories informing and underpinning the Handbook project.

### **In-depth interviews**

Two of the most active members of the Reference Group which oversaw the project were interviewed about the project. An attempt was made to contact other members (none of whom still lives in the Midlands), but these were unsuccessful. These interviews with those most closely involved in the Handbook project are used to identify their underlying assumptions and check my own understandings about the project and its intentions. This helps to more accurately locate the Handbook and Handbook project within a theoretical position, as suggested by Weiss.

## **The focus groups**

The extent to which various members of the target audience understood and used the information in the Handbook, as well as what information, and how they used the information, was investigated through a series of focus groups with women in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands who have had access to the Handbook.

At least one focus group was held in each of the seven areas where the initial workshops which informed the Handbook's development were held:

1. A focus group was held with 16 women in Enhlalakahle, Greytown. The women were from Greytown, a small rural town, or Enhlalakahle, its township, or from rural villages in the surrounding area, such as Mbulwane and Seven Oaks. All of the women at the focus group had access to the Handbook (although they did not necessarily have their own copy).
2. A focus group was held with 23 women from Sobantu, a township in Pietermaritzburg. Six of the women had had access to the Handbook; the remainder had not, and did not know about the Handbook.
3. A focus group was held at Tembaletu Community Education Centre in Pietermaritzburg with 17 facilitators and learners from three rural communities (Muden, Qanda and Stoffelton) involved in an Adult Basic Education project. Tembaletu had trained the facilitators and provided ongoing support to the ABE classes. One of the co-ordinators of the project was also present. The Handbook had been used in their classes for some time. 5 men attended the focus group, 3 of them facilitators and one the project co-ordinator.
4. A focus group was held with a group of 26 women in Impendle. Impendle is a very small rural town in a tribal authority area. The women came from settlements in the area. Half of the women (13) had had access to the Handbook.
5. A focus group was held in Nhlazuka, a fairly remote rural community in the vicinity of Richmond. (I was not present at this focus group, and the report on this focus group, done by the MWG, is unfortunately incomplete. It does not, for example, record how many women were present).
6. A focus group was held with 19 women and 1 man in Ixopo. All the participants had received the Handbook.
7. A focus group of 12 women was held in Matatiele. Most of the women there had not received the Handbook, and were seeing it for the first time. Only three women had seen, and used, the book. This focus group was supposed to include women from Kokstad - but it appeared that it had not been properly organised by the contact person, and thus only women from Matatiele attended.

The MWG was responsible for setting up the workshops held with women as part of the initial phase of the Women's Handbook Project, and has maintained links with women in the areas where these workshops were held. As has been discussed, the MWG was also responsible for the distribution of the Handbook, both directly to women, and through various organizations in the region. The MWG used women or groups it was in contact with in each of the seven areas to help set up the evaluation focus groups. Although criteria such as geographical spread, age, and education level were supposed to be used to select participants, in reality it was very difficult to control the final composition of such focus groups, since many of the women in the areas where the focus groups were held self-selected themselves and attended anyway (some of the focus groups were thus bigger than the 15-women ideal which had been planned, and many of those who attended had not received the Handbook at all, although it was made clear that the focus groups were specifically to talk about its use). We were not prepared to send them away once they had arrived, and in the event having them there provided useful data.

The focus groups covered urban (town, formal township, informal settlement) and rural (largely white farming areas, black African freehold, tribal authority areas). The women at the focus groups varied widely in terms of age, employment, and level of education, but were with very few exceptions black African. The women in the focus groups were also involved in a range of livelihoods, and included subsistence farmers, health workers (including community health workers), students, advice office workers, NGO workers, ABET facilitators, etc. Some of the women were involved in voluntary work (eg. HIV and AIDS counselling, palliative care etc.), and a number were members of church or women's groups.

Where men were present in the focus groups, in most cases they were such a small minority that their presence was judged to not be influencing the proceedings, and they remained throughout. However, in the case of the Tembaletu focus group, five men were present. Three of these were facilitators, and one the project co-ordinator, who thus had some authority over the women, who were mostly learners. In this case, the men initially dominated, and the women were called on specifically to respond after the first few questions. However, the men, and particularly the project co-ordinator, became increasingly problematic (and abusive) to a point where I intervened. I subsequently lodged a formal complaint against the co-ordinator with Tembaletu.

The focus groups explored the extent to which women had actually read (or had someone read to them) the *Handbook*; which sections of the *Handbook* they had accessed; why; and what they did (if anything) as a result, using a questionnaire devised by MWG staff and myself (see Appendix 1). If women attempted to use the information in the *Handbook*, their experiences of so doing, and the results of using the information, were examined. In some of the focus groups, women were also asked to comment on the format of the book. All of the focus groups were conducted in Zulu, with a MWG staff member continuously translating for my benefit. Thus although in the following section I have tried to reflect what individual women said, the statements are as translated and reported to me by a third party.

Whilst personal knowledge, the interviews and the focus groups represent the key source of obtaining information about the Handbook's development and use, a number of other strategies were also used, with greater or lesser success.

### **Questionnaires to organisations**

Representatives of organisations working in the area who distributed copies of the *Handbook* to women were asked to complete a questionnaire. Many of these are service organisations, providing some kind of support or help to people in their area of operation (not necessarily only women). The NGOs were asked to provide information specifically related to use and impact, but they were also asked to comment on the format.

### **Questionnaires to readers in *Learn with Echo***

In addition to the focus groups, interviews and questionnaires to NGOs, a questionnaire asking those who had accessed the Handbook to reflect on whether they had used it, and how, was printed in *Learn with Echo* (a weekly Adult Basic Education supplement reaching an estimated 300 000 readers in KwaZulu-Natal) on 26 September 2002, with a free-post return address. However, only one completed questionnaire was received - the remaining 16 responses were all requests for copies of the Handbook!

As can be seen, these research methods attempted to capture in particular data on the use of the Handbook. However, analysing the findings and attempting to account for them required a review of pertinent literature, including that relating specifically to the Handbook project. Thus the process used to develop the Handbook was explored using records kept by the developers and reports written by them, as well as my own personal knowledge. The process was also evaluated by the Handbook project itself, in an internal evaluation held on 8 June 1999, which included the writers, researchers, editors, layout people, members of the field team, and the co-ordinator. It was facilitated by John Aitchison (a member of the Handbook Reference Group, and an expert in materials design and in evaluation), and designed by him in conjunction with the co-ordinator. This internal evaluation is reported and reflected on.

The Handbook itself, as a piece of material, was examined against materials development theory and method using literature on this topic and specifically on evaluating materials developed for adults with low reading ability; particularly those theories and methods developed with an emancipatory intent.

Whilst the methods used are appropriate, I think, for this study, they were not unproblematic in practice (as is often the case!). Thus, as mentioned above, although an attempt was made to contact other members of the Reference Group for in-depth interviews, these were unsuccessful. Not all of the questionnaires which were given to organisations were returned - and in one case, the person who completed it clearly was not completely certain of how many copies had been distributed to whom, nor how they had been used. As has already been stated, only one of the questionnaires printed in *Learn with Echo* was completed and returned.

In addition, as has already been discussed, there were a number of problems with the focus groups. Many women came to the focus groups unsolicited - they had heard about the focus groups, and were interested enough to come. This had a number of implications. We ended up with some focus groups that were much larger than ideal, and this may have affected the extent to which all participants were able to participate. We also had women attending who had not even seen the Handbook before. Although we attempted some strategies to overcome this (for example, sending them away with a copy to look at, and then asking them what they thought of it), it did mean we were not only getting information from women who

had seen and potentially used the book. As has also been mentioned, men were present in two of the focus groups. Although I am reasonably sure the presence of the one man in the Ixopo focus group did not significantly impact on the participation of the women, in the case of the Tembaletu focus group the men present definitely affected this, particularly since they were in a position of relative power (as facilitators) compared to the women (learners). Finally, I cannot myself speak or understand Zulu, and almost all of those who attended the focus groups are Zulu-speakers. The focus groups were run in Zulu by the MWG facilitator, and I relied on translation by another MWG staff member. This obviously hampered my understanding and ability to engage with the participants.

## Who should do it?

Since evaluation requires judgement of some kind, it is, of necessity, a political act, as has been pointed out by numerous writers, including Clarke (1999:2), Morrison (1993:2) and Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:40). Thus who the evaluator is becomes of paramount importance. Bless and Achola (1990:50) consider this aspect of an evaluation 'controversial':

Should [the programme] be evaluated by an insider who has been involved in the development and the implementation of the project and thus is very knowledgeable but most likely subjective? Or should it be evaluated by an outsider, who is most likely an objective evaluator but who might not identify correctly some of the objectives, constraints, etc. of the programme?

The question of whether to use an internal/'insider' evaluator or an external/'outsider' evaluator remains a vexed question. Clarke (1999:23) summarises the advantages and disadvantages of each as follows:

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Internal evaluator	familiar with history, background, policies, issues and culture of the intervention likely to be more committed to implementing evaluation recommendations, having been responsible for producing them likely to focus on the central concerns as perceived by management	have a vested interest in a particular outcome often be over-influenced by history and knowledge of intervention issues sometimes be over-influenced by the known views of management be unlikely to have had experience of a broad range of evaluation techniques be less committed to the need for evaluation be inclined to favour programmes developed within their own unit or section find it difficult to encourage stakeholders in their own organisation/intervention to actively participate in the evaluation process
External evaluator	independent stance and fresh perspective objective, critical approach overview of numerous interventions to serve as comparisons knowledge and experience of wide range of evaluation techniques resilience to intimidation by management	ignorant of internal matters so that judgements may not reflect the complex reality of the situation unaware as to who are the key players in a particular setting and thus more easily misled by interested parties more interested in the report than its implementation influenced by the need to secure future contracts primarily responsible to an external organisation

As with the evaluation typologies discussed above, the internal/external approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive, as Patton (1997) points out. He suggests that there are cogent reasons for using both an internal and external evaluator in the same evaluation (1997:142). In addition, the role of the evaluator has changed as the field has shifted and developed. Thus the concept of the evaluator as technical expert, whose objectivity was essential, has been modified, with the evaluator now being required to play different, and often multiple, roles depending on the kind of evaluation being done and its purpose. This mirrors the growing debate about the role of the researcher, and whether the 'objective' researcher is possible or, indeed, desirable.

Obviously, in the case of this particular evaluation, I am doing it. But am I the best person? Given the claim of emancipatory research theorists that research cannot be neutral, and that who the researcher is is of critical importance, who then am I, what are my philosophical and theoretical influences, and why am I undertaking this research?

I would identify myself as falling within a particular political (and research) stream - I do the research I do in order to help to bring about change in the world to benefit the oppressed (including, incidentally, myself as a woman). It was for this reason that I conceptualised the Handbook project, and for this reason that the Handbook was developed. It is also for this reason that I undertake this research work, this evaluation - I want to know whether it has made a difference and, even more, whether it could be made better, whether it could be made to make a difference, or more of a difference, to the lives of women living where I live.

This suggests that what I am trying to do with this evaluation (and what I tried to do with the Handbook) is what Lather calls 'praxis-oriented research'. However, the traditions upon which I draw are not identical to those Lather uses to construct her model. Rather, I, and my work, are influenced by:

- feminist theory and new feminist methodology;
- participatory research theory and methodology (including feminist participatory research theory and methodology);
- emancipatory action research theory and methodology.

If this is the case, I need to undertake this evaluation according to the methodologies developed as part of these approaches (and I do not see these as in any way contradictory - they overlap considerably, with a slightly different emphasis on the point of departure); but I also need to pay attention to the underlying ethos of these approaches. This implies that as a researcher/evaluator, I need to constantly critique my own work, my own practice, and my own understanding of what it is that I tried to do, and am trying to do; and in this particular study, within the two overlapping projects of the Handbook (conceptualising it, researching it, developing it) and its evaluation. But it also means that my own role in the conceptualisation and creation of the Handbook does not necessarily make it undesirable that I undertake this evaluation.

Given that this evaluation falls within an action research, feminist research and participatory research framework, it was conceived of as participatory and collaborative in nature. Thus the Midlands Women's Group has been pivotally involved in much of it, in that MWG staff were responsible for setting up the focus groups, and jointly facilitated these with me. They were also involved in developing the questionnaires to be sent to NGOs, used in the focus groups, and used in the interviews.

## Chapter 2: What is the Women's Handbook?

*The Women's Handbook* was produced by the Women's Handbook project. This was a joint initiative of the Centre for Adult Education (CAE), the Midlands Women's Group (MWG), and the Commission on Gender Equality (CGE). The project was overseen by a Reference Group drawn from these three organisations, as well as prominent local women, and started in the latter half of 1997.

The Centre for Adult Education (CAE) is part of the School of Adult and Higher Education of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, and is based on the University's Pietermaritzburg campus. Founded in 1979, CAE has been involved since its inception in adult education work specifically aimed at empowering local communities.

CAE is involved in the following work:

- Adult Basic Education (ABE), including a weekly ABE supplement, *Learn with Echo*
- Research
- Materials development
- Curriculum development
- Adult Education Policy and Advocacy
- Formal courses, including a Masters in Adult Education and a Certificate in Education (Participatory Development).

The Centre has considerable experience in conducting applied research. I have been a member of the Centre's research staff since 1994, and conceptualised and co-ordinated the Women's Handbook project. The Centre's then Director (and now head of the School for Adult and Higher Education), Prof. John Aitchison, was a member of the Handbook Reference Group.

The Midlands Women's Group (MWG) is a collective of individual women in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands, working around women's issues. The Group was established in 1993 as a regional affiliate of the Women's National Coalition, and was very involved in the process of drawing up the national Women's Charter. Until 1997, the Group was an entirely voluntary organisation, which met monthly, and ran workshops for women on a range of issues, including violence against women, working with women local representatives, and how to run a workshop.

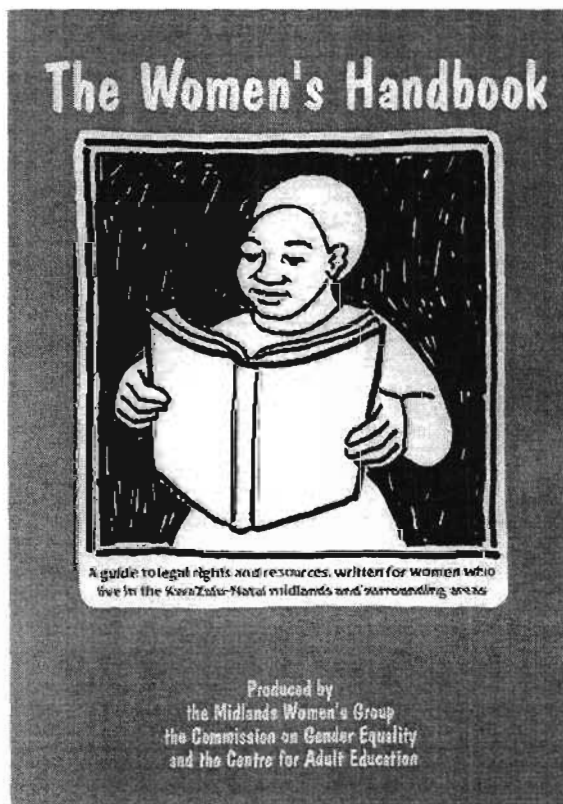
In July 1997, the Pietermaritzburg branch of a Christian-based South African NGO was closed down, and its staff and assets handed over the Midlands Women's Group. The Group thus had, at the time of the project, three staff members (an administrator and two field workers) operating out of modest offices at the Tembaletu Community Education Centre. I have been a member of the Midlands Women's Group since its inception, and served on its Management Committee from 1997 until 2002. I remain closely involved with the organisation.

The Commission on Gender Equality (CGE) is an independent, statutory body created in terms of Chapter 9 of the Constitution of South Africa. The CGE is mandated by the Act which established it to undertake a number of tasks, including:

- Monitoring and evaluating the protection and promotion of gender equality within both government and civil society;
- Assessing laws within national, provincial and local government to ensure that they reflect and promote gender equality;
- Monitoring adherence to international conventions;
- Conducting research and in-depth analysis of gender oppressive practices, customs, traditions and laws.

The Commission was responsible for soliciting the funding for the Handbook project, which was provided by the Swedish International Development and Co-operation Agency (SIDA). One of the Commissioners of the CGE, Phumelele Ntombela-Nzimande, was a member of the Reference Group which oversaw the project. She was at that time also an MWG member.

The project was supported by a range of women's organisations and individual women in Pietermaritzburg, including the Pietermaritzburg Advice Office of the Natal Midlands Region of the Black Sash (the Director of whom was a member of the Handbook Reference Group), and the then deputy mayor of the Pietermaritzburg-Umsinduzi Transitional Local Council, Makhosi Khoza (a former staff member of the Centre for Adult Education, and a member of the Women's Handbook Reference Group).

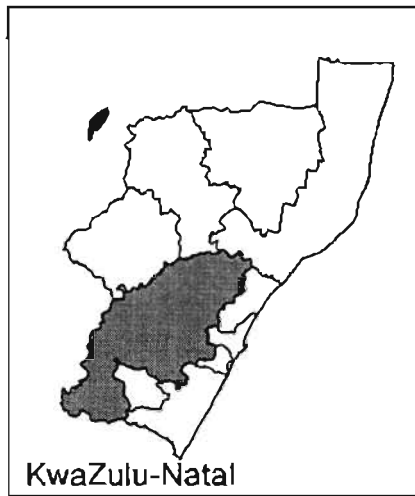


*The Women's Handbook: A guide to legal rights and resources, written for women who live in the KwaZulu-Natal midlands and surrounding areas* was printed in English and in Zulu (the mother tongue of the majority of women living in the area), although it was also written in Afrikaans (a lack of funding precluded this from being printed). The Handbook was written at a level at which a woman with seven years of schooling (Grade 7, or ABET Level 3, in the South African National Qualifications Framework) could comfortably read it. The English version is 404 pages long, whilst the Zulu version is slightly longer, at 429 pages. 1 200 copies of the English version were distributed from June 1999 and 10 000 copies of the Zulu version were distributed from June 2000. All of the copies were distributed free of charge to ordinary women<sup>1</sup> living in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands (see map), the majority to individual women, at whom the *Handbook* was aimed.

<sup>1</sup> I use the term 'ordinary women' to denote women who do not occupy spaces of power, position or influence to an unusual degree.



## The Midlands region of KwaZulu-Natal



The *Handbook* itself is divided into three sections:

1. Who makes the rules?

This section explains the different parts of government, what the Constitution is, how a law is made, and so on. It also gives details about local government in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands, including contact details of local councillors.

2. Issues of concern to women

This section includes separate chapters on each of the following issues:

- Marriage and divorce
- Homosexuality
- Government grants and help for the aged and disabled
- Police, courts and legal help
- Death
- Women and violence
- Women and health
- Children and youth
- Services (water, toilets, electricity, telephones)
- Women and work
- Women and transport
- Land and housing
- Earning your own money
- Consumer issues

Each chapter is structured in roughly the same way, with an introduction about why this issue is important to women (i.e. the gendered nature of the issue); women's rights in terms of the law and the Constitution; what the Women's Charter says about the issue; a step-by-step guide to how to access these rights/services; common problems; and who can help with the issue (government department and local NGO contact details are given).

In some of the chapters, systems are explained, such as the health system and the legal system. Some of the issue chapters provide basic information about the issue, such as what electricity is, or how the reproductive system works. Difficult or technical terms are explained in a glossary in the margin.

3. Women working together

This section argues that women working together to tackle an issue can overcome problems that individual women cannot, and suggests ways in which women can work together. It also gives examples of what women have achieved by working together.

## Marriage and divorce



# Marriage and divorce

### *The Bill of Rights says:*

- Our new Constitution and the Bill of Rights say that everyone must be treated in the same way and everyone is equal. This means that different kinds of families and marriages must be treated equally.

### *The Women's Charter says:*

- All women should have equal rights during and at the end of a marriage.
- Women should have an equal share of the money of the family.
- Women should be the guardians of their children.

In South Africa at the moment there are many different kinds of families. In some families there is a woman and a man. But there are also families with only a single woman or a single man. There are also families where both partners are of the same sex.

Only some of these families are seen as legal marriages by the law. A legal marriage means that you and your partner have legal rights and legal obligations. Different kinds of marriages have different legal rights and obligations.

For now there are different ways to get married and different ways to get divorced. The way you get divorced will usually depend on the way you got married.



The *Handbook* includes a comprehensive contents page, as well as an introductory section on how to use the book.

### How we wrote this book



## How to use the Women's Handbook

### The Bill of Rights and the Women's Charter

In frames shaped like this you can read what the Women's Charter (see page 11) and the Bill of Rights (see page 13) say about each issue in this book.

### Words you need to know

**Difficult words**  
In frames that look like this you will find the difficult words from the main text on each page, and their meanings are explained here. Words that are explained in these boxes are **bolded** in the main text.



When there is something really important in the text, you will see Thandi pointing it out to you.

She will also warn you when there is something to be careful of, by saying "Warning!"



This book has been designed to make it easy to read. We have organised information in the same way on each page, so that you the reader know where to look for the information you want. These two pages show you where to look for things. This is what you will find on most pages:

- The name of the chapter
- A logo (picture) for each chapter
- Quotes from the Women's Charter or
- Quotes from the Bill of Rights
- Who can help

Most of the information in this book is here in the middle of the page. There is quite a lot to read through. To find the information you want, you should look at the table of contents, called "What is in this book", on pages 8, 9 and 10. There you will see which chapter to look for, and the page number you will find it on.

In the chapters we have used lots of small headings like this:

#### Small headings

Look for the name of your particular problem in a heading. Then it will be easy to find, and you don't always have to read the whole chapter.

### Logos

On each page there is a logo, which is a simple picture to tell you what the chapter is about. Each chapter has its own logo. The logos should tell you quickly and easily what part of the book you are looking at.

In this book there is different kinds of information:

#### Who makes the rules?

This tells you about the rights that all South Africans should have. It also explains how the laws in South Africa are made. You can read about the powers and responsibilities of the different parts of the government. This also tells you about groups which are there to protect our rights, like the Commission on Gender Equality.

#### Problems that many women have

There is information about different things, like health, violence against women, maintenance, housing and services, and so on. You can read about what your rights are and what the law says. You can also find out what you can do to deal with problems you might have. There are also names and addresses of organisations that can help you.

#### Women working together

Women can join together to solve their problems. You can find out what you can do to change the laws to make them better for women. There are examples of what other women have done by working together for change. There are ideas for things you could try if you want to change a law.

### Your notes...

At the end of most chapters, you will find a blank page called *Your notes*. These pages are for you to use to write down any information that might be important later, for example, the name and phone number of someone you complained to about something, who promised to help you.

### Checklists

Where there are lists of things for you to remember to do, or lists of things you must take with you when you go somewhere for help, we have made checklists for you to help you remember everything.

When you have done each thing on the list you can tick the box, like this:

### How we wrote this book



### Who can help

#### Organisations that can help you

In these boxes you will find lists of people who can help you with the issues of problems talked about on the page.

You should find their names, addresses, and telephone numbers, and a short description of what they can offer you. It should also tell you if you have to pay for their help.

**Note:** We hear that phone numbers in Pietermaritzburg will change in 1999. The code will become 033 and most phone numbers will probably have a 3 put in front. Contact Telkom or look in your telephone book if numbers you need have changed.

### Gray boxes

Sometimes you will see a gray box like this on the page. These boxes have addresses of government departments, organisations, and other extra information that you may find useful.

In summary, the following salient features of the *Handbook* can be determined:

1. The *Handbook* is a printed text of some 400-430 pages.
2. It is educational in intent, and is thus an educational text.
3. It is aimed at an audience with a level of education of Grade 7 and above. It is thus a relatively basic educational text.
4. It targets adults, and more specifically women.



## Chapter 3: The context: Why was the Women's Handbook developed?

The Handbook was produced in response to the particular demographic, political and legal context of women in the Midlands region of KwaZulu-Natal at the time. The idea for a Handbook for women was first mooted in the period immediately following the first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994 (although the project itself was not actually begun until some years later), as a means of letting women know about the implications of the new dispensation for them. Post-1994, a number of factors gave impetus to this task:

- the new Constitution of 1996 included a non-discrimination clause in its Bill of Rights, making it an offence to discriminate on the grounds of sex;
- a considerable quantity of legislation was passed which profoundly affected women, including new legislation on domestic abuse, abortion, and maintenance;
- a new local government dispensation came into being, providing many women with local political representatives for the first time.

The Handbook was thus produced at a particular historical moment which, as one of early funding proposals for the project argued, highlighted the need for such a book:

The City of Pietermaritzburg-Umsinduzi, situated in the KwaZulu-Natal interior (about 90 kilometres from Durban), underwent its first democratic local government elections in mid-1996. These resulted not only in the first democratically-elected city council, but in a city boundary which for the first time incorporated areas which under the previous apartheid government had been set aside for Black South Africans. This means that for the first time taxes paid by city residents are available to all. One of the new possibilities created by this democratic transition is increased social spending, including increased social spending for women.

However, given the relatively low income of the city (since so many of its residents are poor), and the very high demand for social spending (including for basic infrastructure such as housing, running water, and electricity), it is likely that spending on facilities specifically for women will continue to be sidelined. Women's organisations within the city, and women councillors, are lobbying the new Council for such spending.

A similar process has been occurring within the smaller towns in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands, all of which, with the city of Pietermaritzburg-Umsinduzi, fall under the iNdllovu Regional Council. The rural areas within the Midlands face even more challenges, particularly since there is no primary level of local government for rural areas, and they fall directly under the iNdllovu Regional Council.

At a national level, the new constitution for the country has been drawn up, new policy is being developed, and existing legislation is being amended or extended. This process has included a number of positive developments for women, from an anti-discriminatory clause in the constitution, to free health care for pregnant women and children under the age of six, to recently-passed legislation on abortion. The Government has also established the Commission on Gender Equality.

However, many women are not certain of their new rights; and if they are, they often do not know how to go about claiming such rights. There is thus a great need for such information to be disseminated to women at a local level. Inevitably, too, there are enormous areas of women's lives which have so far been ignored by national government - extended maternity benefits, childcare, greater sensitivity to women's health issues, and the rampant violence against women in this country, to name only a few.

Women in South Africa have in the past played a significant role in the history of this country, and its fight for democracy. Thus, with the prospect of a new, democratically elected national government, women organised nationally to draw up a Women's Charter to lay down the expectations and needs of the women of this country. Once again, whilst many women all over the country participated in creating the Charter, many are not aware of its existence, or the difference it could make to their lives if it were adopted by national, regional and local government (Handbook Project, Funding Proposal 2, 1997).

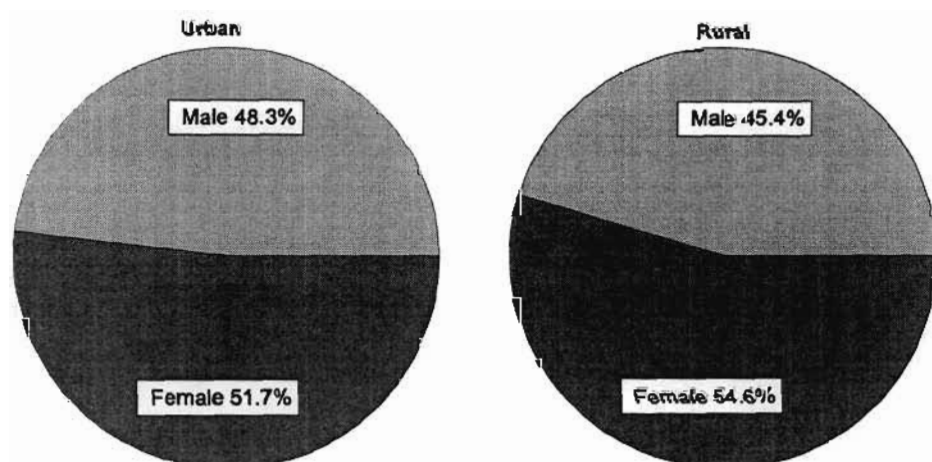
But this political change was in a particular socio-economic context: a context which meant that many women living in the Midlands were unlikely to receive sufficient information about these changes and their specific implications for women, because of their relatively disadvantaged and marginalised position in society.

## Women in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands

At this time (as now) the disparities within the population of South Africa were huge with a range of different factors such as 'race', class, urban/rural location, age and sex acting as clear indicators of advantage/disadvantage. Women reflected these disparities acutely; for example, at the time the Handbook was being developed, overall women tended to be disproportionately represented among the poorest in the country (Budlender, 1996:1). Being Black, and being rural, compounded the relative disadvantage of being a woman.

At the time the Handbook project began in 1997, the South African population stood at about 38 million. Of this, just over half (52%) were women. Most women lived in the urban areas of the country; but most of the people living in the rural areas of the country were female. These trends were true for the province of KwaZulu-Natal as well, although this is a more rural province than many others. Of a total provincial population of nearly 7.7 million, women constituted just over 52% (4 089 000). The majority of the province's population (56.5%) lived in the rural areas; and the majority of people in rural areas (55%) were women (Statistics South Africa 1996).

**Male/Female population by urban/rural location  
KwaZulu-Natal**



Source: Statistics South Africa. 1999. *Population census, 1996*



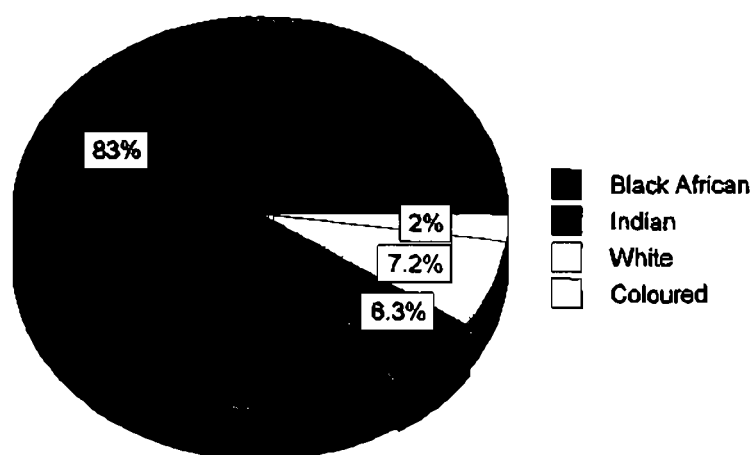
Over a million people (1 195 089) lived in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands in 1996 (here taken to be the iNdllovu Regional Council area - see map on page 25 - although the magisterial district boundaries used in the census do not exactly coincide with the local government boundaries). Of these, 636 691 (53%) were women. Nearly 60% of the total population of the Midlands lived in rural areas; 54% of these were women (Statistics South Africa 1999). A slightly greater percentage of women (59%) lived in the rural areas of the Midlands compared to men (58%), whilst in actual numbers there were over 50 000 more women living in the rural areas of the Midlands than men.

## Race

77% of the estimated national population of South Africa could be classified as black African in 1996. Women constituted 52% of the black African population; and black African women 77% of the total female population. In KwaZulu-Natal in the same year, black African people made up 82% of the province's population. 53% of the province's black African population were women.

Within the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands, the race breakdown was as follows:

### Race breakdown of women in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands

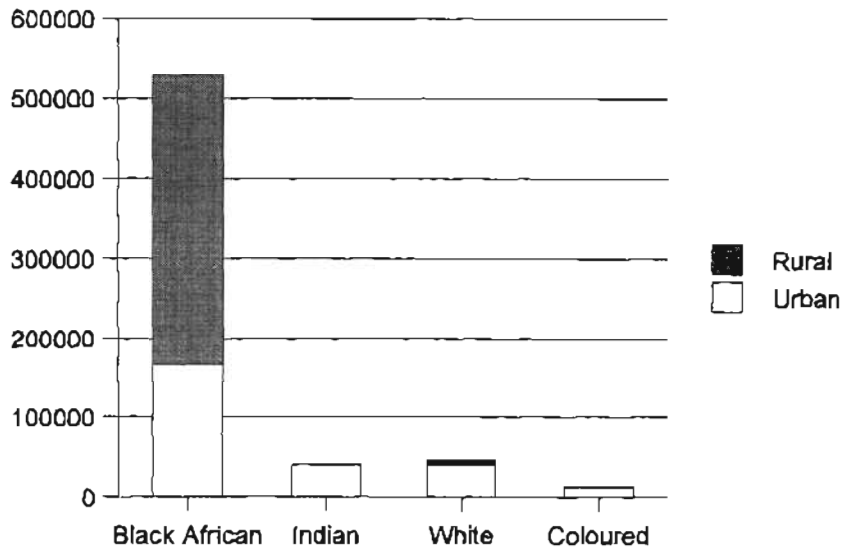


Source: Statistics South Africa. 1999. *Population census, 1996*

As can be seen, in 1996 black African women constituted 83% of the female population of the Midlands; white women 7%; Indian women 6%; and Coloured women only two percent.

Within the rural areas, black African women made up an even greater percent of the female population, at 96%.

### Race breakdown of women in the urban and rural areas of the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands

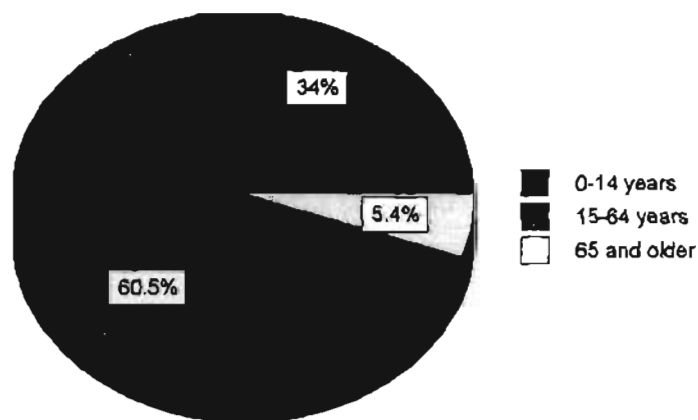


Source: Statistics South Africa. 1999. *Population census, 1996*

### Age

The *1996 Population Census* shows that in the province of KwaZulu-Natal in that year 34% of the female population were between the ages 0-14 years; 60.5% between 15-64 years and 5.4% over 65 years (Statistics South Africa. 1999).

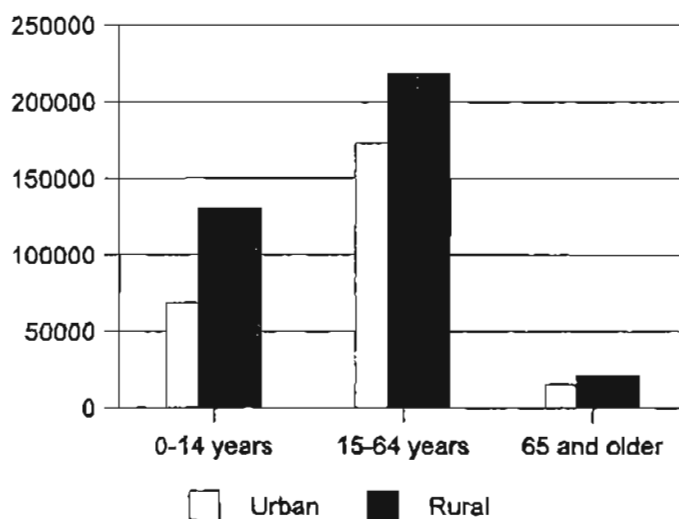
### Age breakdown of women in KwaZulu-Natal



Source: Statistics South Africa. 1999. *Population census, 1996*

In the same year, the majority of the population in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands was between 15 and 64 years of age. This age-group accounted for over 60% of the population. Female children up to 14 years of age constituted nearly 32% of the total female population. In the rural areas, these children accounted for an even greater proportion, with 35% of all females in this category.

**Age breakdown of women in the urban and rural areas of the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands**



Source: Statistics South Africa. 1999. *Population census, 1996*

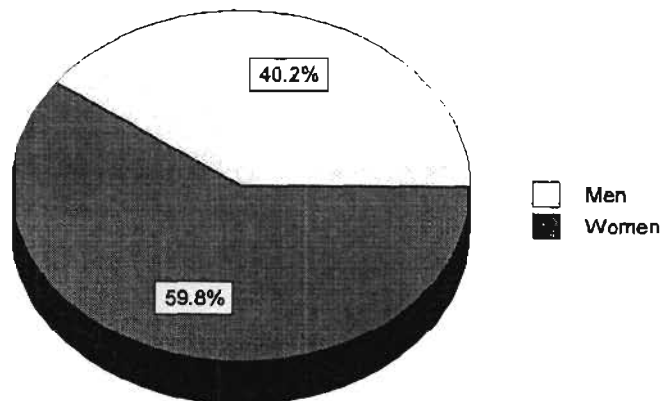
The more rural districts of the Midlands had higher than average populations of female children, and a correspondingly lower percentage of women in the economically active (15-64 years) population. The more rural districts often also showed a higher proportion of women of 65 years or older. These women are often an invaluable resource in rural areas, since their pensions provide essential income, and they are often the primary caregivers of children.

## Education

According to the 1996 Population Census, in that year over 4 million (19%) people in South Africa over the age of 20 years had had no formal schooling at all, and some 36% had less than seven years of schooling, and are thus also classifiable as functionally illiterate. There were more illiterate women (55%) than men (45%).

In KwaZulu-Natal in 1996, according to the same population census, illiteracy rates were even higher than for South Africa as a whole, with 22.9% of the population over the age of 20 having had no schooling, whilst 41% had less than seven years of schooling and are thus classifiable as illiterate. Most of those who can be classified as illiterate were women (60%) (South African Institute of Race Relations 1999:112).

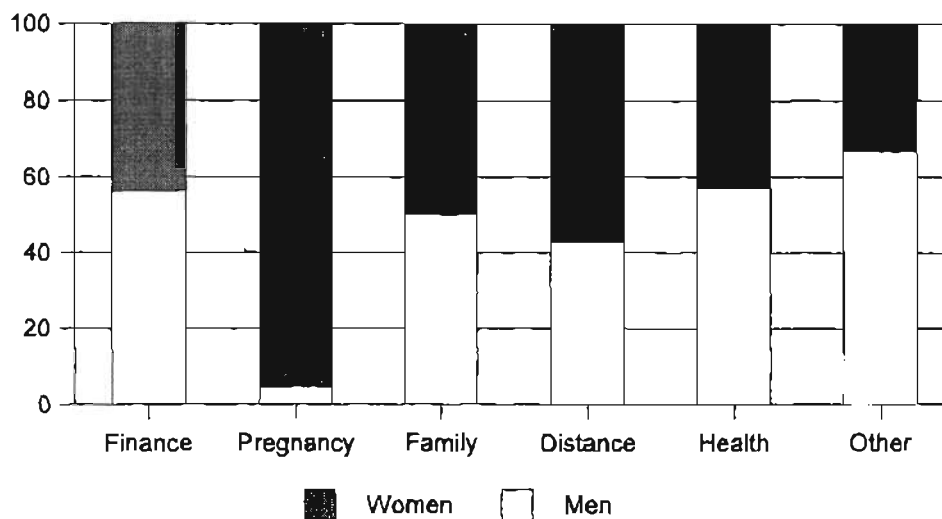
**Percentage of men and women over 20 years of age with less than seven years of schooling - KwaZulu-Natal**



Source: South African Institute of Race Relations. 1999. *South Africa Survey 1999/2000*, p.112

A study by the Education Foundation in 1997 found that although there was a roughly equivalent number of boys and girls in school, a higher percentage of women than men left school before obtaining their senior certificate. The most frequent reason given by women for leaving school was finance, followed by pregnancy and family. Women are more affected by a number of these issues than men are:

**Reasons for non-completion of matric (senior certificate) by sex**

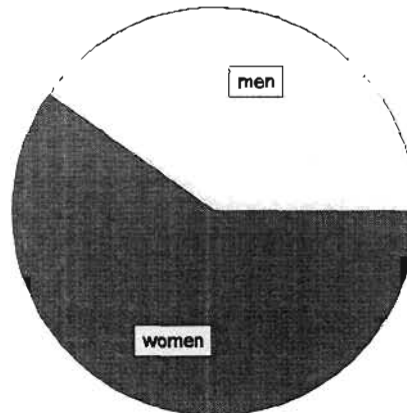


Source: Central Statistics. 1998. *Women and men in South Africa*. Pretoria: Central Statistics, p.29

Within the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands, the discrepancy between educational levels of men and woman was far greater than the national average, with nearly 150 000 women over the age of 20 functionally illiterate (i.e. had less than seven years of schooling) in 1996, compared to just over 100 000 men in the same age group. Of these, nearly 82 000 women had no formal

schooling at all, compared to nearly 52 000 men. Thus some 13% of women living in the Midlands had no formal schooling at all, and 23% could be considered functionally illiterate.

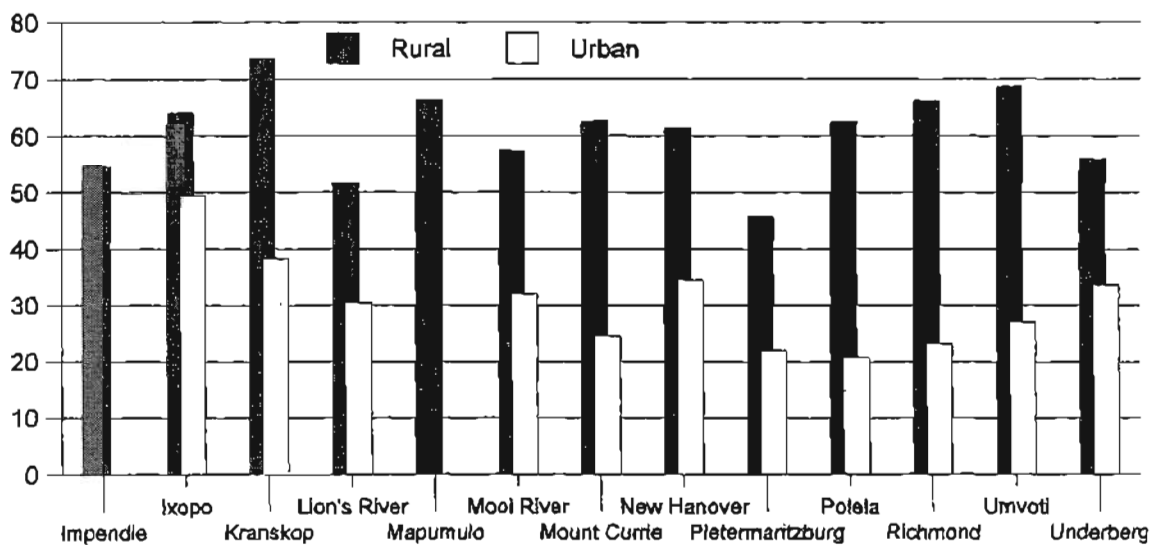
### Functionally illiterate men and women over the age of 20 in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands



Source: Statistics South Africa. 1999. *Population census, 1996*

The difference in education levels between urban and rural females at this time was marked. Rural areas fared the worst with Kranskop showing a female adult illiteracy rate of over 70%, and seven others showing rates of over 60% in the rural areas:

### Percentage of women over 20 years with less than seven years schooling (functionally illiterate)



NOTE: Mapumulo and Impendle districts show no figures for the urban population because these districts are entirely rural.

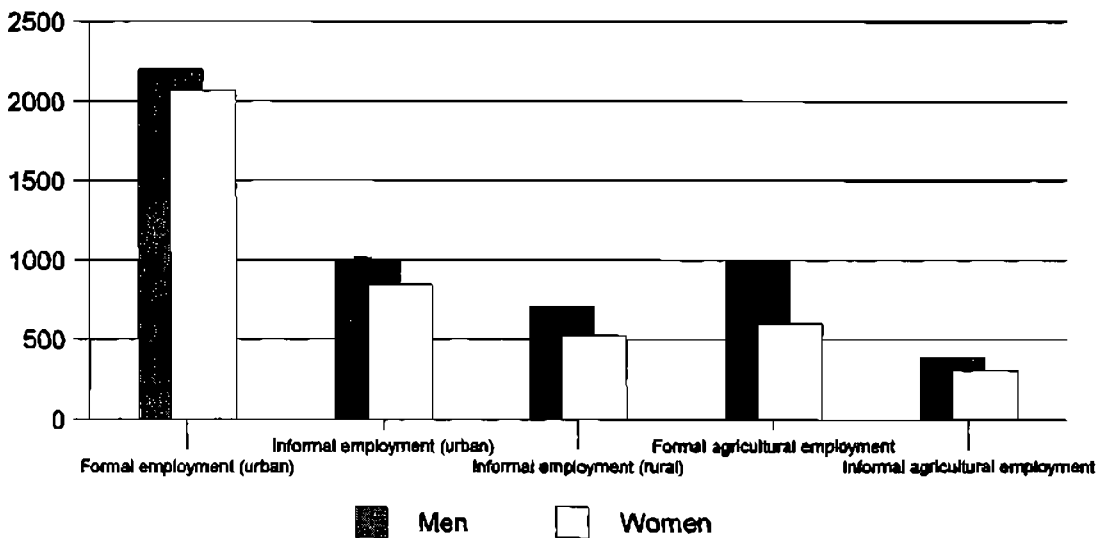
Source: Statistics South Africa. 1999. *Population census, 1996*

As can be seen, a far higher percentage of the rural female population did not have a Grade 7. This is due to a number of factors, including rural isolation and the lack of access to basic amenities such as schools. In the urban area of the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands education levels were somewhat better, with only about one in five women in Pietermaritzburg having less than seven years of schooling.

## Employment

Occupation is one of the primary indices of empowerment or disadvantage. Women in employment often experience exclusion (since they work in jobs which isolate them) and as a rule earn less than men for the same work even with the same qualifications.

**Wages of men and women (Rands)**



Source: Nicholson, J. 2001. *Measuring Change: South Africa's economy since 1994*, p.55

Black African people are more likely to earn less; and black African women most likely. The 1996 population census found that in that year 26% of black African men and 48% of black African women earned R500 per month or less (South African Institute of Race Relations 1999:248).

In 1996 women accounted for 60% of the total economically active population of South Africa (those between the ages of 15 and 65 who are willing and able to work); and 56% of the unemployed. 42% of all women in the economically active population were unemployed. (South African Institute of Race Relations 1999:251). Most of those who were unemployed (both men and women) were black African, with black Africans accounting for 90% of the unemployed population, although they made up only 72% of the economically active population (South African Institute of Race Relations 1999:252). Rural black African women are the worst affected by unemployment.

Women who are employed are concentrated in low-income, low-ranking jobs:

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
Elementary occupations (unskilled/basic work)	2 375 448	1 353 622 (57%)	1 021 826 (43%)
Clerks	707 032	486 437 (69%)	220 595 (31%)
Professionals	852 578	471 594 (55%)	380 984 (45%)
Service workers and shop and market sales workers	810 804	280 969 (35%)	529 835 (65%)
Technicians and association professions	534 169	256 083 (48%)	278 086 (52%)
Craft and related trades	1 277 888	164 331 (13%)	1 113 557 (87%)
Legislators, senior officials, managers	363 028	99 656 (27.5%)	263 372 (73.5%)
Plant and machine operators and assemblers	640 033	99 213 (15.5%)	540 820 (84%)
Skilled agriculture and fishery workers	355 627	72 000 (20%)	283 627 (80%)
Others	1 197 240	348 039 (29%)	849 201 (71%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>9 113 847</b>	<b>3 631 944 (40%)</b>	<b>5 481 903 (60%)</b>

Source: South African Institute of Race Relations. 1999. *South Africa Survey 1999/2000*. p.259

Thus in 1996 women outnumbered men only as clerks (69%), in elementary occupations, which includes domestic work (57%), and as professionals (largely teachers and nurses), and most women workers fell into these categories. Women were grossly under-represented (i.e. comprising less than one-third) as legislators, senior officers and managers, as plant and machine operators, as skilled agricultural and fishery workers, and in the craft and related occupations sector (which includes, for example, the building, metal and machinery, printing, food processing, textile and leather trades, as well as handicrafts).

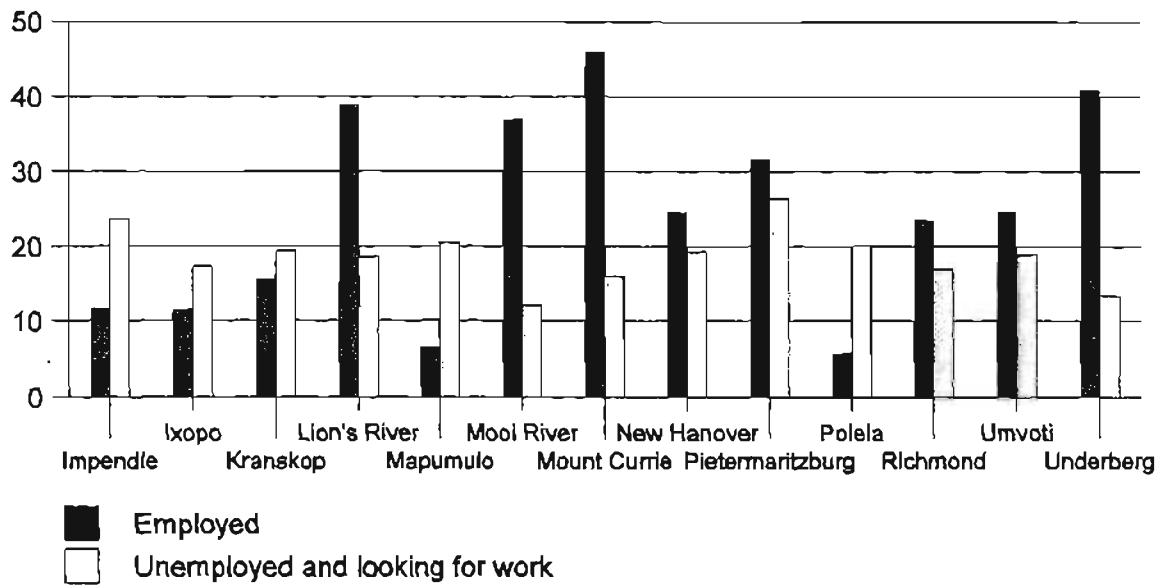
Within the informal sector, women also dominated, making up 58% of the people who were informally employed (South African Institute of Race Relations 1999:271).

The sectors in which mainly women are found tend to earn lower wages and salaries than those in which mainly men are found (Statistics South Africa 2001:18).

Within KwaZulu-Natal, the picture was not very different. Women made up 49% of the total economically active population, but 56% of the unemployed. 43% of all women in the economically active population in the province were unemployed, with 51% of rural women unemployed (Statistics South Africa 2001).

Within the Midlands, official female unemployment in 1996 was relatively low, at only 22%; but female employment was only slightly higher (28%). This is because of the high number of women who were either studying or pensioners, or who did not wish to work, or who 'do not work' because they were 'housewives'. Within individual districts, this pattern is clear - sometimes appallingly low levels of employment, coupled with relatively low levels of unemployment:

### Employment and unemployment rates of women between 15 and 64 years of age

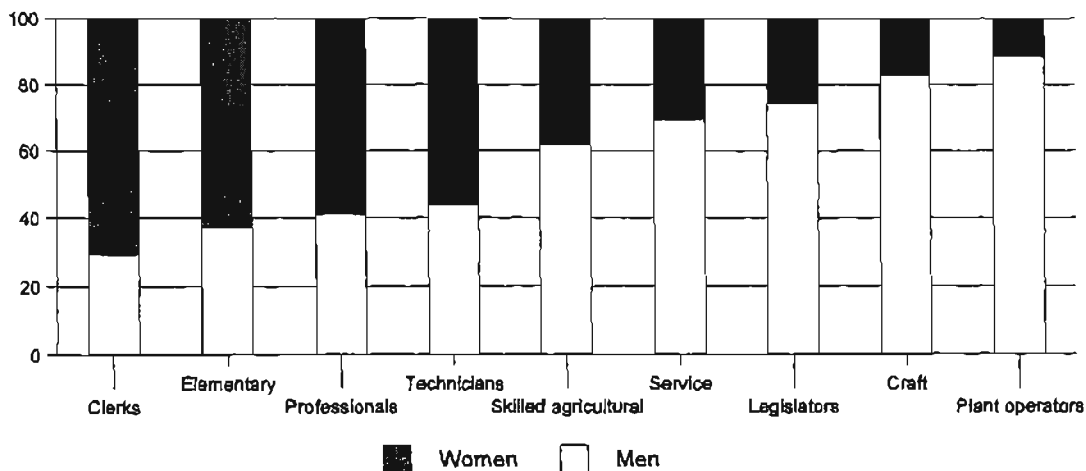


Source: Statistics South Africa. 1999. *Population census, 1996*

Employment rates thus tended to be higher in the more urban districts (Pietermaritzburg, Lions River, Mount Currie, and Mooi River), and those associated with commercial farming (Underberg). Unemployment tended to be highest in the most rural districts (Mapumulo, Impendle and Polela), with the exception of Pietermaritzburg, where there was a very high percentage of female job seekers.

The distortion in occupation shown at a national level continued at a provincial level, and within the Midlands, with women again making up a majority of clerks, professionals, and those working in the elementary sector.

### Male/Female occupation in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands



Source: Statistics South Africa. 1999. *Population census, 1996*



Within the Midlands, nearly half of the employed women (48%) were employed in elementary (unskilled) occupations:

**Number of women in various occupations, KwaZulu-Natal Midlands**

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Number of women</b>
Legislators, senior officials, managers	1652
Plant and machine operators and assemblers	2234
Craft and related trades	4227
Skilled agriculture and fishery workers	5989
Service workers and shop and market sales workers	6048
Technicians and association professions	6838
Clerks	10271
Professionals	12714
Elementary occupations (unskilled/basic work)	45711
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>95684</b>

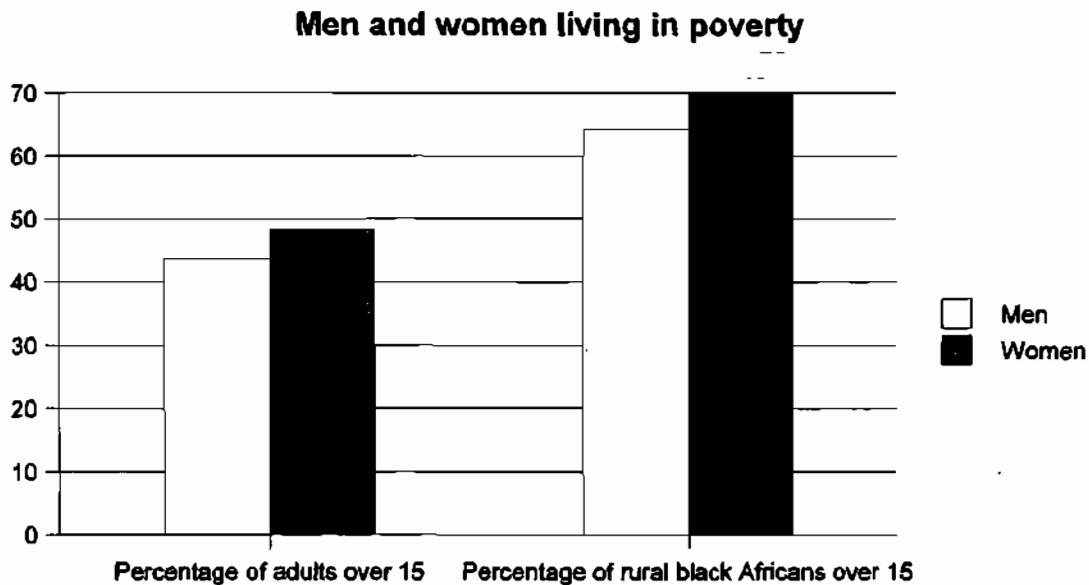
Source: Statistics South Africa. 1999. *Population census, 1996*

However, the proportion of women doing elementary occupations was generally lower in the more rural districts, with a particularly high proportion of women employed in elementary occupations - over 50% of those in Richmond, Underberg, New Hanover and Umvoti were doing this type of work. In addition, whilst in the Midlands as a whole a relatively small proportion (5.2%) were engaged in skilled agricultural work, in many districts this was a significant occupation, most notably in Richmond (15%), Mooi River (15%), and New Hanover (14%). In these three districts this type of work was the second greatest occupational sector amongst women, as it was in Underberg and Umvoti. The professions were also clearly a significant occupations sector in many districts in the Midlands, although clerking was also important in Pietermaritzburg, Mount Currie and Mooi River. In Kranskop, the craft and related trades sector was significant, as was the service, shop and market sales sector in Mapumulo.

## Poverty

The official definition of 'employment', as used in the figures given above, is a relatively problematic one, in that it assumes that those involved in the non-market labour sector are 'not economically active'. This sector (housework, childrearing and subsistence agricultural production) is made up almost exclusively of women workers. Thus women's contribution to the economy is either not valued or undervalued.

The fact that such 'women's work' is unpaid, coupled with the fact that most 'employed' women occupy low-status low-paying jobs, means that, unsurprisingly, women continue to constitute a disproportionately large percent of the poor.

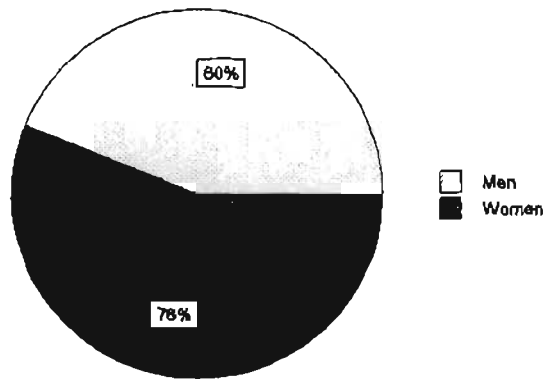


Source: May et al, 1995, as adapted and cited in Budlender, D. (ed). 1998. *Country Gender Profile: South Africa 1998*. p.15

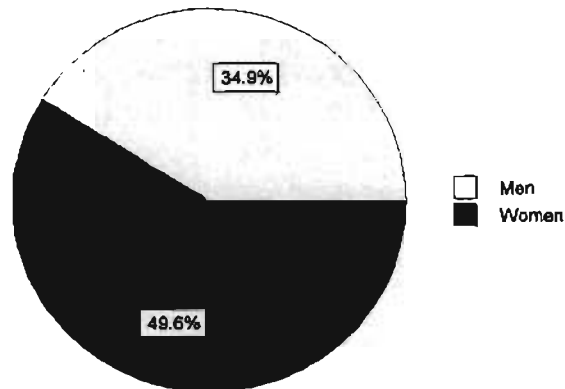
As can be seen, in the mid-nineties women were more likely to be living in poverty than men, in both the urban and rural areas of South Africa. Overall, a household headed by a woman was more likely to be poor than a household headed by man. In 1995, 49% of female-headed households were categorised as 'poor' (the poorest 40%), compared to 31% of male-headed households. 26% of female-headed households fell in the 'ultra-poor' category (the poorest 20%), compared to 13% of male-headed households.

As can be expected, therefore, within KwaZulu-Natal, a greater percent of women fell within the lower income bracket than men at the time of the 1996 census. Thus some 76% of women 20 years and older earned R1 000 per month or less, compared to 60% of men. The sex disparity was even greater the lower the income, with very nearly half (49.6%) of all women of 20 years or older earning no income at all, compared to 35% of men.

**Proportion of women and men 20 years and older earning R1 000 or less per month**



**Proportion of women and men 20 years and older earning no income**

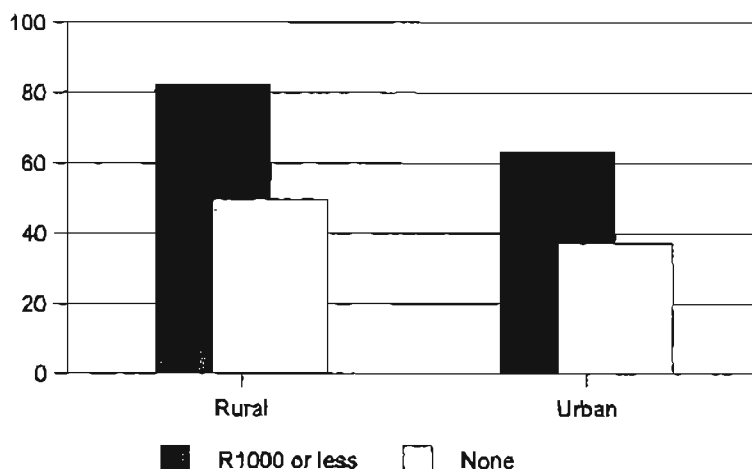


Source: Statistics South Africa. 1999. *Population census, 1996*

Within the Midlands, such disparities continued. Thus nearly three-quarters (74%) of all women 20 years and older living in the Midlands received R1 000 or less per month, compared to 61% of men; and 44% of women of 20 years and older received no income at all, compared to 32% of men.

The appalling income levels of adult women were far worse in the rural areas of the Midlands than in the urban areas:

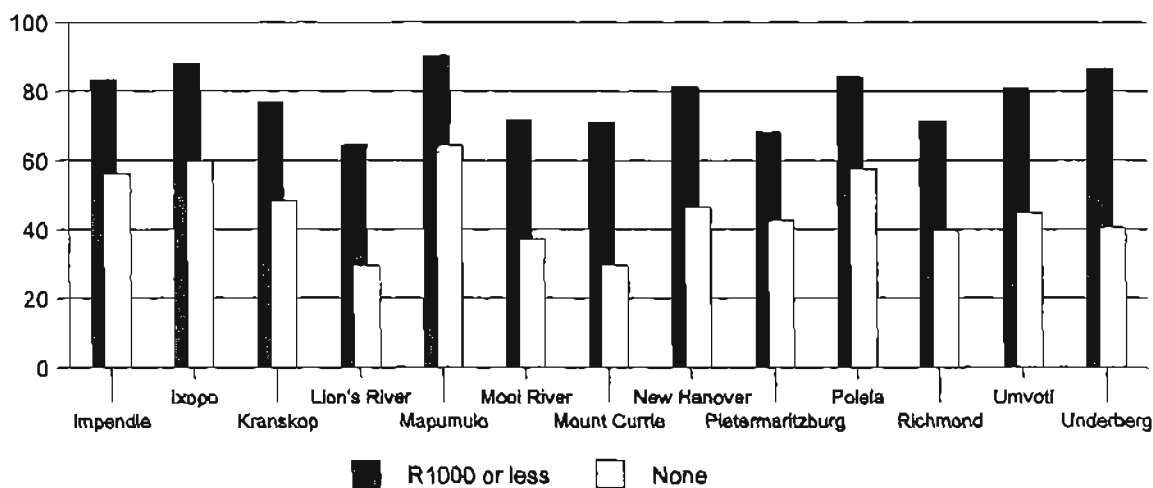
**Percentage of women 20 years and older earning R1 000 per month or less urban/rural areas of the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands**



Source: Statistics South Africa. 1999. *Population census, 1996*

In 1996, over 60% of women over the age of 20 living in Mapumulo had no personal income at all; whilst over 80% of women over the age of 20 living in Mapumulo, Ixopo, Umvoti, New Hanover, Impendle and Underberg received R1000 a month or less. In Mapumulo, one of the most populous districts in the Midlands, over 26 000 adult women had no personal income at all.

**Percentage of women over the age of 20 with no personal income/R1000 per month or less**



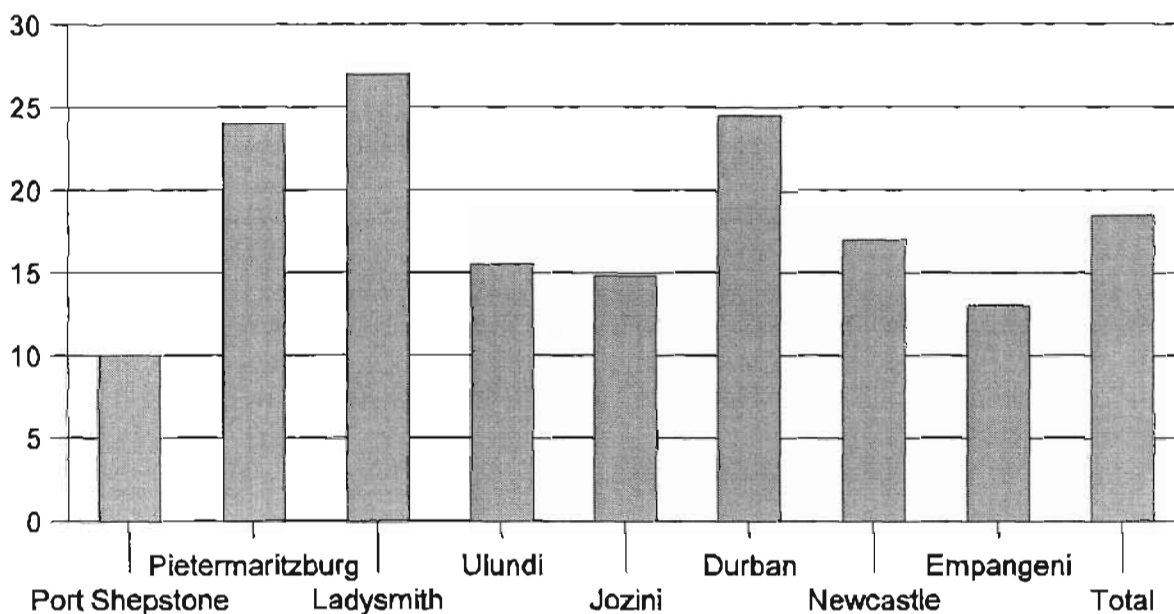
Source: Statistics South Africa. 1999. *Population census, 1996*

Thus women in the Midlands at the time the Handbook was being considered were primarily poor, rural, black African women with relatively low levels of formal schooling. In addition to this, women in the Midlands were at that time (as now) profoundly affected by the HIV and AIDS pandemic.

## HIV and AIDS

By the time the Women's Handbook project began in 1997, indications were that the population of the country, and more especially of KwaZulu-Natal, was likely to be significantly affected by HIV/AIDS. At this time, the HIV positivity rate in KwaZulu-Natal (as measured by the percentage of women reporting to ante-natal clinics who are HIV-positive) was 26.9%, up from 20% the previous year (1996), and 9.5% in 1993 (South African Institute of Race Relations 1999:218). This was the highest in the country (as it remains today). This is the result of a number of factors, including low levels of education and awareness about HIV/AIDS; cultural and gender factors which make it difficult for women to protect themselves against infection; high levels of migrancy; and a history of political violence (Whiteside and Sunter 2000:62-65).

**% HIV positivity in women attending ante-natal clinics by health region  
KwaZulu-Natal**



Source: *AIDS Brief* No.6, March 1996

Women in the 20-24 year age group have the highest prevalence of HIV (men tend to become HIV-positive at a slightly older age than women). In a survey of tertiary health services in KwaZulu-Natal it was found that on average respondents reported a ratio of around 1.3 infected females to every male. Since women are society's carers and child bearers, they also bear the brunt of responsibility for the old and for AIDS orphans (Whiteside 1996:14-24).

## Aims of the Handbook project

As has been seen, the Handbook was largely a response to the political context of the time (coupled with the partners' interest in and concern with women's issues). However, it was also a response to the socio-economic context outlined above, since the relative marginalisation of women in the Midlands, and their relatively low levels of education, meant that it was less likely that they would receive, and would not easily have access to, information about legislative, policy and political changes taking place which could profoundly impact on them.

Whilst the political context largely dictated the content of the Handbook, the socio-economic context shaped the original conceptualisation of the Handbook in a number of ways:

1. The considerable demographic differences between the rural areas of the Midlands and Pietermaritzburg resulted in an original conceptualisation of the Handbook as two distinct texts - one for Pietermaritzburg, and one for the remainder of the Midlands. As one of the original funding proposals explained:

(... information for urban women in the city will obviously be very different in both content and structure from information for rural women in the Midlands) (Handbook Project, Funding Proposal 2, 1997).

2. The relatively low levels of formal schooling (and high levels of functional illiteracy) meant that the Handbook/s would need to be developed as adult basic education texts/texts for neo-literates. This in turn affected the level of language and layout of the Handbook. In addition, women would need to be given very detailed, specific information, including about where to go to for help (for example, women need to be given physical addresses of government offices in each town, rather than simply be told to go to 'the Home Affairs office').
3. The fact that most women in the area were black African (with Zulu as mother-tongue) meant that more copies would need to be produced in Zulu than in any other language.
4. The fact that many women were living in poverty, and 'unemployed', meant that content about income-generating, consumer issues, social grants etc. would need to be included, even where this was not necessarily 'new' (in the sense of only being put in place post-1994).

The Outline of the project, written to provide a brief synopsis of the project for anyone who needed to be informed about it, gave the following 'aims and objectives' of the Women's Handbook project:

The research aims to empower women in Pietermaritzburg and in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands by providing them with information on issues of concern, including access to justice and the practical steps they can take to put their rights into practice and the various services and facilities available to them. This aim takes seriously the proposition that rights are empty unless people have knowledge of them and the capacity to claim them.

The purpose of the project is to provide practical information for addressing the key issues identified by women. The Handbooks will contain general information, information about women's rights, the facilities available to them, and the contact details of officials and local representatives who have a responsibility to ensure that their rights are upheld (Handbook Project, Outline, 1997).

But the political, social and economic context also meant that the Handbook was seen from the outset as a political tool to advance the rights of women and address the kind of marginalisation and discrimination women were experiencing.

Thus the Handbook project partners argued that 'Women's Handbooks would give women in the city and in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands the information they need about their newly acquired rights, about the work that is being done both locally and nationally to extend and protect these rights, and about the people and organisations available to assist them locally. *Such Handbooks would be an invaluable tool in empowering women to organise themselves at a grassroots level, and to lobby local and national representatives on women's issues*' (my emphasis) (Handbook Project, Outline, 1997).

So the Handbook was a deliberate attempt to 'empower' women, not just by giving them information about their rights, but by attempting to get them to move beyond that, to acting on this information. This is implicit in the funding proposal, but was stated explicitly by myself in an article I wrote about the project for the newsletter of a local parachurch organisation, the Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Enquiry (PACSA), in June 1998:

...the project hopes to empower women to make the leap from having information to practically using it for their benefit (Harley 1998:3).

And in August 1998, I am quoted in an article in *The Natal Witness* as saying, 'Our hope is...we will make the jump from women having information to actually using it' (*Natal Witness. A Handbook for life in KwaZulu-Natal*, 8 August 1998).

The funding proposal submitted to the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) (Handbook Project, Funding Proposal 3, 1997) thus proposed that the Handbook include information about *inter alia* the following (with the proviso that the list might change after consultation with local women):

**Organisations, institutions, rights information and regional information**

Emergency numbers - ambulance, police, Rape Crisis; fire brigade etc

Women in Pietermaritzburg/KwaZulu-Natal Midlands - an overview

Map plus list of place names falling under the Pietermaritzburg-Msunduzi Transitional Local Council/the iNdllovu Regional Council. Explanation of Departmental regions (eg. Health regions)

List of all Councillors (Towns and Regional), and their contact details

List of all local Members of Parliament, and their contact details

The new Constitution, and how it affects women - eg. the equality clause; judgements by the Constitutional Court; the Administrative Justice clause

The Commission on Gender Equality - role, names and contact details of Commissioners.

The Public protector - role, name and contact details

**Issues: (the relevant clauses from the Constitution will be integrated into each section, as will the relevant clause from the Women's Charter)**

## Health

### Women and health

The Health Care System - how it works, different levels of health care; health practitioners - what they do, who to report them to, check-list; alternative health care

Clinics: where they are situated, hours of opening, costs, services available at each

Hospitals: emergency numbers, outpatient services, costs etc.

Women's reproductive health: menstruation, menopause, fertility, contraception, pregnancy, breastfeeding, miscarriage, abortion, breast and uterine cancer; who can help

Substance abuse: services available, costs, where situated

Mental health: organisations, contact details

AIDS: information about how AIDS/HIV can and cannot be contracted; who can help

TB, blood pressure, other common diseases: signs and symptoms, who to contact

Crisis intervention: eg. Lifeline numbers, FAMSA numbers

## Social security

Old age pensions

Disability grants

Child maintenance

Foster care grants

Care dependency grants

Social relief of distress

## Death

Legal rights of inheritance - intestate vs. will; customary law

Practical steps re: dealing with death; death certificates; inquests

How to draw up a will

Burial aid

## Legal issues

Legal system; levels, kinds of laws, kinds of courts

Customary law

Legal practitioners - what they do, who to report them to

Reading and signing legal documents, kinds, age of capacity

Personal legal documents - I.D., Marriage and Divorce, Birth

Legal aid clinics: where, opening hours, services available, costs

Other legal advisers/human rights organisations

Marriage and divorce: kinds of marriage contracts; polygamy; changing names; rights in divorce

Insurance and particularly life insurance

## Violence against women

Sexual harassment

Rape: your rights; who can help; police unit numbers and names

Abuse: your rights; who can help; who to contact to find out about shelters

## Child-care:

List of registered childminders/crèches/playschools, contact numbers, where they are, costs

What to check for in terms of child/caretaker ratios, sanitation, first aid equipment and training etc

Legal obligations of (eg. sanitation etc)

Organisations involved in the issue

First Aid/emergency procedures, and child safety

Maintenance: your rights; organisations dealing with the issue; number/s of government department/s concerned, and name of official/s to speak to



Child custody and guardianship  
Child abuse

Services:

Contact numbers of city officials responsible for water, electricity, refuse removal, public health etc

Consumer issues:

Your rights; consumer groups in the city  
Cash loan companies  
High purchase agreements  
Purchasing a home: home loans, state aid  
Credit bureaux and credit status

Transport issues:

Bus company numbers  
Taxi services and costs  
Taxi association representatives and their numbers  
Road Accident Fund/Third party  
Transport Forums

Women and work:

The new labour legislation  
Domestic workers and farm workers  
Pension rights (civil and private)  
Unemployment Insurance  
Sexual Harassment  
Maternity benefits: your rights; organisations offering help; number/s of government department/s concerned, and name of official/s to speak to;  
Parental leave  
Labour bureaux

Land and property rights:

Title deeds  
Landlord and tenant rights and obligations  
Government subsidies and grants and how to access these

Adult Basic Education and Training:

What classes are being held; where; times; costs; contact numbers

Civics/residents/ratepayers Associations

Names and numbers

Women's organisations

**What you can do: How to organise around issues; how to lobby local representatives; who to write to and how to address them**



## Chapter 4:

# Evaluating the impact of the Women's Handbook

As has been discussed, the evaluation undertaken as part of this study constitutes the first real attempt to find out 'Was the Handbook successful in helping women make the leap from having information to using it?'. This question can be broken down into three parts:

1. Did women who had access to the Handbook actually read it?
2. Did they understand what they read?
3. Did they, as a result of reading and understanding the book, make any attempt to take action?

Data on use and impact were gathered using:

- A questionnaire given to the organisations who had been involved in the original distribution of the Handbook. These organisations are primarily NGOs operating in the Midlands area.
- A questionnaire printed in *Learn with Echo*, asking readers to comment on the Handbook, if they had accessed it.
- Focus groups held with women throughout the Midlands.

### Questionnaires to organisations

Although the intention had been for the MWG to distribute copies of the Handbook directly to individual ordinary women, a number of NGOs were approached by the Midlands Women's Group to distribute the Handbook to women they were in contact with. Many of these are service organisations, providing some kind of support or help to people in their area of operation (not necessarily only women). These NGOs<sup>1</sup> were asked to complete a questionnaire consisting of a number of questions, including the following questions specifically related to use and impact:

- Do you know whether the people or group the Handbook was distributed to have used it? If they have, what have they used it for?
- Do you think the Handbook has made a difference to the lives of women?

Of the organisations which responded, almost all said that the Handbook had been used by the people to whom they distributed it - one said they could not be sure (this is a network office, which does not deal with people on the ground). However, they gave no specific examples of how the book had been used, and their responses were thus vague:

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<sup>1</sup> Where possible, the questionnaire was addressed to the person within the organisation with whom the MWG had been working. However, we did not specify who should complete it.

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>How many copies did you distribute? Who did you distribute to? Do you know whether the people or group the Handbook was distributed to have used it? If so, what have they used it for?</b>
Centre for Criminal Justice	Distributed 10 boxes - one box each to 10 support centres. [They have used it to gain] access to justice for women and children.
Family and Marriage Society (FAMSA) Pietermaritzburg	Distributed 30 English and 30 Zulu copies to staff, volunteers working at the FAMSA office and in the rural areas, and to workshop participants in the rural areas. Yes, to refer individuals or groups to the appropriate service providers be it on a personal level or for educational and further information purposes.
Training and Resources in Early Education (TREE)	Over 150 copies to school teachers, pre-school practitioners, community workers and some to councillors. Yes, they have used them to inform others about resources and to build humanity among themselves.
Children in Distress Network (CINDI)	Between 100 and 200 (not sure). Copies were distributed to participants in our Home Based Care training courses, because we believed it would empower them and their communities who could refer people to appropriate organisations. Do not know if it has been used.
Thandanani Association	About 500 copies were distributed to our Community Child Care Committees in the 8 areas of our operation around Pietermaritzburg. Our committees use these books as a resource to gain information on various issues of interest or identify service providers.

(NOTE that the numbers given above represent only a small proportion of the total number of books distributed, since NGOs were given only a limited number of copies to distribute - this is discussed in detail in Chapter 7).

All of the organisations who responded, and who had said that those to whom they had distributed the book had used it, felt that the book had made a difference to lives of women and communities:

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Do you think the Handbook has made a difference to the lives of women or communities?</b>
Centre for Criminal Justice	Yes - a considerable difference to an estimated 4 000 clients.
Family and Marriage Society (FAMSA) Pietermaritzburg	Yes, I am a community development manager and have experienced first hand the value of the handbook.
Training and Resources in Early Education	Yes. People are confident and motivated. They feel that they are part of society and they know what to do.
Thandanani Association	[did not respond to this question]

Some of the respondents reported that they had personally used the Handbook - one for help regarding a pension matter, another to help a neighbour who was being abused by her husband.

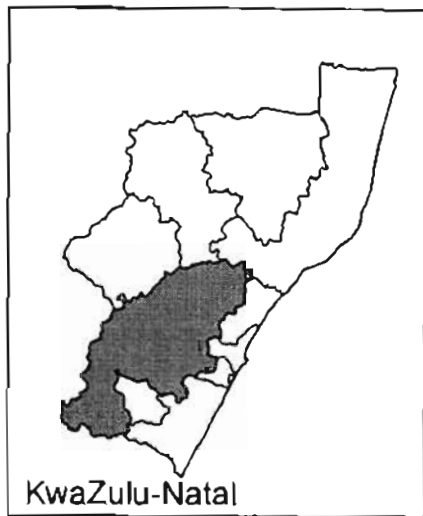
## Questionnaire in *Learn with Echo*

As has been mentioned, only one response was received - this respondent said that she had used it to help herself with issues to do with women's health. She also said she had used it to help other women, but did not say how.

## The focus groups

Seven focus groups were held during 2002/2003 (although one included women from three different areas). The focus groups targeted ordinary women who had had access to the Handbook. They largely mirrored the original workshops, held at the start of the Handbook Project, insofar as where they were held:

1. A focus group was held with 16 women in Enhlalakahle, Greytown. Enhlalakahle is a fairly well-established black African township outside Greytown, a small rural town surrounded by (largely White) commercial farms and plantations. The women were from Greytown, Enhlalakahle, or farms or rural villages in the surrounding area, such as Mbulwane and Seven Oaks.
2. A focus group was held with a group of 26 women in Impendle. Impendle is a very small rural town in a tribal authority area dominated by subsistence farming. The women came from settlements in the area.
3. A focus group was held with 19 women and 1 man in Ixopo. Ixopo is a small town and township in a (largely White) commercial farming area, but with significant black African settlements (such as Hopewell and Highflats) nearby. There are also growing informal settlements around the town. The participants came from Ixopo and the townships and informal settlements in the town, Highflats, Hopewell, Donnybrook, and local farms.
4. A focus group of 12 women was held in Matatiele. Matatiele is a small town and township in a (largely White) commercial farming area. This focus group was supposed to include women from Kokstad, but it appeared that it had not been properly organised by the contact person, and thus only women from Matatiele attended.
5. A focus group was held in Nhlazuka, a fairly remote rural community in the vicinity of Richmond. Nhlazuka is a tribal authority area dominated by subsistence farming.
6. A focus group was held with 23 women from Sobantu, a well-established, middle-class black African township in the middle of Pietermaritzburg.
7. A focus group was held at Tembaletu Community Education Centre in Pietermaritzburg with 17 facilitators and learners from three rural communities (Muden, Qanda and Stoffelton) involved in an Adult Basic Education project. Muden is a (largely White) commercial farming area; Qanda is a small peri-urban settlement in a tribal authority area abutting greater Pietermaritzburg; and Stoffelton is a black African settlement in a tribal authority area near Impendle.



The siting of the focus groups was intended to ensure that very different groups of women were consulted over a fairly wide geographic area, as the following demographic data, drawn from the 2001 population census, shows :

Place	Demographic data			
	Urban/rural profile	Sex profile	'Race' profile	Age profile
Greytown (Enhlalakahle)	urban	53% female	99.75% black African	61% of black African women are in their 20s and 30s; 11% are over 60
Impendle	rural, tribal authority area	56% female	91% black African	57% of black African women are in their 20s and 30s; 15% are over 60
Ixopo	urban, peri-urban, rural	54% female	98% black African	69% of black African women are in their 20s and 30s; 5% are over 60
Matatiele	urban, peri-urban, rural	53% female	54% black African	62% of black African women are in their 20s and 30s; 6% are over 60
Richmond (Nhlazuka)	very rural, tribal authority area	58% female	100% black African	48% of black African women are in their 20s and 30s; 22% are over 60
Sobantu	urban	53% female	99.59% black African	56% of black African women are in their 20s and 30s; 16% are over 60
Muden*	rural	No census data for this area can be determined, since Muden falls within a census area which is too large to be useful.		
Qanda*	peri-urban	57%	100% black African	61% of black African women are in their 20s and 30s; 15% are over 60
Stoffelton*	rural	50%	100% black Africa	Only 22% of black African women are in their 20s and 30s; 46% are over 60

\*NOTE that these three areas were represented in a single focus group

Source: Statistics South Africa. 2003. Population census, 2001

The education levels of black African women in these area is fairly predictable, given the above demographics:

Place	Education level of black African women over the age of 19				
	No ne	Some level of primary education	Some level of secondary (but have not completed this)	Successfully completed secondary school	Post-secondary school qualification
Greytown (Enhlalakahle)	12 %	24%	34%	20%	9%
Impendle	31 %	40%	20%	6%	4%
Ixopo	57 %	23%	15%	4%	2%
Matatiele	10 %	21%	31%	14%	24%
Richmond (Nhlazuka)	58 %	23%	13%	4%	1%
Sobantu	4%	15%	45%	26%	9%
Muden*	No census data for this area can be determined, since Muden falls within a census area which is too large to be useful.				
Qanda*	15 %	40%	29%	12%	4%
Stoffelton*	28 %	18%	45%	4%	4%

\*NOTE that these three areas were represented in a single focus group  
Source: Statistics South Africa. 2003. Population census, 2001

Thus levels of education are particularly low in the more rural areas such as Impendle, Stoffelton and Nhlazuka, and the small rural town of Ixopo, and higher in bigger towns and established townships, such as Matatiele, Greytown, and Sobantu. Both Sobantu and Enhlalakahle townships show a relatively high proportion of women who have completed secondary school (over 25%), whilst less is than 10% of African women in Ixopo, Stoffelton and Nhlazuka have done so (and in the case of Nhlazuka, less than 5%).

However, unemployment in the more urban areas is generally higher than elsewhere, particularly so in the well-established townships of Enhlalakahle and Sobantu:



Place	Employment status of black African women in the economically active population (i.e. 20-59)		
	Employed	Unemployed and looking for work	Other
Greytown (Enhlalakahle)	40%	46%	14%
Impendle	39%	31%	30%
Ixopo	18%	17%	65%
Matatiele	69%	18%	13%
Richmond (Nhlazuka)	6%	31%	63%
Sobantu	32%	46%	22%
Muden*	No census data for this area can be determined, since Muden falls within a census area which is too large to be useful.		
Qanda*	12%	25%	63%
Stoffelton*	0%	25%	75%

\*NOTE that these three areas were represented in a single focus group

Source: Statistics South Africa. 2003. Population census, 2001

To some extent, the high levels of unemployment in these areas is a result of the high proportion of black African women seeking employment, compared to areas where relatively few women are actively involved in the formal economy, or seeking to be. Thus areas where subsistence agriculture - largely performed by women - is the main economic activity (Nhlazuka, Qanda, Stoffelton, Impendle) show a far lower proportion of women either employed or seeking work.

The women at the focus groups, for the most part, were fairly typical of the demographics of the area they were drawn from (as per the 2001 census data):

Place	Demographic profile of area	Focus group profile
Greytown (Enhlalakahle)	The vast majority of residents are black African. Most black African women are in their 20s and 30s. Most have at least some secondary schooling, and one in four black African women have a matric or a post-matric qualification. Unemployment is very high - nearly half of black African women are seeking work. This is higher than the percentage of women who are employed.	All of the women at the focus group were black African. They ranged widely in terms of age, from a woman who was still at school, to pensioners. 6 of the women were receiving a stipend as community health workers, and one of the women was a qualified nurse. However, most of the women at the focus group were not working. Levels of education varied widely. One of the women was currently attending adult basic education classes.
Impendle	The vast majority of residents are black African. Most black African women are in their 20s and 30s. Nearly one third of black African women in the area have no schooling at all, and over 70% have no secondary schooling at all. Although more black African women are employed than unemployed, over 30% are actively seeking work.	All of the women were black African. The women varied widely in age, but the majority were in their 20s and 30s. Most were unemployed, and not seeking work. Some of the women were community health workers. The levels of education of participants were relatively low, although community health workers are technically supposed to have at least Grade 10 (one of the health workers present admitted she could not read the book herself without difficulty)
Ixopo	The vast majority of residents are black African. A very high proportion of black African women (nearly 70%) are in their 20s and 30s. 57% have received no formal education at all, and only 4% have passed matric. Very few women are employed or seeking employment.	Only one of the women present was not a black African. 17 of the participants were in their 20s or 30s, the remaining 4 in their 40s. Most of the participants were not employed, although some were community health workers, and a local social worker was also present. Levels of education were relatively high, with most having some level of primary education.

Matatiele	<p>The majority of residents are black African, but 46% of the population are not. Most black African women are in their 20s and 30s, and there is a relatively small proportion of women aged 60 years or over. Black African women in the area are relatively well educated, with nearly 40% having a matric or post-matric qualification. Employment levels are very high with nearly 70% of black African women employed, and less than 20% seeking work.</p>	<p>All of the participants were black African. All were employed, and had relatively high levels of education (at least some secondary education). The age of participants was varied, from 20s to 60s.</p>
Richmond (Nhlanzuka)	<p>Black Africans constitute 100% of the population. Unlike other areas, less than half of black African women are in their 20s and 30s, and there is a higher than usual proportion of women aged 60 years or over. Education levels are very low, with 58% of black African having received no education at all, and less than one in five women having had more than a primary level of education. Only 6% of black African women are employed, and nearly one in three women are seeking employment; but 63% of women are neither employed nor seeking employment.</p>	<p>All of the participants were black African. Education levels were relatively low, with few women having received more than primary level education. Very few of the participants were employed.</p>
Sobantu	<p>The vast majority of residents are black African. Most black African women are in their 20s and 30s. Levels of employment are relatively high, with less than 5% having had no schooling, and over 60% having had some level of primary or secondary education. Nearly half of black African women are seeking employment, but even so levels of employment are relatively high, at 32%.</p>	<p>All of the participants were black African women. Women who participated were on the whole older than in other areas, although there was a wide spread of ages. Levels of education were relatively high, with almost all women having had at least some schooling. About half of the women were employed.</p>
Muden*	<p>[No census data for this area can be determined, since Muden falls within a census area which is too large to be useful.]</p>	<p>All of the women from Muden were black African. Most of the learners were in their 30s or 40s. Levels of education were low, since all of the learners are currently attending adult basic education classes. None of the learners is employed (the facilitator obviously is, by Tembaletu).</p>

Qanda*	100% of residents are black African. Most black African women are in their 20s and 30s. 40% of women have at least some level of primary schooling. Only 12% of black African women are employed, and one in four women is seeking employment. However, over 60% of women are not employed and are not seeking employment.	All of the women from Qanda were black African. Most of the learners were in their 30s or 40s. Levels of education were low, since all of the learners are currently attending adult basic education classes. None of the learners is employed (the facilitator obviously is, by Tembaletu).
Stoffelton*	100% of residents are black African. Unlike other areas, the black African female population is relatively old, with less than one in four women in their 20s or 30s, and nearly half aged 60 or over. 28% have had no schooling. No black African women are employed, and only one in four women seeking employment.	All of the women from Stoffelton were black African. Most of the learners were in their 30s or 40s. Levels of education were low, since all of the learners are currently attending adult basic education classes. None of the learners is employed (the facilitator obviously is, by Tembaletu).

Thus the women who participated in the focus groups represented both urban (town, formal township, informal settlement) and rural (largely white commercial farming areas, tribal authority areas) areas, and varied widely in terms of age, employment, and level of education. However, the women were, with very few exceptions, black African.

Each focus group was set up by the Midlands Women's Group, generally using a local woman with whom the MWG had been in contact over a period of time (many of these contacts had been part of the original Handbook project workshops). These people were asked to contact 20 women who had a copy of the Handbook and ask them to attend a meeting to answer questions about the Handbook and how they had used it. Using this process generally resulted in a diverse group of ordinary women from area - but it had significant drawbacks, in that we had relatively little control over the process. Thus we could never be sure when the focus groups would be held, which made planning difficult. We also could not control the fact that a number of women would arrive for the focus group having never actually seen the Handbook. These women had been invited by other participants, or accompanied friends, or had simply heard that there was a meeting to discuss women's issues. We were not prepared to send them away once they had arrived, and in the event having them there provided useful data (see below).

The focus groups were facilitated by the Midlands Women's Group, using a schedule which we jointly prepared, and which had also been circulated to members of the MWG Management Committee (MWG, 2002. Minutes of Manco meeting, 24 April 2002). The focus groups were generally conducted in Zulu, with one of the MWG staff translating to me throughout. Thus, although in the following section I have tried to reflect what individual women said, the statements are as translated and reported to me by a third party.

Of the women who had seen the Handbook prior to the focus group, most had been given the book some time before - many of these as part of the initial Zulu-language distribution process in 2000/2001 (one woman had received her copy (of the English version) in 1999). They had thus had the book for over a year at the time of the focus group. To test whether women had actually read the book, and were familiar with the content, they were asked what they remembered about the book (there were no copies of the book in the focus groups at this point - some were circulated later to the women who had not yet seen the Handbook, and in some cases these women met in a separate small group to look through the book and say what they thought of it).

Across all the sites where focus groups were held, women who had accessed the Handbook were able to recall much of the content of the book remarkably well. This, in and of itself, suggests that these women had actually read the book. In their responses some women also gave examples of how they had put the information into practice:

Focus group venue	What do you remember about the book?
Greytown	<p>How to help pensioners            How to refer people for help - for example, one woman referred a child who was raped to the Department of Welfare, where she was helped and given counselling; another helped a man who had been injured some time ago in a car crash apply to the Road Accident Fund            That there are two kinds of marriage - 'I learned about the rights of women under customary marriage'.            'If you are a widow, you can refuse to marry your husband's brother'.            Information about starting your own business.            Institutions for the disabled - I have referred people to these.</p>
Impendle	<p>Abuse when people get pensions            Diseases like TB and what to do            Abuse of women</p>
Ixopo	<p>Termination of pregnancy            Abuse of women            Old age pension            Organisations to contact in cases of abuse            Infections like TB            Customary Marriages Act            Where to go if there is a death in the family</p>
Matatiele	<p>Problems with getting the correct documents, like ID books and marriage certificates            Different kinds of marriages            Land and housing            Many important things, like getting men to change their attitudes to pregnancy, giving women a choice about how to have their baby (i.e. natural versus Ceasarian section)            Mental health/disability</p>

Richmond	Domestic violence Act that protects women against abuse Maintenance Act - that husbands/boyfriends have to face their responsibilities as parents as well as mothers/girlfriends Inheritance - boy and girl child should get an equal amount of inheritance
Sobantu	How to go about getting a pension/grant Teenage pregnancy Maintenance, child abuse, divorce, health, and where to go
Tembaletu (Muden, Qanda, Stoffelton)	What a person should do in the case of a rape (she described this in some detail) Different kinds of marriage (this was said by one of the men present) Inheritance rights of the children of a man (versus his family) when he dies

Thus, across the focus groups, women recalled a fairly wide range of information. Women remembered, in particular, information concerning marriage and inheritance (all the focus groups); social grants (four out of seven focus groups); and violence against women (five out of seven focus groups). There was no mention at all of issues concerning physical infrastructure (water, electricity etc.) or consumer rights.

Women were then asked a number of questions exploring whether they used the book, and if so, what they had used it for. Many of the women had used the book to help others, either practically, or to educate them about their rights:

Focus group venue	Use of the book
Greytown	I use it in all the structures I am part of (Land Claims Committee; Umvoti AIDS awareness organisation; Sinamuva Senior Citizens Club; Arcadia Old Age Home) [to tell women about their rights]. I use it to help women in customary marriages in my community. I use it at school (she is a learner) to help other students address problems at school. I use it every day in my community health work. I use it to educate children in the community about abuse. I gave it to the local magistrate to read. He liked it a lot, and has now run workshops for women using the book.
Impendle	I helped a woman access the Child Support Grant. I knew a woman who was pregnant and very sick - I read the part about pregnancy to her and this reassured her that this was normal. I (a health worker) used it to learn more about common sicknesses. I tried to help an elderly neighbour to go to an old age home, but he refused, saying he wanted to die at home. I have referred women who suffer from domestic violence to the Criminal Justice Centre's Victim Support Centre (at the local police station).

Ixopo	<p>I have directed people to places where they can get treatment - many are now better.</p> <p>One woman (clinic sister) related how a woman had told her that her husband was emotionally and physically abusing her. She counselled the woman, and sent her to the magistrate's court (to apply for a protection order). She also referred the woman and her husband to the Crisis Centre in Ixopo. The woman has now applied for a divorce.</p> <p>An old lady of 72, who had applied for a pension when she was 62, was still not receiving it (because her ID book had the same ID number as someone else). I (local clinic sister) helped her sort it out. Now she gets her pension, and she also got R37 000 in back-pay. I helped her open a bank account.</p> <p>I helped a woman who wanted an abortion to follow the steps, and referred her to support organisations who could help.</p> <p>I have used it to set up income-generating projects (sewing, gardening).</p> <p>I (community health worker) use it when I go door to door to give information about maintenance, pregnancy, drug abuse, etc.</p> <p>I (clinic sister) called the environmental health officer [after I read the book] about an informal settlement which had no toilets. The community is now getting toilets.</p> <p>A local principal had been excluding children whose parents did not pay fees. I told him the children must be allowed to go to school even if the fees aren't paid. Now many children are in school that weren't.</p>
Matatiele	<p>I (a member of the Council of Churches) take it to meetings with me to show other women the things that are in it. I helped a woman who stays with me, she is HIV+ and was abused by her husband. I also have a slot on the local community radio where I talk about the Bible and this book. I also give advice to people over the phone.</p> <p>The local minister was having an affair. Everyone knew about it, but didn't feel able to challenge this. We talked about this, and after reading the book, and linking it with the Bible, we have now refused to take the sacrament from the minister.</p> <p>I use the book at work (a paralegal office) to help clients. I helped an HIV+ woman who was prevented from seeing a doctor by the nurses at the clinic. I went with her to the clinic and demanded that she be allowed to see the doctor (using the book to show she had this right), and she was.</p> <p>The menopause section is also very good - most women think they sick, but when they read about it in the book, it helps them a lot.</p>
Richmond (Nhlazuka)	[no examples reported]
Sobantu	<p>I do counselling for Lifeline. I use the book when I give advice. I am also involved in an HIV/AIDS programme. I saw in the book there are other organisations involved in HIV and contacted them.</p> <p>I visit informal settlements as part of my work. They used to ask me questions I couldn't answer - now I can use the Handbook to answer.</p> <p>I (health worker) work with old people in the community, and help them get pensions using the Handbook.</p> <p>I used it to help some children who ran away from home because they were being abused. I also gave two women who had been raped the telephone number for Rape Crisis.</p>

<p>Tembaletu (Muden, Qanda, Stoffelton)</p>	<p>I (an ABET facilitator) use it in my ABET class. An old woman in the community went to apply for a pension. The official told her to go and get married, so she would have a husband to support her. When I heard about this, I took her and the book to the offices, and showed them she has a right to get a pension, and now she gets it. I knew that a child was being abused by the people she was staying with. I reported this to the Social Worker, and she has been removed from those people.</p>
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The women were asked to comment on whether they felt that reading and using the Handbook had made a difference to their own lives. This question elicited many stories about the ways in which they had used the book, many of them extraordinarily powerful:

<p><b>Focus group venue</b></p>	<p><b>Difference the book has made to their life</b></p>
<p>Greytown</p>	<p>If you have the Handbook, you become a community worker, because everyone comes to you. I never got maintenance for my children before. After reading the Handbook, I challenged the father and got support for the first time (the child was now 17). He has also agreed to keep paying support for the child until he gets work. (Note - this participant had received the book in 1999, but had only summonsed the courage to challenge the father some years later, after using the Handbook extensively to help others). I was being abused by my husband. I told him what the Handbook said [that this was illegal] and he stopped. Others are now coming to me for help.</p>
<p>Impendle</p>	<p>One woman reported that her whole family had read it, including the children. There had been a dramatic change in the family as a result. Her husband felt threatened by her saying she had rights, and showing him the book. But others explained to him this doesn't mean he is disempowered - just that he must share. She told her 2 sons that they must also do 'girls' work - now they do it without complaint. Another woman also reported that her husband has changed after reading the book. He used to insist that she cooked the food, and refused to eat food prepared by the children. Now, if they get home from a funeral and she is tired, he lets the children cook. Another woman is a health worker, but cannot read well. Her husband, a teacher, read the book to her and explained things she did not understand. Now he is happy to let her attend meetings whilst he copes at home with the children. He even makes the bed (there were many <i>Hawuls</i> from other participants at this revelation). Another woman said that her daughter had been reading it. She comes to her to ask questions (for example, she read that the Child Support Grant was only for children up to 7 years old - she asked what about other children?).</p>



Ixopo	<p>I now know my rights as a woman, and I help others to know their rights and where to go.</p> <p>The book empowered me. I gained a lot of information. The part that helped me personally was the disability section. I am now working very closely with the Disabled Association [whose contact details are listed in the Handbook] - we now get help with wheelchairs, grants, accessing special schools from them.</p> <p>I used it to help write my health exams.</p> <p>Women at this focus group said that the Handbook had helped other women in the community - because they knew their rights, their partners had to treat them better. The Clinic Sister said that women were no longer locking away disabled children, and were now getting assistance for them.</p>
Matatiele	<p>When I found out I was pregnant, I didn't know whether to have an abortion or not. I read the book, and decided to keep the baby. I used the book everyday to read about pregnancy and birth - for example, that you must not use certain medicines when you are pregnant.</p> <p>I know my own rights and where to go to for help with these.</p> <p>My understanding of homosexuality has increased. I accept it better.</p>
Richmond (Nhlazuka)	<p>The women in the focus group said that they now know about their rights. They know that their job is not to bear children as they were told, but to be part and parcel of decision-making at home. Marriage is partnership, and they should not be treated like children by their husbands.</p> <p>We now practice gender equality at home - the boys also have to do work. I am from a polygamous marriage. The other wives and I read about inheritance. We have discussed it with our husband that his inheritance should be shared equally among the boys and girls in the family.</p>
Sobantu	<p>I used the information in the book to get the Child Support Grant.</p> <p>I am part of a stokvel. There was corruption. I showed them in the book how we should run. Now it is better.</p>
Tembaletu (Muden, Qanda, Stoffelton)	<p>I (ABET facilitator) also use it at home. My husband always used to say it was his house, and if I misbehaved he would send me away. After reading the book I know I have an equal right to the house. My husband and I now sit down and talk about these issues.</p> <p>We were having problems getting the Child Support Grant. We read in the book what to do. We followed the steps [in the book] and showed the officials we had a right to the CSG, and now we get the grant.</p>

Women had thus used the Handbook in a variety of ways, with often extraordinary results. Perhaps most significant is the reported changes within their own families - the fact that boys and girls behaved differently (for example, boys doing more work in the home), and that their partners were treating them differently (greater sharing of household work, higher status of women within the home, and in one case a decrease in abuse). Significant shifts in property dispensations were also reported (boys and girl children being given equal inheritance rights, husband accepting wife's right to joint property).

Women had also increased household income through accessing social grants or maintenance.

The access of women to information about their rights, as well as the actions they had taken as a result, appears to have led to a shift in, at the very least, their own levels of confidence, and in some cases their status. But accessing the Handbook had also changed their attitudes to others - for example, to the disabled and to homosexuals.

This is not to say that women have found it easy to do these things - quite apart from any internal difficulties they may have had to overcome (such as low self-confidence, fear of the unknown, etc.), women have also had to deal with multiple external problems, as they reported at the focus groups:

Focus group venue	Problems experienced by women
Greytown	<p>It was easy to access organisations around Greytown - but institutions outside are more difficult.</p> <p>Government officials often ask questions that women don't understand. They don't use language that women know. Forms such as applications for a birth certificate are difficult to fill in because women don't understand them. When women ask for help, they are often told to come back the next day, which is very expensive.</p> <p>There is a lot of bribery and sexual abuse by officials. For example, a male official working at the Greytown Home Affairs office will not help women without them first giving sexual favours. Sometimes, to try to get help from the woman official at the office, women sleep outside on the pavement overnight so that they can be first in the queue.</p>
Impendle	<p>A group of women that a focus group participant told about the Child Support Grant (using the Handbook) decided to apply. They had to go to Home Affairs to get the necessary documentation. They slept at the office for two nights before they were helped.</p> <p>The treatment at the clinic is very bad. One woman whose child had been badly burned by boiling water was made to wait. A woman's husband was told by the hospital to collect medicine each day from the clinic, but the clinic didn't have it.</p> <p>Support organisations are there, but they are not educated about women's issues and women's difficulty in accessing things; they tell women to come back the next day, and don't understand how hard this is for women.</p> <p>In income-generating projects, women get discouraged and give up because the officials from the departments they approach for help are negative rather than supportive. They criticise them without giving constructive suggestions.</p> <p>For example, some women are involved in a project under the Department of Welfare, overseen by local social workers. The women had been given sewing machines and fabric by the District Council, and were told to submit a proposal for a sewing project to the social workers. But the social workers have their own criteria for projects, which are not for things they (the women) want. They were told by the social worker that their proposal had not been approved - but they were given no letter nor any explanation.</p>

Ixopo	<p>Government officials are very rude to women. The Department of Social Welfare is especially bad, and gives endless problems. For example, the community health workers (mostly women) are trying to help the many orphans in the area get birth certificates (so that their carers can apply for the Child Support Grant), but are being sent from pillar to post by the officials.</p> <p>People have to pay bribes. For example, a woman who was supposed to get R18 000 in back-pay for a disability grant was actually paid out only R3 000. The rest was taken by departmental officials. She laid a charge, and was visited at her home by officials from the department who promised to give her R10 000 if she would keep quiet. She refused, and is now being kept in a safe house pending the trial after having been threatened.</p> <p>Pensioners are very badly treated. After the clinic sister persuaded the mayor to come and look at the pension queue, portable shelters and chairs have been set up (but pensioners still begin queuing two days' before). A 'pension committee' used to collect R5 from each pensioner, but after one of the focus group participants reported them, they were arrested and taken away.</p> <p>One participant tried to get seeds from the Department of Agriculture for a garden project, but the department will only help if the area is fenced, and they have no money to fence it.</p> <p>It is difficult finding the right person - people get sent from one office to another, and referred on, and so on.</p>
Matatiele	<p>Women have a big problem trying to get the correct documents. They keep getting ID books, marriage certificates etc. with the wrong names, dates etc. Then they have to go through the process all over again.</p> <p>One participant tried to contact the Life Insurance Ombudsman, but got no reply to her letter. Another tried to contact the Independent Complaints Directorate (to complain about a police member), but also did not get a response. The police are especially bad in Matatiele. They won't help women, and tend to take the side of the man in cases of domestic abuse. They won't take action, even when women have proof. The police in the charge office say they are not trained to deal with domestic violence, and don't know what to do. They approached the Matatiele Advice Office, who ran a training session for them but they didn't turn up. They set another date, and again the police did not arrive.</p> <p>Police often raid homes looking for guns. Women don't know if they are allowed to do this.</p> <p>One participant said that the men in the Department of Justice are also biased against women, especially in cases of maintenance - other participants say it is not only the men. The women officials also don't help. There is a branch of Consumer Affairs in Kokstad, but not Matatiele - its too far.</p>
Richmond (Nhlanzuka)	<p>Home Affairs gives them a hard time every time they need help. When you go there, and they tell you to come again, they don't tell you exactly what you must bring. They just keep postponing and postponing until you give up.</p> <p>The police are also a problem. When someone has been arrested for, for example, rape, they are released on bail almost immediately. When community members report a crime, they are told they must have proof that the person has done it before they will make an arrest. When they are given proof, they almost always say it is not enough.</p> <p>The nurses at the clinic are very rude to patients.</p>

Sobantu	<p>Officials are helpful, but you often get sent from one place to another. One woman said that she had called the police after a woman had been raped. The police never came.</p> <p>Until very recently, there was no Social Worker for Sobantu. People had to go to the office in town (Pietermaritzburg) because the social welfare refused to come to Sobantu.</p> <p>The staff at the Home Affairs office in Pietermaritzburg are very rude and treat people very badly. They demand a R20 bribe before they will help. One woman recounted how she had applied and paid for a full birth certificate. When, after months, she had not received it, she complained. She was told there was no record of her application (despite the fact that she had a receipt), and she was made to reapply and repay.</p> <p>Another woman reported that she had applied for a disability grant for her son. It had still not been processed when he died 9 months later.</p> <p>When you apply at one government office, you get sent to another, which then tells you the other office is responsible.</p> <p>A grandmother in the community called the emergency number after a shooting. A private ambulance arrived, and she was asked to pay R200 before they would transport the victim.</p>
Tembaletu (Muden, Qanda, Stoffelton)	<p>One participant said that when she went to get a death certificate from Home Affairs, they insisted she apply for a new ID book first, for which she had to pay. But each time she has to travel far to go to the office (she is in Muden, and has to go to the Greytown office).</p> <p>Another participant said that after her husband died, the magistrate said his family should get all his assets, because she and her husband had no children.</p> <p>Staff at the clinic treat people badly - for example, one woman was given the contraceptive injection after she had just given birth without telling her what it was or asking her permission.</p>

Despite these difficulties, the *Handbook* has clearly been remarkably successful in meeting the aim of helping these women ‘jump the gap’ between having information and actually using it. The overwhelming evidence from the focus groups (and across the focus groups) is:

- women who have accessed the Handbook have indeed read at least those sections they believe to be useful to them;
- women who have accessed the Handbook know and understand many of their rights as a result of reading it. These rights include a wide range of rights, including their right to access government grants, their right not to be abused by their partners, their rights in customary marriage, their right to inherit their husband’s property, and their right to child maintenance. They also know and understand a range of other issues and processes, such as what to do in the case of a rape.

- women who have accessed the Handbook have used it in order to access a range of rights and services for themselves and others. These include:
  - accessing the Child Support Grant
  - accessing the Social Pension
  - accessing the Road Accident Fund
  - accessing maintenance from the father of their children
  - accessing counselling and support in cases of rape
  - dealing with cases of child abuse and abuse of the elderly
  - ensuring transparency and democracy in community structures
  - accessing a variety of the organisations, including organisations dealing with disability, HIV/AIDS and child and elderly abuse;
- some women have also used it to change the nature of their relationships with their children and their partners (including, in one instance, to end abuse).

Women have also used the Handbook extensively to teach other women (and men) about their rights; about health issues (including HIV/AIDS); and about services available to them.

The Handbook has thus undoubtedly (at least in the case of the women involved in the focus groups) helped women to know about their rights, and set about accessing these. In a high number of cases, women have been successful in their attempts to access their rights and services available to them. The range of rights accessed, however, is relatively limited, and tend to be social, personal rights. Thus none of the women in the focus groups mentioned rights related to things like water or transport, and certainly none reported having done anything about these issues (despite the fact that water was the issue most often prioritised at the initial workshops). This could be because these are more difficult to access, since they often require a degree of community organisation, rather than individual action; or it could be that these are seen as outside of the sphere of legitimate activity for women. This is an issue which will be explored in more depth in the final chapter.



## Chapter 5:

# Locating the Women's Handbook within a philosophical and theoretical paradigm

The Handbook can thus be said to have succeeded in its primary aim of 'empower[ing] women to make the leap from having information to practically using it for their benefit' (Harley 1998). How does one account for this?

The various letters and reviews included in the introductory paragraphs of this thesis offer some explanations of their own:

[It uses] user-friendly language and free of jargon (Letter from Beatrice Ngcobo, Gender Commissioner, to the Midlands Women's Group, 8 January 2003).

Having had the opportunity to read some portions of the handbook, I must say that I am impressed both by the user-friendly presentation of its material and by the comprehensiveness of the issues addressed (Letter from Brenda Gourley, Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of Natal, to John Aitchison, member of the Reference Group, 8 September 1999).

I have found it absolutely interesting and informative. I have never read a book with so much of valuable information (Letter from a recipient of the book to the Midlands Women's Group, 3 August 1999).

The book is written and presented in a way that women can understand and use...the content is useful for all South African women, of all ages, races, creeds, cultures and sexual orientation...The quality of the book is a reflection of the remarkable process undertaken by the producers which was both inclusive and participatory...The beauty of this book lies in its simplicity and its vision of empowering women particularly those with minimum levels of literacy to take control of their lives and to work through the problems and concerns they face in everyday life (Naidoo 2000:109-110).

Thus, the fact that the content is comprehensive, relevant and useful; that the book is written and presented in a simple, user-friendly way; and that the process used in its creation was participatory, have all been suggested as particular strengths of the Handbook. Do these account for the fact that women have read and used it?

The process used to create the Handbook, and the way it looks and reads, is no accident. Rather, we, the developers of the book, drew on very specific traditions of best practice, which informed both the product and the process (since these traditions argue that process is as critical as product).

John Aitchison, one of the members of the Reference Group, and in many senses a pivotal member of the project since he designed and facilitated a number of workshops with project staff during the development process (and because of his enormous influence on my own personal development and thinking), argues that the project was somewhat eclectic in its philosophical underpinnings:

We were guided by an essentially enlightenment view that information is good for you; that knowledge is important and powerful. This very modern and scientific view was allied with a people-centred view that the voice of ordinary people is important and needs to be engaged with to make things real. Therefore, the process needed to be participatory (Interview, 18 November 2002).

I would agree that those of us involved in conceptualising the Handbook and the Handbook project were indeed wedded to the notion that it is vital for people to have information; the aims of the Handbook as expressed in the funding proposal make this very clear. We also believed that by involving the people we were targeting (ordinary women) we could 'discover' the information most important to them, and thus ensure that the Handbook gave them that information most likely to help them; and in that respect, we were influenced by the many voices arguing for reader-centred education and materials, including Freirian and critical pedagogy. The extent to which this theme was actually carried through into the Handbook itself is debatable - and I will explore this more in the next two chapters.

What John Aitchison does not emphasise is the gendered nature of the Handbook - the fact that it was specifically targeted at women, for the very overt purpose of 'empowering' them, by telling them about their rights and how to access these, and hoping they would then go out and do this. This aim is emphasised by another key member of the Reference Group, Ashnie Padarath, then regional director of the Pietermaritzburg Black Sash:

We wanted to empower women (Interview, 14 November 2002).

How then did these multiple influences on the Handbook shape it?

This section will explore this question in detail, offering a backdrop against which to judge both the Handbook-as-product and the Handbook-as-process. I will begin by looking at the broader paradigms (and paradoxically, those which make the Handbook a very specific kind of educational text) of feminism and human rights/citizenship. I will then examine the location of the Handbook and the Handbook project within the considerable body of theory concerning education, pedagogy and learning theory, and more specifically Adult Education and Adult Basic Education.

## Feminist theory

The term 'feminist theory' is something of a misnomer, since, as Preece (2002) has pointed out, there are multiple 'feminisms':

There is no one feminist position, although all share a commitment to understanding and challenging what has caused women's subordination to men (2002:82).

There have been many attempts to categorise these feminisms (see Lather for a fuller description of this, 1991:169-170), but the categorisation most commonly used is that which divides feminism into the four broad strands of liberal, radical, socialist and postmodernist/poststructuralist.



**Liberal feminism** argues that the characteristics generally regarded as those of women are socially constructed rather than biologically inherited - women are 'feminine', 'emotional', 'intuitive' etc. because they are brought up to be that way, and this is reinforced by society which requires women to be a certain way. Although liberal feminism has roots reaching hundreds of years back, this position is now generally seen as having been best articulated in *The feminine mystique*, Betty Friedan's hugely influential 1963 book. Friedan, and liberal feminists, argue that by dismantling discriminatory practices, laws and policies, men and women can be equal. Much of the liberal feminist project is thus aimed at freeing women from oppressive, patriarchal gender roles and allowing them equal access to the job market and equal, democratic rights with men (Tong 1998).

Liberal feminism has been criticised for focusing primarily on sex stereotyping and bias within existing structures, thus not challenging relationships of domination, for example, the relationship between gender and class (Weiler 1988:27-28). Weiler argues that implicit in liberal feminist discourse is that sexism exists in the realm of ideas. Thus, if ideas are changed, society will be changed. This does not take into account the constraints of the material world, and the forms of power and privilege that shape this (Weiler 1988:28).

**Radical feminism** rejects the liberal feminist notion that women should be allowed to be more like men, and defends the essential qualities of femaleness (such as subjectivity, emotion, intuition and so on). This strand of feminism argues that men are also disadvantaged by gender discrimination, since their 'femaleness' is negated. Radical feminism identifies the specific historical role of male domination over women.

**Socialist feminism** emphasises how gender is socially, rather than biologically, constructed, identifying different sources of oppression. Socialist feminists assume that capitalism and patriarchy are related and mutually reinforce one another, but argue that traditional Marxist analysis is not an adequate tool for revealing the nature of women's experience and oppression.

**Postmodern/poststructuralist feminism** looks at the relationship between language and power, and explores how women and other social groups are positioned in different ways as a result of shifting identities and meanings.

Recent debates have seen considerable discussion between, in particular, the socialist and postmodernist strands of feminism. Thus Preece (2002:82) argues that socialist feminists are unable to explain how patriarchy came to exist in the first place, whilst Kelly (2000) claims that Marxism provides a far better framework than postmodernism for explaining why the feminist movement has achieved so little:

Postmodernism's refusal to analyse society as an entity and its determination to concentrate on the local situation means it is unable to understand women's oppression (2000:7).

Kelly, like many other socialist feminists, attempts to reconcile the much debated schism between feminism and Marxism. This schism results from Marxism's use of class to explain structural oppression, versus feminism's use of patriarchy. Kelly argues that capitalist society not only divides by class, but takes advantage of other existing divisions, such as sex and

race, to maintain class rule. The oppressed nature of women is essential in the capitalist structure of society, since it ensures that women reproduce the labour force, and provide free labour (in the home) to sustain the labour force. In addition, the emphasis on women's domestic and reproductive role allows women's paid work to be undervalued (since the man is the breadwinner, so his wage includes family money), with the result that women are paid less for the same work. Women also form an essential part of the reserve army of labour needed by capitalism (Kelly 2000:15-16).

Weiler (1988), in her seminal work *Women teaching for change: gender, class and power*, also attempted to overcome the apparently irreconcilable differences between feminist theory and Marxist critical theory (which she argued had tended to ignore one another because of their fundamental difference in structural analysis) by emphasising their similarities:

Despite these differences, both critical education theory and feminist theory share an underlying concern with the relationship between the individual subject and an oppressive social structure. Both demonstrate the tensions between paradigms of production and reproduction as theoretical approaches, and both emphasise that social structures and knowledge are socially constructed and thus are open to contestation and change (1988:4).

Weiler argues that the categorisation of much social scientific theory into those which focus on the reproduction of knowledge and society and those which focus on production<sup>1</sup> applies equally to feminism, which has been deeply influenced by such theories. In her analysis of reproductive theories, Weiler distinguishes between social reproductive theorists (such as Althusser, and Bowles and Gintis), and cultural reproductive theorists (such as Pierre Bourdieu and Basil Bernstein). Louis Althusser's concepts of ideology and subject to explain the process by which members of society accept as 'real' their class identity and their relationship to the means of production has been drawn on by feminist theorists to explain how women 'buy in' to their own oppression. Similarly, Basil Bernstein's work on the role of language in the transmission of hegemonic culture, and his use of classification and framing to analyse this transmission, has also impacted on the work of some feminist theorists, who have used his work to look at the social construction of gender through language (Weiler 1988:11). Some feminists now argue that language itself is a male construct which thus in and of itself oppresses women.

But productive theories have had perhaps an even greater impact on feminism, possibly because feminists by definition resist their own oppression, and reproductive theories make no allowance for possible negotiation, contestation or resistance by individuals (Weiler 1988:8, 10).

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<sup>1</sup> 'Reproductive' forces are those which tend to recreate (reproduce) existing power relations. 'Productive' forces, on the other hand, disrupt existing power relations, and can create (produce) new processes and structures of power. Antonio Gramsci argued that hegemony, the ability of a dominant group to exert and/or maintain control over other groups, results not just from coercion but also from a more subtle psychosocial, ideological control, often exerted by cultural institutions (such as the church or the educational system), through which the oppressed or unfree to a large extent consent to their own domination. Reproductive forces thus operate to continue existing hegemonic forces; productive forces to dislocate these.

A productive theorist who has had much influence on feminist thinking is Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci's work on consciousness and hegemony has had widespread impact on social theory, and particularly on those who would like to believe that social resistance and transformation is possible. Gramsci's notion that individuals are shaped by the hegemonic culture of the dominant classes but, since they have the power to contest this, hegemony is constantly being contested and reimposed, has obvious applicability as a tool for understanding women's oppression. Many of feminism's established arguments reflect Gramsci's. Compare, for example, the now famous consciousness-raising women's groups with this well-known quotation:

The starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is and in 'knowing thyself' as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory (Gramsci 1971:326).

Interestingly, the consciousness-raising groups in fact preceded the appearance of this quote in English, beginning as they did in the United States in the 1960s.

Weiler (1988:38-39) argues that one of the most sophisticated and fully developed feminist production theories is that of Madeleine Arnot, who argues against reproductive theories, and uses Gramsci's concept of hegemony. Arnot argues that girls negotiate and construct their own gendered identities through the different definitions of what it means to be a woman that they receive from their families, peers, school, the media, and so on. This involves both contradictions and conflict, and girls' (and women's) identities are affected by the multiple oppressions they experience. Thus race and class experiences impact on the process of negotiating identity.

### *The Women's Handbook* within feminist theory

So how does feminist theory relate to the Handbook?

As has been seen, apart from the single male member of the Reference Group, we were very clear that we were involved in a gendered project - we were not producing a Handbook for everyone, we were producing one for women. But what theoretical framework were we carrying in our heads in doing this?

The Handbook itself includes a one page section at the beginning called 'Why do women need this handbook?', which is entirely in the form of a series of cartoon drawings:

# Why do women need this handbook?



The page includes three scenarios we, the authors, believed to be very common experiences of women - waiting in a pension queue, receiving medical advice (which is unintelligible), and being physically abused.

The pensioner is complaining about not having received a pension for three months, and is worried about having to feed her grandchildren. Her grandchildren are holding on to her skirt. This is a very common experience for many elderly women, particularly in rural areas, where many are responsible for looking after their grandchildren (and increasingly other children as well), and rely on their pensions to do so.

The patient is basically being informed that she has cancer. She is being told this by a male doctor who is not looking at her whilst he is speaking, and is using terminology she does not understand. He is also criticising her for not having come sooner. He is sitting on his desk, and is thus higher than she is, and in control of the situation. She is thus disadvantaged by being seated (and thus lower than him); not being talked to, but rather talked at; not having (or understanding) the correct language; by being in a state of undress; and being found at fault, quite apart from being told that she has a serious physical condition.

Considerable work has been done on the ways in which women are not treated well by the mainstream medical profession, particularly as regards the way they are spoken to by medical professionals (lack of respect; language too technical and not explained; choices not offered).

The victim of abuse has just been hit in the face by her partner, who is blaming her for the abuse. She is clearly alone (there is no-one else present, apart from her partner), and within her own home. She is in the kitchen, supposedly a women's sphere of influence, but is obviously not safe there.

There are very high levels of domestic violence in South Africa. Most domestic violence occurs within the home, where women are often isolated. Level of income is not a factor in predicting the likelihood of domestic violence; neither is race nor religion. Violence is often cyclical in nature, and women are usually blamed for the occurrence of the violence.

Thus this section is reflecting a common reality to the women at whom the Handbook is aimed (particularly since the pictures reflect different race groups and classes). However, in the final frame, the Handbook argues that women CAN do something about this reality; if they have information about 'laws to protect them and people who can help'. The book suggests that women can help themselves, using the information in the book.

What this section does not do is give any indication of why this reality exists - why women carry the burden of childcare, and are forced to use their meagre resources to do so, why women are badly treated by the medical profession, why women are abused by their partners. Much of the rest of the book is in the same vein - it reflects the reality experienced by many women (see, for example, *Police, Courts and Legal Help*, p.84; *Services*, p.262; *Women and Transport*, p.304), but does not really unpack *why* this is their reality, except in particular

instances. The reflection of reality is important, because it helps women to see that they are not alone in their experience; for many women, simply knowing that what they experience is in common with many other women is an important step in beginning to understand the structural nature of that experience - it is the first step in beginning to conceive of the notion of oppression.

The Handbook also shows that other women have fought against their experiences, in particular by giving women information about the Women's Charter near the beginning of the book (immediately after the contents pages). Thus the women who read the book are introduced early on to the notion that other women (and many of them) are unhappy about their experiences, and want these to be changed for *all* women. Obviously, the notion of rights is also a critical focus of the book.

In certain instances, the Handbook does broach the subject of the structured nature of women's experiences, and the role of power in this, rather than simply reflecting reality. Thus, for example, the section on homosexuality says:

Sometimes, women fall in love with other women. Some women want to, or do, have sex with other women. It is often very difficult for these women to accept their feelings, and talk about them to other people. This is because society is usually very against such feelings. Community leaders like religious leaders, doctors, teachers and other people may say that such feelings are wrong, or even evil. Also, their families are often very against such feelings. So, often women who feel this way feel guilty, bad or dirty. They also often feel very lonely because they cannot talk to anyone about how they feel (*The Women's Handbook* 1999:49).

The section on Women and Health, in its opening remarks about the particular health problems women experience, includes the following:

...[W]omen are supposed to look a certain way, according to some men, newspapers, television, magazines and so on. For example, women are supposed to be thin, to have pale skin if they are black, or sun-tanned skin if they are white, have breasts that look a certain way, and so on. Often women damage their bodies trying to look this way. Women may eat too little (because they think they are too fat); or hurt their skins by using chemicals to make them lighter, or getting sunburnt to make them darker; or have unnecessary operations to change the way they look (*The Women's Handbook* 1999:148).

How you feel about your own menstruation is often affected by other people's feelings and attitudes to menstruation. In our society, many people think that menstruation is something to hide, or it is dirty. If we look at menstruation as a normal part of a healthy life we do not need to feel dirty, or that we should hide it. It is not right for other people to say things that make you feel bad when you have your period (*The Women's Handbook* 1999:162).

Women also often feel bad during menopause because of the way other people see women. Often people think that the main job of women is to give birth to children. Menopause means that women can't have more children, so at this time women can often feel useless, and they are no longer sure of what their job or role is in society (*The Women's Handbook* 1999:166).

The introduction to the section *Women and work* also deals with the gendered nature of women's experience:

Women's work helps the economy of the country as much as men's work. But many women work in jobs with little pay and low skills simply because they are women and their bosses do not think they can do the same work as men, or that they should earn the same as men. Also, women often do not have the education or training needed for better jobs because they did not get the same opportunities as men...

At home, most women spend many hours working. They cook, clean, fetch water, garden, and look after children, sick people and old people. This is important work because it helps husbands and other people who are working for money to do their work. But many people do not think of this work as real work, because there is no pay (*The Women's Handbook* 1999:288).

The section on *Land and Housing* also comments on the ways in which women are disempowered by societal norms as translated into social (and legal) practice:

It is especially difficult for women to get rights to land...it is still usually a man who gets the rights to the land for the household. This can cause problems when things that the man wants are not the same as things that the woman wants. For example, the man might want to use the land to keep cattle. But the woman might want to use the land to grow food for the household. Because the man has the right to the land he decides what happens with the land.

Because many people don't think that women should be the head of a household women often don't have much power to make decisions in the community. Many people think that a woman's job is to work for the home and to have children. This means that even when a woman is the head of a household, she is not part of the group who makes decisions in the community...(*The Woman's Handbook* 1999:319).

But it is perhaps in the section on *Women and Violence* that we most clearly revealed our understanding of the structural nature of women's experience, and the role of power in determining this experience:

Violence against women is the result of many things. In our society, many men learn to think that women are their property (especially if the men "paid" for a woman with lobola). Many men also believe that women have a duty to serve men. For these reasons, many men think that they have a right to force women to do things. These men can use violence to control women.

It is terrible that many people in society agree that it is right for men to have power and control over women. They think it is all right for men to hit women (especially their partners), or to make sexual comments about women, or to touch women's private parts. Some people blame women for the abuse that happens to them. They think that women must "behave properly" and if they don't then they deserve the abuse. Even women tell other women that if they behaved better, they would not be abused. This is not true. Men who abuse women are responsible for what they do (*The Women's Handbook* 1999:126).

This section goes on to say:

When a man rapes a woman he is using his power to control the woman. Rape is an act of violence, it is not an act of sexual passion or lust (*The Women's Handbook* 1999:141).

A close reading of the text of the Handbook thus makes it clear that the Handbook falls within the radical tradition of feminism, seeing the experience of women as the result of the way in which society is structured to give power to men. Clearly, given its intention, the Handbook sees the possibility of education as a productive force; it believes that women can change their own experience. This will be discussed further below.

## Human rights and citizenship

Whilst the idea of human rights was conceived of thousands of years ago, the idea that human rights are universal, that they transcend governments and nation states, was only widely acknowledged with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 (Osler and Starkey 1996:2). Whilst not all governments and political movements have accepted this notion, the rhetoric of human rights has become an entrenched feature in international discourse.

However, the notion of human rights, and especially of universal human rights, has come under increasing attack in the last four decades. One major criticism of the notion of 'universal' human rights has emerged as part of the argument for the need for cultural relativism, which posits that different societies are entitled to continue 'traditional' practices even if these are counter to established human rights (Osler and Starkey 1996:8). This has gained momentum as a result of the cultural specificity which has emerged in reaction to globalization:

Religious, ethnic and cultural groups vigorously promote their particular claims to differentiate themselves from others and reject the process of homogenisation of world culture (Osler and Starkey 1996:9-10).

In addition, many writers within the postmodernist tradition have criticised the idea of universality as a Western individualistic project. However, such criticisms have been rejected by a number of writers in the field. For example, Osler and Starkey (1996:12) argue for a distinction between 'universality' and 'unity', and claim that the very notion of universal human rights supports and protects diversity since, because human rights transcend national, ethnic, cultural and religious differences, societies based on human rights are able to include and integrate individuals and groups (1996:vi). South African human rights writers McQuoid-Mason, O'Brien and Green (1991:10) argue that there is general agreement across cultures on certain basic values, like respect for life and human dignity.

Nevertheless, certain cultural and traditional practices continue to be criticised for violating human rights, for example arranged marriages, domestic violence, female circumcision, job discrimination, and so on, and the tension between culture/tradition/personal identity and universal human rights remains.



Educating people about human rights has been a concern of many (including the United Nations) since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. The intent of such education is relatively clear - to lay the basis for just communities, just societies, and a just world - although some suspect an ulterior motive behind some human rights education:

To me the noblest purpose of human rights and human rights education ought to be to liberate the oppressed and the marginalised. The object of rights struggles should be to create societies based on real equality and justice. We should guard against being part of so-called human rights education which only serves to pacify the marginalised and oppressed (Gutto 1994:1).

Eide (1983:3) argues that the ultimate goal of human rights education must be to make people behave in such a way that human rights are respected, protected and realised, and thus aims to influence behaviour.

However, the form such education should take is less clear. As Osler and Starkey point out (1996:70), there have been many models and many approaches to the teaching of human rights. De Senarclens, writing in the early 1980s, identified two main approaches to human rights education, distinguished by content. One looked at the mainly juridical aspects of human rights, focusing on international and national systems of human rights, instruments, institutions, and mechanisms for protection. The other belonged more within the social sciences than law, and focused on an analysis of why human rights abuses happen, and the problems in implementing human rights. He argued that the second approach was more likely to lead to worldwide improvement in human rights than the first (1983:12-13). De Senarclens also argued that at the time there was a neglect of economic, social and cultural rights in human rights education, which concentrated rather on civil and political rights (16), and said that it was unacceptable that economic rights in particular be neglected simply because they were hard to teach (18).

Civic education attempted to combine the juridical and human rights as social science approaches. Poulsen-Hansen (2002:113) (Deputy Secretary-General of the Danish National Commission for UNESCO) defines civic education as education about how human rights are embedded and used in society, and thus needs to cover not only what human rights are, but also reflect on the where and how of any particular situation.

More recently, since the mid-1990s, there has been a surge of interest in 'citizenship education'. This has arisen out of debate about the nature of citizenship:

The debate about citizenship is a debate about democracy, i.e. the kind of society we live in and the kind of society we want to live in (Martin 2000:12).

This debate has been an important one in that it looks at not only the kind of society 'we want to live in', but at what our role as citizens is in that society. Benn and Fieldhouse (1998), for example, give the following definition of citizenship:

...how an individual activates him or herself to be able to consciously influence their own situation and the situation of others in a democratic society (1998:44).

Ruth Lister has written a great deal on the subject of citizenship, particularly as it relates to women (see for example 1993; 1997). Lister argues that essential aspects of citizenship are agency, identity and independence:

To act as a Citizen requires first a sense of agency, the belief that one *can* act...agency is not simply about the capacity to choose and act but is also about a conscious capacity which is important to the individual's self identity (Lister 1997:38).

Thus if one does not have a sense of self, of one's own identity, and 'confidence that one is worthy to participate in political life' (1997:39), then one cannot be an active citizen.

However, to have 'citizenship value', individual agency needs to be translated into collective action, or social transformation is impossible (Preece 2002:89).

Citizenship education, then, is about both the individual, the collective, and the wider society:

Education for citizenship is concerned with both the personal development of students and the political and social development of society at local, national and international levels. On a personal level, citizenship education is about integration into society. It is about overcoming structural barriers to equality; challenging racism and sexism in institutions, for instance. It is also about developing personal commitment to the promotion of equality and social justice in schools and the wider society. On a political and social level it is about creating a social order that will help provide security without the need for repression. It is also about protecting democracy from anti-democratic forces such as organised racism and xenophobia. It is about promoting democracy and human rights as the basis for good society (Osler and Starkey 1996:71).

What citizenship education does, argue Osler and Starkey, is to combine civic education (which is about public principles), and moral education (which is about personal decisions). In so doing, it looks at the nexus between 'rights' (public ethical principles) and 'identity' (private or personal ethical principles and cultural background or inheritance).

So how should human rights be taught?

Richardson (1996) argues that citizenship requires two things:

1. knowledge of human rights
2. the opportunity to develop a feeling of identity.

Thus citizenship education requires at minimum a knowledge of human rights. Unfortunately, teaching this is done too often through 'diagrams in books or lists of rights' (Osler and Starkey 1996:76), and this is often very unsuccessful.

Lister (1984) argues that because the very nature of human rights engage not just the intellect but the emotions, human rights education cannot be limited to the cognitive domain (Osler and Starkey 1996:124). Osler and Starkey (1996) agree, although on more pedagogical grounds, and argue for a degree of action as well:

Education in human rights must itself have an affective dimension. This affective dimension finds expression in action. Action will, in turn, reinforce both the cognitive and the affective aspects of this education (1996:159).

Lister (1984) states that the human rights curriculum should have three aims; knowledge of human rights; understanding of procedural values such as 'fair treatment' and 'due process'; and skills (Osler and Starkey 1996:123). A number of writers in the field, including Lister, argue that human rights education should involve democratic teaching methods, where this is practicable, and should involve personal experiences and feelings (Osler and Starkey 1996:134-135; Poulsen-Hansen 2002:113).

Osler and Starkey (1996:154) expand on this, stating that pedagogy within human rights education must reflect human rights principles and, in particular, dignity, security, participation, identity, inclusivity, freedom, access to information and privacy.

Reflecting the principles of dignity and security implies that the relationship between the educator and the student is one which avoids the abuse of power by the educator, but does not forget the educator's right to dignity. The principle of participation requires that the educator is responsive to the needs of individual students and the group as a whole. Identity and inclusivity require the recognition of the multiple identities which an individual may adopt, respect for the individual and his/her culture and family, valuing diversity, and ensuring that the different/differently abled are not marginalised. Adhering to the principle of freedom means that pedagogy needs to permit the maximum freedom of expression, conscience, religion, association, and so on. Access to information requires the educator to ensure that the student develops the skills necessary to interpret information, as well access to a wide range of sources of information. Finally, the principle of privacy demands that the student's right to privacy with respect to his or her family and home is respected.

In 1994, African human rights workers gathered at a workshop on human rights education in Durban, South Africa, agreed that human rights education needed to be learner-centred to some extent, and needed to take into account the real life experience of the learners. It should thus be tailored to the needs of, and in the language understood by, the recipients. Nevertheless, the content should be the same (*Human Rights for Africa* 1994:10,12).

David McQuoid-Mason, a prominent human rights advocate in South Africa, argues that the most fundamental guidelines for human rights education are a combination of 'practice what you preach' and a Freirian approach, viz.

- accept everyone's idea critically
- ask communities [learners] what problems they face and build on their experiences and issues they can identify with (McQuoid-Mason as reported in *Human Rights for Africa* 1994:12).

Conteh (1983:58) emphasises the need to use a historical approach in teaching human rights in an African context, and argues for an Afrocentric approach. For example, human rights education in Africa should stress the demands which African peoples have made for rights over time, and their failures. Diokno (1983) points out that human rights education is often difficult to undertake precisely because it takes place within a human rights vacuum:

There lies the tragic irony of human rights education: that it is most needed when it is least safe (1983:40).

Given this, what Diokno calls 'informal channels of education' are often more important in human rights education than schooling. Such informal channels include literacy campaigns adapting the methods pioneered by Freire (39). NGOs play an important role in this enterprise and, even under anti-democratic governments, can use the teaching of existing legal rights (such as they are) to begin a process of human rights education. Thus people can be taught what their rights and duties are under existing law - what they can do, what they can't do, and why. People should be encouraged to discuss whether the laws do or do not solve their problems and, if not, why not and how they should be changed. Examples should be given of other communities who, by organising themselves and planning common action, obtained recognition of their rights or redress of the grievances. Diokno points out that this way of teaching carries some risk, but even authoritarian governments would have to see the political consequences of restricting a teaching of their own laws (40).

## Feminism and human rights

There is a clear connection between human rights and feminism, in that feminists argue that women's rights need to be understood as human rights:

First, gender-based abuses must be recognised as human rights abuses, and secondly, this understanding must lead to the transformation of prevailing concepts of human rights (Osler and Starkey 1996:139).

In this sense feminism broadens the concept of human rights in that it argues that human rights should not be seen as only crimes by the state, within the public domain:

Women's human rights violations have mostly taken place in the private sphere, and so have not been covered by international legislation (Osler and Starkey 1996:139).

The concern about the special dangers to women as a result of widespread human rights violations led to the writing and signing of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1981 (McQuoid-Mason et al 1991:63).

### *The Women's Handbook* within human rights theory

As has been seen, much of the Handbook is written from a human rights perspective, and emphasises the rights of women and their legal protection. The first section, *Why do women need this handbook*, says that the women portrayed in the cartoon images 'have problems but they don't know what to do about them. They don't know that there are laws to protect them...' (*The Women's Handbook* 1999:1).

Very early on in the book is a section called *Who makes the rules?* (12), which explains the concept of human rights, and talks about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and CEDAW, as well as the Bill of Rights in the South Africa Constitution. It goes on to discuss the bodies created in terms of the Constitution to protect rights, such as the Public Protector, Human Rights Commission, and Commission on Gender Equality (14-17).

Each section in the Handbook begins with a statement of what the Bill of Rights says about that particular issue, and this is highlighted through its positioning on the page (see, for example, *Marriage and Divorce*, p.26). Any policy or legislation furthering this right, or putting into effect, is also explained in each section. As has been seen above, the Handbook also identifies ways in which women's rights are violated.

Through the constant use of the term 'we', the use of the Women's Charter as a starting point, and repeated reiteration of the commonality of women's experiences, the Handbook attempts to foster a feeling of common identity as women amongst readers. Although the Handbook does acknowledge differences of class, 'race', religion, culture, and so on, it emphasises the sameness of experience far more often, constantly using phrases such as 'many women', or 'often, women', or deliberately arguing that a particular experience affects women whatever other identities they may have:

Many, many women in South Africa are battered...Battery can happen to any kind of woman. It does not happen only to poor women, or to young women, or to women who behave in a particular way (*The Women's Handbook* 1999:130).

Often, people in society think that only particular groups or cultures have women who feel this way. In fact this is wrong. Women who feel this way:

- can be any race or colour
- can be rich or poor
- can be any religion or culture (both traditional and modern)
- can be very young or very old
- can come from all different kinds of families (*The Women's Handbook* (Homosexuality):49).

The Handbook operates from an assumption that if women know about their rights, they can do something to make their lives better, or prevent their rights from being violated. This has been discussed above. However, the Handbook also argues that women working collectively can achieve more than women working alone. Thus the last section of the book is called *Women working together*, and says:

In most of this book we have talked about how you, on your own, can begin to deal with the problems that affect you. But, many of the things that you need to deal with are also important to many other women. In this book you can also see that many of the things the Government wants to do, or has promised to do, have not really happened. This book also shows that although many new laws help women a lot, many laws don't help enough. Or sometimes we find that having good laws is not enough if they don't really help to make our lives better.

Also, you can see in this book that there is often a big difference between the laws that we have now, and the things that women are asking for in the Women's Charter.

For these reasons it is important that women also work together, as well as alone. If a woman works alone, she can make a difference to her own life. But when a woman works with other women, she can change things in her own life *and* in the lives of other women. She can also change things in the lives of her children and family (*The Women's Handbook* 1999:400).

The section goes on to look at examples of how other women have achieved various things through collective action, and gives ideas about how women can work together.

The *Women's Handbook* is thus clearly a good example of the kind of citizenship education argued for by Ruth Lister, Preece, Osler and Starkey and Richardson:

- it provides information about human rights, both in fairly technical, legalistic terms, and in terms of socio-economic rights (particularly within a feminist framework)
- it attempts to develop a feeling of identity and solidarity
- it assumes agency - that individual women can act to change their lives - and argues this point strongly
- it argues for transformative collective action.

## Education, pedagogy, and learning theory

It is obviously not possible to explore such a vast field in any depth in this thesis. However, it is necessary to consider some of the key arguments and theories that have influenced the Handbook.

Perhaps the best place to begin is with some understanding of what education, learning and teaching is. This is not as easy as it might seem, since there is little agreement about what learning is, let alone how it happens, and even less on what education is, and whilst there is clear agreement on what pedagogy is (the theory of teaching), there are multiple theories of about the best kind of pedagogical practice. These are all relevant - although the Handbook was never intended as a mediated text (i.e. one which would be used by a 'teacher' to 'teach' women), it was, as has been seen, quite clearly seen as an educational text, from which women would learn. And how they would learn from it was informed by teaching and learning theories.

### Learning

Jarvis (2002) argues that learning is individual; education is social. Thus education can be controlled, and institutionalised; learning cannot:

Learning is uncontrollable inasmuch as it occurs within people, even when they learn in a controlled educational setting (2002:297).

Merriam and Caffarella (1999:249) suggest that although there are many definitions of learning, most include the concepts of behavioural change and experience - or at least the potential for change. They give as examples of useful definitions those by Hergenhahn (1988) and Maples and Webster (1980):

Learning is relatively permanent change in behavior or in behavioral potentiality that results from experience and cannot be attributed to temporary body states such as those induced by illness, fatigue, or drugs (Hergenhahn 1988:7).

Learning can be thought of as a process by which behavior changes as a result of experience (Maples and Webster 1980:1).

How, then, does learning happen?

Merriam and Caffarella (1999:250) argue that there is 'little consensus on how many learning theories there are or how they should be grouped'. They argue for five basic 'orientations' - behaviourist, cognitive, humanist, social learning and constructivist. All of these have ideological underpinning, since, as Jarvis (1995) points out,

*no theory is value free so that the theories of learning cannot be divorced from the wider worlds of ideology and belief (1995:60).*

**Behaviourist** theories are derived from the work of behaviourist psychologists, such as John Watson, Ivan Pavlov and B.F. Skinner, who attempt to explain why it is that people behave in the way they do in particular situations. Only observable behaviour is held to be of any significance, not mental activity. Learning is thus the acquisition of new behaviour. Behaviourists argue that people will respond in particular predictable ways to particular stimuli. Thus by experiencing either positive or negative reinforcement of a particular behaviour, the learner will learn to repeat it.

Behaviourism has been criticised for, *inter alia*, not being able to account for some learning, such as the recognition of new language patterns by young children, where there is no reinforcement. It has also been criticised for ignoring mental (cognitive) activity and emotions.

**Cognitive** theorists look not just at observable behaviour, but at the processes that go on in people's minds. They thus reject the notion that it is the actual behaviour itself that is the most important factor - rather, the behaviour is a manifestation of cognitive processes.

One of the most influential cognitive theorists is Piaget, who argued that children go through a number of stages in their cognitive development, linked to their biological development. Thus, at different stages, children are cognitively able to learn certain things - and not other things.

There have been many other theorists and theories that could be grouped under the category of cognitive theories, and the way in which these then intersect with theories of instruction, including, for example Ausubel, Gagne, and Bruner (Jarvis 1995:62-63; Merriam and Caffarella 1999:254).

**Social learning** theory combines elements of both behaviorist and cognitive theories. This theory argues that people learn by observing others - which they generally do within a social setting. But watching is not enough - what is seen must be imitated and reinforced for learning to happen. The link with behaviourism is clear. In the 1960s, Bandura's work emphasised the cognitive processes, thus breaking social learning theory from a purely behaviourist tradition. Bandura argued that it is possible to learn through observation alone - imitation is not necessary. In addition, people are able to imagine an outcome to their actions

- and can thus regulate their behaviour (Merriam and Caffarella 1999:259). Learning through observation requires four things: attention (which will vary depending on how interesting, important etc. the learner finds what he/she is observing), retention (remembering), behavioural rehearsal (comparing one's behaviour with that which one remembers), and motivation (Hergenhahn 1988). Bandura also argues that a person's actions are affected by how competent he/she feels within a particular environment (Merriam and Caffarella 1999:260). Thus behaviour is affected by both the environment and the cognitive processes within a person's mind - and he or she affects the environment and is in turn affected by it.

Merriam and Caffarella cite Rotter as an important influence within the social learning tradition. Rotter's work in the 1950s suggests that different people react differently to their own experiences, depending on the extent to which they feel in control of their lives. Thus someone might tend to exhibit an external locus of control (he or she feels that his or her successes or failures are the result of something 'out there' over which he or she has no control) or an internal locus of control (he or she feel that his or her successes or failures are more to do with his or her own actions). The extent to which a person feels that the locus of control is internal affects the extent to which he or she is likely to engage in learning activities or to change his or her behaviour and so on.

**Humanist** theories consider not only the cognitive dimension of learning but the affective dimension as well. Thus humanists draw in part on Freud's work, in particular the role of the subconscious, whilst rejecting the concept of 'human nature' as somehow predetermined (either by the environment or the subconscious) as proposed by both cognitive theorists and Freud. Such theorists tend to argue that 'people are inherently good, and will strive for a better world' (Merriam and Caffarella 1999:256); they are able to make conscious choices, and can control their lives. Two of the most influential writers arguing this view have been Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers.

Maslow's theory is that people are motivated by a 'hierarchy of needs'. A person needs to attend to different needs at each level in this hierarchy, from basic physiological needs at the lowest level to 'self-actualisation' needs at the top. A person is unlikely to be motivated by higher-order needs until lower-order needs have been met. Thus, for Maslow, becoming everything he or she is capable of - developing to his or her full potential - is a real human need; but other needs may be more immediate.

Carl Rogers argues that things to be learned need to be significant to learners, or they won't be learned - they need to address the needs and wants of the learners. Thus 'learner-centredness' is an important part of the learning experience.

**Constructivism** incorporates a number of different elements. Constructivists argue that learning is a process of constructing meaning.

[I]t is how people make sense of their experience (Merriam and Caffarella 1999:261).



However, constructivists vary in their understanding of reality, the role of experience, and the extent to which this is an individual or a social enterprise (Mirriam and Caffarella 1999:261). Those advocating a more personal approach suggests that learning is an individual activity, in which an individual makes meaning, and the meaning is shaped by the his/her previous experience and current knowledge. The individual compares what he/she already knows (his/her previous experience and learning) with new experiences/knowledge. Where there is 'disjuncture' - their previous response to a previous experience is not appropriate, they have to stop and think - in other words, reflect on what is happening.

Social constructivists argue that knowledge is the result of individuals talking to each other about 'shared problems or tasks':

Making meaning is thus a dialogic process involving persons-in-conversation, and learning is seen as the process by which individuals are introduced to a culture by more skilled members (Driver et al 1994:7).

Others within this tradition (Phillips 1995; Cobb 1994) have argued that constructivism successfully brings together both the individual enterprise of those such as Piaget and Vygotsky with the social enterprise of, for example, feminists, and can explain how individuals build up individual bodies of knowledge whilst communities build up public bodies of knowledge (Merriam and Caffarella 1999:262). People need both, particularly if one subscribes to the view that we have agency:

[T]he constructivist view of learning is particularly compatible with the notion of self-direction, since it emphasizes the combined characteristics of active enquiry, independence, and individuality in a learning task (Candy 1991:278, quoted in Merriam and Caffarella 1999:262-3).

## Education

What then is education? As seen, Jarvis (2002) argues that learning is individual; education is social. Thus education can be controlled, and institutionalised. So the real debate is about what education is *for*, and this profoundly impacts on one's understanding of how it happens.

Perhaps one of the most influential writers on education in the Twentieth Century, Paulo Freire, argued that education was a political project:

Freire argues that the whole activity of education is political in nature. Politics is not one aspect of teaching or learning. All forms of education are political, whether or not teachers and students acknowledge the politics of their work. Politics is the teacher-student relationship, whether authoritarian or democratic. Politics is in the subjects chosen for the syllabus and in those left out (Shor 1993).

Thus education can have a reproductive, or a productive, role. Social reproductive theorists, for example, have explored how education serves to reproduce social relations. For example, in the 1970s, a number of writers began applying Marxist political economy to schooling. Carnoy, in a study of schooling in the United States, argued that schooling served the needs of the dominant capitalist classes (Youngman 2000:34). Ivan Illich, in his famous work *Deschooling Society* (1971), argued that institutionalised education was a powerful means of controlling citizens.

Others, however, rejected this, arguing that education can be a tool for change, if an alternative approach to pedagogy is adopted - with the adult educationist, Freire, being one of the most influential.

Van Damme (1992) has examined production and reproduction theories from an historical perspective, and shown how what he calls the 'educational optimism' of productive theorists is linked to certain historical periods, and has its roots in the Enlightenment:

Regularly, and mostly in periods of rapid social change and modernisation, pedagogical optimism explicitly comes to the centre of educational thinking and practice. An important recent period of unambiguous pedagogical optimism certainly were the sixties and seventies (1992:54).

He argues that the belief of 'educational optimism' that education can compensate for class is misguided, and is historically negated, but the belief persists because of a desire to do 'good' (54-55):

The number of ills that education is supposed to cure is growing constantly and the limited capacity of other social systems, such as the family or the local community in dealing with social problems, seems to contribute to a further overloading of the educational system. This observation not only applies to unemployment, poverty, crime, and other 'classical' social problems, but also to issues such as drug abuse, environmental topics, traffic and mobility, war and peace, racism, democracy and citizenship, sexuality and personal relations, health and physical fitness, etc. Each of these problems is seen as a primary responsibility of the education system and to each of them corresponds a specific educational approach and strategy. There is no specific evidence that education is more successful in dealing with these problems than other social systems: the only plausible explanation is that society in general is overly optimistic about the capability of the educational system to deal with these problems (1992:55).

Van Damme argues that neither production nor reproduction theories seem to be borne out in practice. Postmodernism, however, also does not have all the answers. Postmodernism offers a profound critique of educational optimism, because it rejects the concept of subjectivity and autonomy, both of which are fundamental to modern educational thinking. One of the major proponents of postmodernist thinking, Lyotard, is deeply critical of modern educational theory, arguing that 'educational theory is full of grand narratives' (quoted in Van Damme 1992:59). But Van Damme argues that educational optimism should not be replaced by either postmodernist relativism or the growing educational conservatism and pessimism; but its efficacy as an agent of social change and emancipation needs to be seen in more limited terms, within the narrow margins between agency and determination (60).

## Pedagogy

Pedagogy is about how education and learning come together. Obviously, then, pedagogy is profoundly affected by one's understanding of how people learn; but, according to Freire, it is also determined by the political intention of education. Freire distinguished between liberating education and domesticating education. Domesticating education is underpinned by the 'banking' theory of education, in which the educator (the one who 'knows') transfers knowledge to the learner (the one who doesn't yet 'know'). Liberating education required a different theory, and a different pedagogy - problem-posing education.

Freire argued that by thinking about their own lives and problems, individuals could affect their own lives, their communities, and ultimately all of society. Freire's pedagogy is thus rooted in his belief that individuals could be agents of change, if they were helped to reflect on their lives and problems, and work out how to tackle these. Thus learners' own lives are the starting point of any educational event. The educator's role is to identify the most important issues ('generative themes'), the ones upon which learners are most likely to act, by listening to the learners talk about their own lives and experiences. These 'generative themes' must then be problematised. Freire argued for the use of 'codes' - in the form of a poster, a play, an object, a song, a story, a newspaper article, a proverb, a case study - to prompt discussion in the classroom. The code should deal with a theme about which the learners have strong feelings, and should relate very closely to common, everyday, experience. The point of the code is to stimulate interest, and prompt engagement. Thus the code should never present an answer, but rather a problem. Learners must be assisted to see that the issues are not an unchangeable part of life, but a problem which can and must be addressed. Both reflection and praxis thus become an absolutely essential part of the education process:

*At all stages of their liberation, the oppressed must see themselves as women and men engaged in the ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human. Reflection and action become imperative when one does not erroneously attempt to dichotomize the content of humanity from its historical forms.*

*The insistence that the oppressed engage in reflection on their concrete situation is not a call to armchair revolution. On the contrary, reflection - true reflection - leads to action. On the other hand, when the situation calls for action, that action will constitute an authentic praxis only if its consequences become the object of critical reflection (Freire, 1996:47-48).*

What has thus to be developed in learners is 'critical consciousness', the ability to reflect, critique, and act upon a situation to bring about change.

Freire's work has been built on by many educational theorists over the last three decades, and now forms part of a body of theory termed 'critical pedagogy'. Roger Simon (1992), an Ontario University-based academic instrumental in the development of the concept of 'critical pedagogy', argues for what he calls a 'pedagogy of possibility', since he is concerned that without a sense of what might be, it is difficult for learners to construct an alternative to what is, however able they are to critique and problematise this. He thus suggests that the critical function of education is to create 'images of that which is not yet' (9), which must

*provoke people to consider, and inform them in considering, what would have to be done for things to be otherwise...For without a perspective on the future, conceivable as a desired and possible future, there can be neither human venture nor possibility (1992:9).*

Thus Simon argues that education is not only a political but also a moral enterprise, and this has profound implications for pedagogy:

*To suggest that education is a moral and political enterprise raises at least two central questions that must enter into deliberations as to how one should formulate one's responsibilities as a teacher. The first of these is what the moral basis of one's practice should be; that is, what are the desired versions of a future human community implied in the pedagogy in which one is implicated? The second is, given our own moral commitments, how should we relate to other people who also have a stake and a claim in articulating future communal possibilities?(1992:15)*

What then is the 'desired versions of a human community'? Simon is clear that the fundamentals of such a vision relate to overcoming the ways in which individuals are limited by structural relations:

[E]ducational practice should participate in a social transformation that is aimed at securing fundamental human dignity and radically reducing the limits of expression and achievement imposed by physical and symbolic violence (1992:17).<sup>2</sup>

Simon argues that human capacity is indissoluble from the historical moment, and that pedagogy aimed at helping individuals to achieve their 'full potential' remains a limited intervention, since it does not take into account the fact that their potential is limited by social forms. A 'project of possibility', on the other hand, can help people see beyond existing social forms, to new ones, ones which expand human capacities, and expand the range of possible social identities people may become. Education has an important role in this project, and thus pedagogy needs to support this:

[I]f education is to be a resource for a process through which individuals attempt to become subjects of their own experience, pedagogical practice must find ways of addressing not only the enhancement of an individual's potential for the acquisition of skills and knowledge but as well the development of resources with which people can begin to challenge and transform those relations which structure the available opportunities from which to choose (1992:19).

However, Simon argues, it is not enough to merely focus on the individual:

[A] project of possibility has a double ethical address: the person and the familial and communal forms within which people live (1992:30).

Thus the project of possibility must secure:

- human diversity
- compassionate justice
- the renewal of life.

Whilst much of Simon's work focuses on how this pedagogy might work in schools (and he rejects the notion that it is impossible to have a 'pedagogy of possibility' in schools - that schooling is in and of itself reproductive), he emphasises that his pedagogy is not only applicable in schools, but also in any other form of education (including adult education) (4, 42). He argues that in this sense educationists are cultural workers. Simon emphasises that it is not the role of educationists/cultural workers to 'imprint' their own ideas (however progressive) on others:

In my view, a progressive pedagogy cannot proceed from the intention of getting those people who participate in our classrooms, watch our films, read our books and magazines, listen to our radio programmes and music, occupy our buildings and urban spaces, and attend our congregational activities to think and act as we do. From a critical pedagogical perspective, occasions of organized symbolic production are not meant as imprinting exercises. If we assume people always come to an engagement

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<sup>2</sup> Julius Nyerere voiced a similar opinion some years before, in somewhat starker terms: 'The skills acquired by education should be liberating skills. Nothing else can properly be called education' (Julius Nyerere, quoted in Basista et al 1986:10).

with symbolic productions already known, and with concerns and questions important to their lives, the task for the progressive cultural worker is to engage such people so as to provoke their inquiry into and challenge their existing views of "the way things are and should be". This will mean offering questions, analyses, visions, and practical options that people can pursue in their attempts to participate in the determination of various aspects of their lives. While the image of learning within a critical pedagogy may be characterized as occurring within structured provocation and challenge, it must remain open and indeterminate. Required is practice rooted in an ethical-political vision that attempts to take people beyond the world they know but in a way that does not insist on a fixed set of altered meanings (1992:46-47).

Whilst critical pedagogy remains a significant force within educational theory, it has come under attack by postmodernists. Wildemeersch (1992), for example, argues that critical pedagogy suggests that it is possible to reveal the truth about reality, and if you follow the rules of critical thought, people will be liberated. However, if you take the argument of postmodernism that there are multiple truths and realities, this becomes a false argument:

In my opinion this element of arbitrariness [with regards to "truth" and "reality"] is not sufficiently taken into consideration in the tradition of "critical pedagogy" (1992:27).

Critical pedagogy, says Wildemeersch, assumes that both educator and student are able to consider reality impartially, and that there can be a rational dialogue between them. He disputes this (28).

### **Feminist pedagogy**

In the late 1980s, Weiler argued that a feminist pedagogy was in the process of being developed (1988:1). She identified as the fundamental element of this pedagogy an understanding that educators cannot escape their own gender, class and race identity, and bring these into the classroom. Thus educators need to problematise their own identity, and their relationship with their students. Teachers need to make existing social relationships problematic, and make sexist ideology and practice conscious. Essential to this is dialogue between teacher and student (1988:144).

Weiler argued that the basis of feminist teacher's work was recognition of the value of their students' own voices, the subjective experience of power and oppression, and the worth of their class and ethnic cultures (1988:149)

What should women be taught?

Ballara (1996) argues that a feminist approach to adult literacy and basic education focuses on women's actual situations, their practical needs, and their strategic interests. Issues such as domination, sexuality, violence, and so on, are included in a feminist curriculum. She also states that many women leaders have identified further learning areas for women. For example, women and girls need training in negotiation and conflict resolution - what and how to negotiate, how and when to consider other interests, when and with whom to make alliances, and how to bargain in an effective way with men.

### *The Women's Handbook* within educational theory

Given its overt aim of empowering women, the Handbook falls quite clearly within a critical notion of education. Its use of women's experiences, as discussed above, as the basis for beginning discussion on an issue, suggest that it subscribes to constructivist arguments about learning and teaching.

The Handbook is brazenly and irrevocably 'educationally optimistic', to use Van Damme's phrase - it believes that social change is possible through education. It is thus in many senses a modern text. However, it does assume that its readers will bring multiple identities - they will not only be women, but also of different classes, races, urban or rural, and so on. But this is more rooted within radical feminism's early understanding of the multiple identities of women (made clear in radical feminism's concept of multiple oppressions), than it is in postmodernism's relativity.

## Adult and Adult Basic Education

Obviously, Adult and Adult Basic Education is in many respects a sub-set of the broader field of education. It is, nevertheless, a discrete sub-set which requires careful consideration because, as Jarvis (1995) argues, adults are different from children because they have greater experience, and, as has been discussed above, according to experiential learning theory learning begins at the point when there is a disjuncture between people's past learning and the present situation. Children have less experience, and are thus confronted with many points of disjuncture. As they grow older, these points of disjuncture become fewer.

However, in terms of what Lyotard calls the 'grand narratives' of educational theory, adult education theory closely reflects the different frameworks of education more broadly.

### **Traditions in adult education**

Two broad traditions are commonly identified in adult education, the liberal tradition and the radical tradition, with the radical tradition being closely aligned to productive theories of education and hence to critical pedagogy.

The liberal tradition of education, and adult education, has its roots in classic Greek philosophies, and has been around in various permutations since then (Werner 2000). The liberal tradition emphasises education for personal development - education undertaken for its own sake. One of the leading writers within the liberal tradition is Malcolm Knowles, whose 1978 work on adult education is based on a humanist concept of the adult learner, does not take into account the significance of different class or gender backgrounds of learners (Youngman 2000:3).

The liberal tradition has remained a very strong tradition within adult education, and, some would argue, has gained ground in the recent appearance of 'lifelong learning' (see below). The radical tradition, on the other hand, rejects the individualistic, humanist stance of liberalism, and criticises liberals for failing to see how individuals are integrated into society and structurally affected by society. Youngman (2000), for example, asserts that the liberal notion of the adult learner hides the ways in which individuals are constrained from acting, and argues that

an important task for adult educators is to analyse the determining factors in their [the learners'] situations so that the influences on their choices are well understood. To do this, adult educators in whatever organisational setting must undertake systematic enquiry into specific socioeconomic contexts (2000:4).

The radical tradition has been an aspect of adult education since the nineteenth century, and has been influenced by various political and philosophical positions, including, but not only, Marxism.

This tradition encompasses adult education concerned with social justice and struggles for social change (Lovett, 1988). It is characterised by its emphasis on the link between adult education activities and social action, particularly through collective participation (Youngman 2000:32).

This tradition, then, sees adult education as a potentially productive force, and has drawn on the work of a number of leading productive theorists, including Antonio Gramsci, who, in his work on hegemony, identifies adult education as a means for challenging oppressive hegemonic ideas and practices, because of its flexibility and its frequent location outside of institutional settings (Mayo 1995:2). Gramsci's ideas are frequently referred to in writings by those within the radical tradition of adult education (Ibid:3), and, as we have already seen, within the radical feminist tradition. Thompson (1983), in a much cited work, makes the link between Gramsci, radical adult education, and women's oppression and liberation:

Gramsci was convinced that despite the all pervasive power of ruling groups, which he called hegemony, education has an important part to play in challenging this ubiquity - especially adult education, which he regarded as political education. Gramsci's analysis was formulated in the context of factory councils and working class industrial struggles, but the same conviction that education has the potential to affect political consciousness holds good. For women the opportunity of education can be enormously significant (1983:97).

The radical tradition has also been profoundly influenced by the work of Paulo Freire. As has been seen, Freire is now seen as one of the seminal influences not only in adult education, but in education more generally.

In the last decade, a number of writers have attempted a synthesis of Gramsci and Freire's work as it relates to adult education (see for example, Coben 1992; Mayo 1994a; 1994b; 1995; Torres 1990).

Coben (1992) for example, looks at Freire's analysis of the transformative role of adult education in liberating the oppressed, and at Gramsci's concept of politics as educative, his writing on hegemony, the role of intellectuals and the nature of education in a revolutionary process. The relationship between Gramsci, Freire and the Liberal Tradition is explored.

Coben considers the appropriateness of the emergence of Gramsci and Freire as 'Radical Heroes' in radical critiques and developments of the Liberal Tradition in adult education.

Since the 1990s, there has been a call for adult education to pay more attention to postmodernism. Westwood, for example, writing in 1991, argued that adult education had to date largely ignored postmodernism. In his opinion, this was short-sighted, since postmodernism has 'a special resonance for adult education' (1991:44). Westwood believes that the decentred view of the subject offered by postmodernism allows adult educators to rethink the notion of 'adult' and of 'learner' in ways that could be helpful in understanding how adults learn (54-55).

The liberal and radical traditions, however, remain strong. Increasingly, the radical tradition has developed close relationships with non-class-based social movements, such as the women's movement, the peace movement and the environmental movement (Youngman 2000:33). Adult education is a critical component of citizenship education. In a recent study of an adult education programme amongst metalworkers in Brazil, Fischer and Hannah (2002) consider the link between adult education and citizenship. They argue that 'in adult education, the promotion of active citizenship has been a pervasive theme in both the liberal and radical traditions' (257), and point to the recent growing debate in adult education about the relationship between citizenship and adult education in theory and practice, citing work done by Bron et al (1998), and Johnston (1999).

However, Fischer and Hannah argue, in recent years the dominant discourse and policy framework within which adult education has been located, 'lifelong learning', is highly economic and places the needs of the economy before the needs of the learner. This is a departure from both the liberal and the radical traditions of adult education, as Hyland (1994) has argued:

There is a world of difference between education and training provision driven by economic objectives and the sort of learning proposed by the adult education tradition - concerned with 'enlightenment' (Simon 1990) and the fostering of 'critical practice...and direct engagement in definable concrete projects for social change' (Collins 1991, p.119) (Hyland 1994:138).

Martin (2000) argues that there are two dominant discourses of citizenship in contemporary adult education policy and practice:

Both are fundamentally economic in the sense that they posit at the centre of our conception of lifelong learning the idea that human beings are essentially economic animals - creatures of the cash nexus. The first discourse constructs the adult learner as a worker or producer...The second discourse of citizenship constructs the adult learner as consumer or customer (2000:12).

In the first discourse, adult education is seen as the key to competitiveness in the global market. In the second, adult education is a commodity to be bought and sold according to individual lifestyle preferences.



Despite the current sway of the economic trend in adult education, argue Fischer and Hannah, there are still spaces for the liberal and radical traditions of adult education (2002:259). Youngman (2000) argues that the liberal notion of adult education is too strong, and argues for a return to the more radical tradition. Thus he states

The dominant approaches in adult education scholarship are based on individualised conceptions of the adult learner and the adult educator. These approaches are derived from the standpoints of psychology and philosophy rather than social theory, and they embody liberalism's concept of the free and autonomous individual (2000:3).

### *The Women's Handbook* within adult education theory

In many respects, the Handbook falls within the radical tradition of adult education; although, in its belief that knowledge is a good thing in its own right, it also draws on liberal, humanist traditions.



## Chapter 6: The Women's Handbook as product

This chapter will first explore what pertinent 'best practice' exists within the frameworks just discussed, and then examine the extent to which the Handbook-as-product actually complied with this.

### Materials development 'best practice'

Arguments about what constitute good or bad materials, how to develop effective materials etc. are located within the different paradigms concerning how adults and children learn, read, and so on, and the purpose of developing the materials, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Thus, having identified that the Handbook is located within the broad paradigm of critical pedagogy, and more specifically a Freirian and feminist stream within this paradigm, this section will look at what those writing from this perspective have to say about how materials should be developed. In addition, whilst much has been written in the broad field of materials development, clearly what is most relevant here is that relating to stand-alone materials developed for adults with limited reading ability.

It is here important to distinguish between different kinds of materials for adults with low reading ability.

In the first instance, clearly, there are **different formats of materials** - most writers distinguish between, for example, printed materials and audio-visual materials, whilst printed materials can include very different kinds of materials, from books to posters.

But even the same kind of material, such as a book, can have very **different purposes**. Fordham, Holland and Millican (1995) divide materials targeting readers with low reading ability into two categories, 'special' materials, produced expressly for literacy learners, and 'ordinary' materials, which are materials generally available in a community, not expressly designed for teaching purposes (1995:128). This suggests that materials have to be one or the other, and is perhaps not a very useful categorisation. Possibly more useful is their suggestion that there are materials which have as their primary aim reading to learn, and others which aim at learning to read. The Asian Cultural Centre for UNESCO (ACCU) Guidebook also categorises materials into those specifically intended to increase neoliterate reading skills, versus materials aimed at broader development. These development materials it again divides into two - those which can help neoliterates directly (such as simple lessons on health and nutrition, poultry farming, civic duties and responsibilities, and so on); and those which make neoliterates aware of benefits or beneficial projects, but which require help from government or NGOs to access (for example income-generating schemes, legal rights, and so on, which require supportive economic, political or social structures) (ACCU Guidebook 1985:12). All of these materials could be broadly defined as having as their purpose 'instruction', as Romiszowski (1981) defines it:

By 'instruction' we shall mean a *goal-directed* teaching process which is more or less *pre-planned*. Whether the goal has been established by the learner or by some external agent such as a teacher or a syllabus is immaterial. What is important is that a predetermined goal has been identified (1981:4).

Other categories of materials for different purposes which have been used include distance materials and 'easy readers for adults' (called ERA) (see, for example, Aitchison 1999). Easy readers are defined as:

...any matter in any language which makes concessions to a lack of proficiency in reading skills or to difficulties with mastering the language of the text (French 1992:240-241).

In this thesis I also use the term 'stand alone' materials to indicate material that is not intended to be mediated (eg. by a 'teacher').

An important issue is also that of **level**. One fairly crude categorisation is between materials for those who cannot read ('illiterate' people, who require a mediator, such as a teacher, to help them to work through the material), and material for those who can ('literate' people, who do not require a mediator), but this does not take into account the fact that people have widely varying reading ability - some people may be able to read a fairly dense academic text with little difficulty, whilst others struggle to decipher a newspaper article.

The ACCU Guidebook (1985:3-5) thus suggests that neo-literates (those 'who have acquired basic literacy skills through primary education or through literacy classes') be divided into three categories:

1. beginning level (neo-literates who have limited reading skills and those who need guidance to use learning materials and need simple reading materials suited to their interests and needs)
2. middle level (those neo-literates who can read interesting stories, songs and comics by themselves and try to understand them in relation to their daily experiences)
3. self-learning level (neo-literates who are able to study books and newspapers independently, and are willing to seek out reading materials).

The Handbook can thus be seen as

- a piece of printed material, and more specifically a book.
- whilst it is educative in intent, and instructional in the sense that it is goal-directed (the goal - to learn more about certain issues and how these can be tackled - having in this case been determined by the readers and the developers) and pre-planned, it does not include specific instructions on its use for educative purpose, nor educational activities etc. Thus, whilst it is not intended for use in the classroom, and could thus be seen as distance material, it cannot strictly speaking be categorised as such. Rather, it is an educational text with some similarities to a reference book or even text book, with the aim of helping readers to learn, rather than learning to read.
- It is neo-literacy material, in the sense that it specifically targets an audience with low levels of reading ability; but within this category, it is at the high level (what UNESCO would call the self-learning level).

So what makes for a good piece of educational material targeting adults (and more especially women) with low reading ability? Here I will consider writings broadly pertinent, given that much that has been written on the topic does not conform exactly to the above categorisation of the Handbook. Thus, for example, the wealth of information on the development of neo-literate materials assumes a certain level of learning to read, rather than reading to learn. In addition, whilst the Handbook is not instructional, some of the techniques advised by those developing instructional distance material are helpful, and I have thus included these.

Considerable research has been done on the development of stand-alone/distance materials for adults, and there is a great deal of literature on this topic (see for example, Rowntree 1994). There is far less available on the development of stand alone materials specifically targeting adults with limited reading ability. Most research in the area of adult basic education is in the area of teaching, curriculum, and materials for the classroom, rather than stand-alone materials<sup>1</sup>, and even a cursory glance at the papers presented at various Regional Literacy Forums, and even the annual International Conference on Literacy, shows how little attention this subject is given, with barely a single paper at each of these bearing some relevance. Aitchison (1999) suggests that this dearth is a relatively recent phenomenon:

The recent literature on the subject of easy readers is surprisingly limited in scope, compared...to the amount available on this subject during the literacy campaigns of the sixties and seventies (1999:41).

However, some fairly recent relevant work has been published. For example, at an international level, UNESCO has been involved in a number of literacy initiatives which have included the issue of materials for neo-literates, and a number of publications have resulted from this (for example, guidebooks developed by the Asian Cultural Centre for UNESCO in the late 1980s, and by the State Education Commission, China, in co-operation with UNESCO bodies, 1988), and more recently a paper presented to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Regional Literacy Forum in New Delhi, India in 1998 gives very practical steps for the developers of materials for neo-literates (Reghu 1998). In addition, a considerable number of guidelines, conference papers, 'practical guides' and so on have been produced for those developing health materials for adults with limited reading ability (see, for example, Davis 1991; Gatson and Daniels 1988; Matiella 1990; Melton 1990; Mettger 1989; Nitzke, Shaw, Pingree and Voichik 1986; Zimmerman, Newton, Frumin and Wittet 1989).

As could be expected, the format of the material (eg. printed or not, book or poster etc), the purpose, and the level, all need to be taken into account in answering the question of what makes for good material targeting readers with low reading ability, but there is some agreement on certain basic requirements (many of which apply to any educational material). These cover both the process used to develop the material, and the product. This chapter will consider those that relate to the product.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example, Soifer's *The complete theory-to-practice handbook of adult literacy*, published in 1990, which contains astonishingly little on materials either in or out of the classroom, and appears to suggest that any text will do. Interestingly, a recent publication specifically looking at basic education at a distance (Yates and Bradley 2000), which looks at different distance/open learning models, for both children and adults, in and out of the classroom, also includes absolutely nothing about materials.

## Developing educational material targeting adults with low reading ability - the product

It is generally agreed that developers of educational materials need to pay attention to the way the material looks:

If your materials look grotty, learners may ignore them. Or pick them up with low expectations.

And if your materials are awkward to use or poorly packaged, they may misuse them, abuse them, and lose bits of them (Rowntree 1994:129).

How your written educational material looks will influence whether or not your target audience will pick it up and use it (Oregon State University n.d.).

But this is not merely because of the possible psychological/emotional response to the material - there are sound educational reasons, too:

Layout and composition in designing should, first of all, render letters, words and sentences, as well as illustrations, graphs, and photographs, in a easily readable and understandable way, and, additionally, be such as to draw the reader's interest (ACCU Guidebook 1985:59).

Indeed, having your material look good could be educationally problematic:

In neo-literate materials the purpose of layout is to organize and present material in order to facilitate learning...One may have originality in layout but if the target neo-literates are unguided or confused, then that layout has failed a major test (ACCU Guidebook 1985:60).

There are a number of issues which need to be considered here, including:

- format
- shape and size of the final product
- binding
- paper quality
- use of colour
- typeface/font
- white space/margins/columns
- illustrations.

### **Format**

The discussion above looked at the importance of deciding on the format of the materials as part of the process of developing them. Since the Handbook is a printed text, this format is perhaps of most interest here, but it is important to note that there are a (growing) variety of possible formats for educational materials, each with its own advantages and disadvantages.

The ACCU Guidebook (1985) says the following about books (over 100 pages) and booklets (under 100 pages):

Printed books and booklets have certain distinctive qualities which give them a position of pre-eminence among neo-literacy materials. They are:

a) Books can actively help in self-education. Most other educational materials need help of other agents or educational aids. The learners use books and booklets at their own time and convenience. They can become part of the reader's life. They can be used when and where they are wanted, repeatedly, if necessary.

b) Books can be easily carried and easily produced.

c) They can cover much wider areas of knowledge and keep in step with expanding knowledge.

d) Books promote in a much more positive way understanding and reasoning of the readers as they can reflect within a time-bound and arranged programme. But to enable books to perform their useful role, certain conditions should be fulfilled (1985:30).

Zimmerman, Newton, Frumin and Wittet (1996) also argue that there are a number of advantages to using print materials:

- they come in many forms (eg. books, pamphlets, flip charts etc)
- they are easy to store and can be used without any special equipment
- they are an excellent tool to reinforce messages presented verbally during interpersonal contacts
- they can be used as reference material by the target audience
- they go beyond the original recipient, since they are often shared by others
- they are usually appropriate for local production and can be tailored for specific audiences
- they improve user comprehension compared to purely verbal information
- they can counteract rumours, reduce fear, and reassure the target
- they may serve as a motivator for those who want to improve their literacy skills (1996:7-9).

Rowntree (1994:68) argues that print is best suited to (although not the only medium suited to) provide a carefully-argued analysis of a specific subject, and ask learners to answer questions about the subject.

Galombik et al, in a South African report in 1994, said:

Print will undoubtedly remain the major medium for many years to come. It is good for detail and has immediacy, permanency, is easily retrievable, and is controlled absolutely by the reader allowing pacing, reference, repetition and revision. It is also reasonably cheap to produce (Galombik et al quoted in Aitchison 1998:2).

Silverblatt (1995:24-26) identifies the following characteristics of print:

- print is a tangible medium
- it is portable
- it can be reread and examined in depth
- it lends itself to detailed presentation of information and discussion of complex issues
- it enables the author to describe what people are thinking as well as doing
- it can be held accountable for the accuracy of the statements made, because authors are generally named
- reading is a physical activity that demands an intense level of concentration and energy
- reading also requires relative solitude
- the writer as well as the reader establishes the pace at which the material is to be read.

### **Shape and size**

Rhegu says that the size of the book 'must be handy' (although he doesn't explain what this means) (Reghu 1998). He also recommends that material targeting a Level 3 reader (able to read and comprehend a short passage) should be between 24 and 32 pages at the most. The ACCU Guidebook (1985:59) says that the paper size must best fit the condition, mood, expression and needs of the target readers.

### **Cover**

The cover should have a bright background colour. The cover should be durable, and as stiff as possible (Fordham, Holland and Millican 1995:130). Reghu says that any illustrations on the cover should be 'proper and relevant' (he does not explain this) (Reghu 1998). The title should be in clear bold type, and centred on the page (Fordham, Holland and Millican 1995:130). The title must clearly reflect what the content of the book is (Matsuoka 1987:39).

### **Binding**

A good binding must be used so that the material does not fall apart (Reghu 1998).

### **Paper quality**

The ACCU Guidebook (1985) argues that the selection of paper is an important factor:

because materials for neo-literates are read and otherwise used a number of times, the materials they are printed on should ideally be as durable and light in weight as is economically possible (1985:60).

The ACCU Guidebook gives the following six factors as the basis on which paper should be chosen:

- smoothness
- softness and flexibility
- oil absorbency
- whiteness or colour and hue
- strength and durability
- size (1985:60).

Fordham, Holland and Millican (1995:130) assert that the paper should be dense enough so that the ink does not show through on the other side.

### **Use of colour**

The ACCU Guidebook (1985) points out that black produces the most stable image in terms of legibility and reproductibility, and thus monochrome printing using black only can be very effective. However, although colour pushes up the production costs, it make materials more attractive, and is particularly important on the cover. However, colour should not be used indiscriminately:

Use of colour should also be based on custom, tradition, preference etc. of people in the target area (1985:60).

Text, however, should be solid black on a clean background with as much contrast as possible (Fordham, Holland and Millican 1995:130).



### **Typeface/font**

The size of the font affects its readability, as does the typeface used.

The ACCU Guidebook (1985:59) argues for a plain readable typeface rather than complex or difficult-to-read typefaces. It also says that the size of font should be larger than that usually used. Reghu (1998) recommends using a typeface of between 14 and 24 points, depending on the level of the reader. For example, materials aimed at a reader at Level 3 (able to read and comprehend a short passage), should use a minimum of a 16 point font. He also says that it is important to use standard shapes of letters. Fordham, Holland and Millican (1995:130) also recommend using a clear, open typeface which does not confuse letter forms or symbols (eg. the letter l and the number 1 should look different). The font should be consistent, and must be large enough to be clearly seen. Fordham, Holland and Millican (1995:131) recommend that the lower case be at least 2mm high whilst the upper case be at least 3mm high.

It has also been suggested that serif fonts are easier to read than sans serif fonts, although studies have not shown this consistently (Oregon State University n.d.). In addition, words written in all capitals are far harder to read than words which use upper and lower case. Oregon State University gives the following useful illustration to demonstrate this:

**ALL CAPS WORDS**  
**ARE HARDER TO READ**  
because  
**they lack the unique**  
**shapes of lower case**

Because the shape of words is the same when they are all in capitals, the reader finds it harder to distinguish between shapes, and thus harder to read.

### **Length of line**

Rowntree (1994:132) asserts that a common mistake made in the development of distance learning materials is that too long a line of type is used. This makes for tiring reading. He thus recommends using a shorter line, either by making the margin wider, or by using columns (although this can make the text on the page appear too dense). Where it is not possible to use a shorter line, the space between lines needs to be wider.

### **White space/margins**

Material is easier to read, and more approachable to readers, if text is balanced with white space:

Through effective use of blank (white) space, the possibility of psychological resistance to the script is minimized and affinity with the materials is encouraged by the reader (ACCU Guidebook 1985:60).

Sufficient white space can be ensured through the use of wide spacing between lines of text; using a more graphic layout of the text itself (such as boxes or bulleted lists), and through wide margins. Fordham, Holland and Millican (1995:131) recommend that the margins be big enough so that someone can hold the page without covering any text with his or her hand; however, they warn that if margins are too big, adult readers will believe that the material is intended for children and will not want to use it).

### **Illustrations**

All of the literature specifically dealing with materials for readers with low reading ability emphasise the importance of illustrations, although actual evaluations done of such materials tend to suggest that this is perhaps the most problematic area for many materials (see, for example, Aitchison 1998, Davis 1991; Lyster, 1995; Mngomezulu 1994a and 1994b).

Illustrations are not just an important tool to help balance text and white space; they can increase understanding, and help the reader to decipher the text. The use of illustrations is thus one of the key characteristics which the ACCU Guidebook (1985) suggests neo-literate materials should display:

Neo-literate materials should utilize visual aids like illustrations, charts, photos and drawings as much as possible, and these should be appropriate for the learners' interests and needs (1985:8).

Reghu (1998) goes even further. He suggests that between 25% and 50% of the space material should be illustrations, depending on the reading level of the target audience. For example, material aimed at a reader at Level 3 (able to read and comprehend a short passage) should have 25% of its total space given over to illustrations. Such illustrations must be clear and relevant.

It is critical that illustrations convey the object clearly, and are as simple and concise as possible (Matsuoka 1987). They must be accurate (in other words, they must conform to what the reader knows and see around him and her), and easily recognisable. They must also be attractive, interesting and enjoyable (Kaewsaiha 1987).

The relationship between illustrations and the text must be clear. Fordham, Holland and Millican (1995:131) also suggest that text should not be put next to an illustration, if possible, but rather above and/or below it.

Text itself can be made more graphic, for example by using bulleted lists, or tables (Rowntree 1994:117).

### **Headings**

Headings help to organise the information on the page, whilst at the same time acting as a 'signpost' to the reader, so that he or she knows what information is coming next. Headings should be underlined or in bigger typeface, or in bold, so that they catch the reader's eye and break up the page. Headings should never be in all capitals, or in reverse print (white on colour) (Oregon State University n.d.).

## **Other signposts**

Headings are important signposts, but there are others as well:

- Circles, boxes, arrows etc. can draw the reader's eye to important information (Oregon State University n.d.);
- Page numbers are important for cross-referencing, and should be large enough and in the same place on every page, so that they can be clearly seen (Fordham, Holland and Millican 1995:131).

But writers on the subject argue that it is not only the way your material looks that is important - it is also what they say and the way they are written. The following aspects are important in this respect:

- content
- style and tone
- language use
- use of technical terms (jargon)
- sentence length
- sentence structure.

## **Content**

It is generally agreed by those researching and writing in the field of materials development that the content, whatever it is, needs to hold the interest of the reader. This can be enhanced through the various elements discussed below (style and tone, use of simple language and sentence structure), as well as by making the material easier to read as discussed at some length above. However, holding the interest of the reader means first and foremost ensuring that the content is relevant and interesting to the reader:

*The neo-literate materials must be interesting to read. If the learning material could create interest and sustain it, the adults would be interested to continue learning [or reading] (ACCU Guidebook 1985:8).*

The ACCU Guidebook emphasises the need for content to cover the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains of learning. Whilst they do not have to be present in equal proportion, they must all be present, and should mutually support each other. This is because education

*is a programme for change, and change can only be beneficial when the right kind of challenge can arouse the right kind of feeling or emotion to initiate the right kind of action (ACCU Guidebook 1985:13).*

Rhegu (1998) argues, based on the Kerala experience, that content needs to fulfill four requirements:

1. It must be relevant to the reader's daily life, environment, needs, occupation, interest, age group, background, and so on.
2. The language must be at the level of readability of the target audience.

3. The material must add to the knowledge the readers already have. It must be current, real and logical. It is very important that the material reflects values.
4. The content must be structured so that one idea at a time is conveyed, clearly and completely (Rhegu 1998).

However, some of the literature goes further, and stresses that the content should be shaped in certain ways. For example, the ACCU Guidebook (1985) says that neo-literate materials should 'promote good citizenship, national integrity, taste for art and culture, etc.'. It also says:

The neo-literate materials should be correlated with individual and social development goals. The materials should contain ideas, and information about overall national and individual development programmes, and some specific materials should contain information about specific development activities. The neo-literate materials should promote an inter-disciplinary approach in contents, and facilitate inter-departmental co-ordination of the different agencies/programmes (1985:8).

Many writers also emphasise the importance of posing problems:

The neo-literate materials should not just pass on information and facts, but should pose problems or describe potential problem conditions and provide related technical and scientific knowledge to aid in solving the problems (ACCU Guidebook 1985:8).

The content, and the way it is presented, is clearly related to the goals of the material. The ACCU Guidebook (1985), as mentioned, has a Freirerian outlook, and thus emphasises the need for problem-posing, using the living conditions of the target audience as the point of departure:

When adult learners gain insight into their existential situation they become active agents of development and not passive recipients of information. This awareness can help them understand problems better and to examine different options before deciding on a course of action. To weave this awareness into the general fabric of literacy materials requires skill and acquaintance with the actual living conditions of the learners (1985:8).

The content thus needs to help readers to understand why things are the way they are, but more than that to help them to understand that change is possible through their own efforts (Ibid.).

### **Style and tone**

Reghu (1998) recommends story, drama, dialogue and narration as appropriate forms for new readers, although more technical subjects are better presented in a non-story way. Examples and experiences should be used throughout to aid readers' understanding. Both problems and solutions should be presented.

Rowntree (1994) gives the following suggestions to developers of distance materials:

#### **Be conversational:**

- refer to your self as 'I' or 'we', and the learner as 'you'
- use contractions (you'll, can't) where natural
- use rhetorical questions
- use reference that the learner will identify with from his or her own daily experience

#### **Be welcoming:**

- say who you and the co-authors are, and what your own experience is in the subject of the material
- remember that your learners are diverse
- avoid language and examples that might exclude or offend any of your learners (1994:139).

#### **Language use**

Writers on materials development are agreed on the use of plain language in educational texts. However, for readers with low reading ability, the use of mother-tongue is also widely recommended:

[T]here is general consensus that neo-literate materials in the mother tongue of the learners are much more easily learnt than are materials in other languages (ACCU Guidebook 1985:8).

#### **Use of technical terms (jargon)**

Rowntree (1994:139) argues that specialist words should be introduced with care, and that short, familiar words should be used wherever possible. Concrete rather than abstract words should be used, and surplus words should be cut out. Reghu (1998) emphasises that for readers with limited reading ability technical terms must only be used where necessary, and must then be explained and examples given.

#### **Sentence length**

Rowntree (1994:139) says that sentences should be kept short (about 20 words), but the length of sentence should vary.

#### **Sentence structure**

Rowntree (1994:139) says that sentence structure should be kept simple.

So good materials are a combination of all of these factors:

The neo-literate material should be simple, attractive and interesting. Since neo-literates have relatively low levels of language skills, the language used in the learning material should be simple and easy, while the theme and the topic should be suited to the level of maturity of the adult learners. The adult learners do not like to be treated as children (ACCU Guidebook 1985:8).

## Materials specifically targeting women

Some work has been produced on material specifically targeting women, but few of these have been framed within an androgogical perspective, much less a liberatory one. Very little indeed exists on developing stand alone basic materials targeted specifically at empowering women. In a recently completed Ed.D dissertation, Miller (2002) points out the scarcity of women-centred literacy materials, and the need for such materials to be developed.

In her thesis, Miller explored why it is that so few literacy and neo-literacy materials specifically targeting women have been produced. She used a number of 'conversation circles', based on the cultural circles of Paulo Freire, 'as a dialogic way to begin to work collaboratively with women learners through their learning centres' (Dissertation framework and methodological process:5). Multiple sites were chosen for these circles, in an attempt to capture the 'voices, experiences, and diversities of 'women'', by including different ages, race groups, languages, urban/rural locations, classes, and educational goals. A total of 52 women were involved in the circles, ranging in age from 18 to about 55. Nearly half of the women were African American, and at least half had children (Who participated in the Learner Conversation Circles:1-2).

In these conversation circles, women talked and wrote about what reading materials most appealed to them, and what they would like to read more about.

Whilst Miller's work was done in the United States of America, a context very different from the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands, some of Miller's findings drawn from the conversation circles are useful for reflecting on, and show some marked similarities to the experiences of the Women's Handbook project. The women in Miller's conversation circles highlighted a number of things they would like to learn and/or read about, including:

- help with talking to their children about issues such as puberty, sex, homosexuality
- help with practical issues concerning their children, such as childhood illnesses, or how to help their children with their own education, homework, and so on
- broader social issues, including crime and violence, child care, racism, substance abuse
- health issues, particularly sexual and reproductive health (including STDs and HIV/AIDS), and issues such as abortion, menopause, eating disorders
- self help
- their own and other cultures
- domestic violence, rape, child abuse
- work and how to get a job
- money matters and consumer issues
- relationships and romance
- spiritual, religious and devotional books
- current events
- legal and civil rights of women
- and various others, including cooking, sports, computers, driving (2002:3-16).

Women emphasised that they would only read what really interested them:

I'm interested in writings mostly connected to information and people's daily lives...I want to read for information that women can use in their daily life. I'm interested in...looking up information to see where women can get help, finding where to get jobs or a place to live and how to get day care. (Miller 2002: Our concerns)

I struggle with reading but will stick with a book if it keeps my attention. If I lose interest, I will put it down (Ibid: Reading).

As far as format is concerned, women liked magazines the most:

Magazines are better because the articles are shorter and there's a whole lot of different kinds of articles in magazines. We like them better than books. It's hard to stay focused and read a whole book, especially alone (Conversation Circle Summary: Formats:1).

Only three women said that they read newspapers; two of these read a newspaper specifically produced for adult learners. Women emphasised that they liked large fonts, and pictures:

I like books with big pictures, especially when the pictures help to explain the text (Ibid:2).

Women also spoke of the need for bilingual texts, or texts in their mother-tongue; but emphasised that it was important that the translation be good (Ibid:3).

Ballara (1991), in her work on women and literacy, argues that post-literacy materials must focus on the reader, and must include subjects which meet women's concerns. Such materials should attempt to promote dialogue and discussion (1991:64). Ballara, however, although pointing out that evaluations of literacy projects at least show that these are more likely to succeed if women's basic motivations and needs are taken into account, argues that asking women themselves (the usual recommendation) is not always a good idea. This is because women cannot always identify problems which require structural change, or develop a strategy for dealing with these (50). She thus recommends collecting general and local information from which to begin to identify needs, and then using a participatory approach to establish a list of priorities (58).

## The Women's Handbook as product

So, how well does the Women's Handbook comply with the 'best practice' for developing materials for women with low levels of reading ability?

On the following page is a fairly typical page from the Handbook. This can be used as departure point for comparing the Handbook with the best practice outline above.

## Consumer Issues



### Words you need to know

- **Assessor**  
Someone who checks that you are claiming a reasonable amount
- **Case Number**  
The number that the police give you which proves that they are investigating (that is, finding out about) your problem
- **Quote**  
Prices that shops tell you they charge
- **Damaged**  
Broken or not working properly

when you fill in the form, and check with the insurance company that you can make another claim when you are sure you can list everything. If you cannot make another claim, then do not fill in the form until you are sure you can list everything you want to claim for.

7. The insurance company may send a person called an **assessor** to check if what you said in the claim was true.
8. The company will look at your claim, listen to the assessor and decide what to pay you. They will send you a letter telling you about their decision. If you disagree, you must tell them as soon as possible. Usually an insurance company will ask you to sign a paper where you agree with what they say. Be sure you agree before you sign this paper, because it means that you cannot disagree with what you get paid later.

### What happens if you miss a payment?

Different insurance companies have different rules about what happens if you miss a payment (that is, your premium). What happens will also depend on the kind of insurance you have. Usually if you miss a payment, the agent/broker will look at how long you have been paying and if you have missed any payments before. He or she will work out a payment plan for you. If you are having problems paying, contact the insurance company to check if the insurance will still help you if anything goes wrong.

If you miss a payment and something goes wrong, for example you have a car accident, you can still make a claim but the company might pay you out less because you missed a payment, or might not pay out at all.

### Household insurance

Household insurance is when you insure your property at home, like your furniture, clothes, books, TV, hi-fi, fridge and so on. The insurance will usually pay out if your things are stolen or damaged by fire or floods. The company will pay you money to get new things or to fix the things that were damaged.

This is the kind of information insurance companies want to know before they sell you household insurance:

- where you live
- how safe your house is, for example if it has an alarm and burglar guards



<b>'Best practice' guidelines</b>	<b>The Women's Handbook</b>
<b>format</b>	
Printed texts are fine, and may carry some advantages over other formats - in particular, they can be referred to again and again	The Handbook is indeed a printed text.
<b>shape and size of the final product</b>	
Should not be more than 32 pages Should be a 'handy' size	The Handbook is over 400 pages! It is A4 size, and about 2.5cm thick - not particularly handy! It is, however, broken up into discrete sections and chapters.
<b>cover</b>	
Bright Title bold and centred Title should make it clear what it contains Cover should be durable and stiff	(Please see picture of cover on page 24) The cover of the Handbook covers all of these criteria. The cover is solid colour (purple) with a bold logo (that designed for the project) on the front cover and a clear title and a sub-title that explains what the book is about. On the back cover are 12 of the logos used in the book, and a list of the chapter headings to make it clear what is included. The words 'The Women's Handbook' (or its Zulu equivalent) in large letters, and the Handbook logo appear on the spine. The cover is made from 230g board, and although not stiff, it has proven to be remarkably durable (all of the copies we have seen, although weathered after use, are still intact). We used a fairly high-quality board (Icena Linen) with a matt finish.
<b>binding</b>	
Durable - must not fall apart	The Handbook is folded in 16, 8 and 4-page sections and unsewn bound. From the many, many copies we have seen, even those that have clearly been thoroughly used are still in one piece.

<b>paper quality</b>	
<p>Must not be see-through Quality must be fairly good, so it will last and look good</p>	<p>We used the cheapest paper we could find that was not see-through - Sappi Super 60gm - which is often used for text books. This is not a high quality paper, and looks off-white rather than white. It is not particularly attractive.</p>
<b>use of colour</b>	
<p>Black-on-white is best - colour is not necessary</p>	<p>We have used black text on off-white paper throughout.</p>
<b>typeface/font</b>	
<p>Should be serif Use a plain readable typeface Should be big enough to read easily (larger than normal) Do not use all capitals - rather use upper case and lower case</p>	<p>We used Dom Casual for major headings and Poppi-Laudetti for minor headings and the body text, both sans-serif fonts. The font is not larger than usual - the body text is 2mm high (lower case). We have not used all upper-case headings anywhere in the book.</p>
<b>Length of line</b>	
<p>Should be a wide margin, so line is not too long - margin should be big enough so that someone can hold the page without covering any text with his or her hand Should be good spacing between lines</p>	<p>The margin is about 8cm wide, or more than one-third of the width of the page (i.e. a very substantial margin). It is indeed possible to hold the book and not cover the body text with your hands - but given how much information is in the margins, you do have to cover quite a lot of information! Although the headings are given quite a lot of spacing, there is no additional line spacing.</p>
<b>white space/layout of text on the page</b>	
<p>Text must be balanced with white space Graphic text should be used - for example, boxes and bullets</p>	<p>There is considerable white space, due to the wide margin, the division of the text into small chunks, the use of graphic text and the extra spacing given to the headings.</p>

<b>illustrations</b>	
<p>Should constitute about 25% of the space Should be clear Should be culturally appropriate</p>	<p>There are in fact relatively few graphics - and they certainly do not constitute a quarter of the book! The first page is almost entirely taken up with cartoon-like pictures, and 2 chapters begin with a line-drawing. There are also line drawings showing the women's reproductive system; how to insert a tampon; different kinds of contraceptives; how to examine your breasts; different kinds of intestinal worms; and different hazard logos. We also used logos to differentiate one chapter from the next, and these appear on each page. There is also a line-drawing of a woman's head and shoulders ('Thandi'), who points to specific pieces of information with a speech bubble saying 'Warning!' or 'Take note'.</p>
<b>headings</b>	
<p>Use headings to organise the page Make headings stand out by eg. underlining, making them bigger, giving them more space, etc. Do not use all capitals Do not use reverse print (eg. white type on black/colour background)</p>	<p>The text on each page is broken into chunks through the use of headings of various sizes. None of these use all upper-case; and all of them are black on white.</p>
<b>other signposts</b>	
<p>Use signposts such as circles, boxes, arrows There should be page numbers, and these should be large and in the same place on every page</p>	<p>We have used logos, headers, 'Thandi', etc. as signposts All pages are numbered in the bottom outside corner in Dom Casual (about 8mm high)</p>

<b>content</b>	
<p>Must be relevant to readers' daily life - use living conditions as the point of departure</p> <p>Content must be interesting, pose problems etc. - not just pass on information/facts</p> <p>Content must be current, real and logical. It is very important that the material reflect values.</p> <p>Content must be structured so that one idea at a time is conveyed, clearly and completely</p>	<p>This has already been covered in some detail - suffice it to say that the book does use readers' daily experiences as its departure point. What the book doesn't really do, and which has been discussed in the last chapter, is pose problems - rather it simply tries to reflect reality.</p> <p>The Handbook is certainly value-based. Each chapter tries to present information in a logical order, as has been discussed in Chapter 2.</p>
<b>style and tone</b>	
<p>Should be conversational/welcoming</p>	<p>As has been seen, we spent a lot of time and effort trying to ensure that the book was as reader-friendly as possible. However, the book talks mostly about 'you' the reader, rather than 'we' the women.</p>
<b>language use</b>	
<p>Use plain language</p> <p>Use mother-tongue</p>	<p>As has been seen, the text was written by people who have considerable experience in writing for adults with low levels of education. It was then edited by experts in the field.</p> <p>There is both an English and Zulu published version of the Handbook (as has been mentioned, it was also developed in Afrikaans, but this was never published). The vast majority of women in Midlands are Zulu-speakers; most of the remainder are English-speakers.</p>
<b>use of technical terms (jargon)</b>	
<p>Avoid using too much</p> <p>When necessary, explain and give examples</p>	<p>We tried to keep the language as plain as possible (see above). Where we felt a 'technical' term had to be used (eg. affidavit), this is bolded in the text and explained on that page in a glossary box in the margin called 'words you need to know'. In fact, we have done this with any word that we felt a reader might struggle with, and not only technical terms.</p>

<b>sentence length</b>	
Keep sentences short (about 20 words), but vary	Sentences vary in length, but are in general slightly more than 20 words each.
<b>sentence structure</b>	
Keep sentence structure simple	The original draft of both the English and Zulu versions were thoroughly edited specifically to ensure that the writing was kept as simple as possible, with simple, straightforward sentence structures.
<b>writing for women with low levels of reading ability</b>	
<p>Write what woman want to read about</p> <p>Use large font</p> <p>Use pictures</p> <p>Write in mother-tongue (if translated, the translation must be good)</p> <p>Whole books are a problem - shorter texts are better</p> <p>Try to promote dialogue and discussion</p>	<p>Although we have deviated from Ballera's suggestion of deciding before-hand what to write about, and getting women to simply prioritise this, using the process we used made it far more likely that we would write about what interested women - and this has been confirmed by the focus groups.</p> <p>As has been discussed above, we didn't use a large font; nor did we use many pictures. We also produced a very substantial book.</p> <p>The evidence suggests that the book did promote dialogue and discussion to some extent, even when used as stand-alone material<sup>2</sup>.</p>

Thus the Handbook complied with best practice to a remarkable degree. It deviates from best practice in three important ways - the size and type of the typeface; the size of the book itself; and the fact that it does not consciously attempt to promote dialogue and discussion or any kind of conscientisation (this has already been discussed at some depth in the previous chapter).

Even before we printed the book, there was discussion about the length of the book, and whether we should rather print a number of separate booklets. We ultimately decided not to do this, since it would raise the cost of printing, but, more importantly, because many of the sections contained references to other sections. For example, the section on women and violence talks about the need to make an affidavit. So does the section on marriage and divorce, and the section on consumer issues. How to make an affidavit is covered in detail in the section on police, courts and legal help. Similarly, there are many, many references

<sup>2</sup> At the MWG Annual Consultative meeting in October 2001, one woman reported 'Women in my community come together and refer to the Women's Handbook and discuss matters, we don't just stay at home and cook and look after children (MWG. 2001. Minutes of Annual Consultative meeting, 20 October 2001).

throughout the book to the Women’s Charter - which is covered in a separate section at the beginning of the book. Thus splitting up the chapters would have required endless repetition of the same information.

We were unable to test the size issue at the pre-printing workshops to test the materials, because we did not have a whole book ready - only certain chapters were tested. (No-one commented on the size of the typeface at these workshops). However, there has been considerable comment from women since the book was first distributed about its size. Many women complained the book is too fat, and that this puts them off reading it. We thus decided to include a specific question about the thickness of the book in the focus groups when we asked women how easy they found it to find information and read this:

<b>Focus group venue</b>	<b>How easy is it to use the Handbook?</b>
Greytown	[Women responded to this question by talking about how easy it had been to put it into practice]
Impendle	Very easy, because it is in Zulu, the font is big enough to read easily, and the pictures help. The thickness of the book was off-putting when they first got it, but once they started reading it, it was fine.
Ixopo	Easy to find information, especially because of the logos. The language is easy, and hard words are explained. However, the book is too thick (but they were adamant that we could not leave anything out if we printed it again!)
Matatiele	Very easy to find information, because of the logos and the contents pages. It is very simple to read. It is not too thick.
Richmond (Nhlazuka)	[This was not discussed at this focus group]
Sobantu	Do not change anything about the book, except for more information about tertiary education opportunities, ABE classes, and school fees.
Tembaletu (Muden, Qanda, Stoffelton)	Easy to read because the pictures [logos] help you find what you are looking for easily. The language is fine.

Thus two of the main ‘faults’ of the book did not feature to any great extent in women’s comments about ease of use. And it would appear that they did not prevent women from accessing the information in the book, or putting it into practice, as Chapter 4 had shown.

The organisations to whom the questionnaire was sent were also asked to comment on the Handbook as a product, including its size. They were, on the whole, very complimentary about how easy to read the book is, and did not feel that the size was an issue:

Organisation	What do you think about: How easy it is to find the things you are looking for in the Handbook; Layout; Level of language; Content; Thickness.
Centre for Criminal Justice	Layout - excellent Level of language - accessible to lay persons Content - informative Thickness - adequate for extent of topics covered
Family and Marriage Society (FAMSA) Pietermaritzburg	Information is easy to find layout is excellent language is simple enough for people on the ground to understand content - excellent given the information in the Handbook, I personally don't think it could be any smaller or thinner.
Training and Resources in Early Education (TREE)	It is user-friendly. It is at the level of the people. It is easy to read because of the bold print. The layout is excellent. It is written in acceptable language which is easily understood especially by Blacks. The thickness is fine because of all the information that it contains.
Children in Distress Network (CINDI)	I found the layout and categories user friendly in the English edition (NOTE this respondent was not able to read Zulu) Yes, I guess it was a bulky document, but given the amount of information could this ever have been avoided?
Thandanani Association	The book is very user friendly, and both languages used are basic and easy to understand, they actually do not require any higher level of literacy. The use of visuals along with information is superb. Even those who cannot read and write can understand through pictures. The layout is well presented and eye catching. The content is very relevant and informative. It raises awareness on issues affecting women e.g. divorce, wills, etc. The thickness of the book is not an issue since it is exactly the same size as the telephone directory which people are familiar with and use on a daily basis, but the good thing about the women's handbook is that it is lighter than the telephone directory thus making it easier to carry.

Thus the Handbook as a product is arguably an excellent example of best practice - and this must, to some extent, account for its success as described in Chapter 4. But best practice in adult basic materials development really only guarantees that someone with a relatively low levels of reading ability will read it - not necessarily put it into practice.

However, as has been seen a number of theorists within the critical paradigms which influenced the Handbook have argued that process is as important as product - so I now turn to the process of creating the Handbook.





## Chapter 7: The Women's Handbook as process

Since the project hopes to empower women to make the leap from having information to practically using it to their benefit, the process used in creating the Handbook is critical (Harley 1998).

We used the process we used because we had to make the book as relevant as possible so it would meet the needs of women (Ashnie Padarath, member of the Reference Group, Interview, 14 November 2002).

From the beginning of the project, we were quite clear that the process was critical to the success of the product - that if we did not develop the Handbook in a particular way, it would not matter much what the Handbook looked like or contained, it would almost certainly not meet the needs of women and hence would not be used by them in the way we hoped.

We saw the process of developing the Handbook as consisting of the following steps:

1. finding out women's information needs in order to determine the content of the Handbook, through consultative workshops with women in the Midlands;
2. gathering accurate information on this content;
3. writing, editing, and laying out the text;
4. assessing the accessibility (in terms of language and layout) of the draft Handbooks through workshops;
5. launching the Handbook through appropriate events with media coverage;
6. disseminating the Handbooks.

Evaluating the effectiveness of the Handbook in use was identified from the beginning as an important part of the project process but, as has been stated, has only been undertaken as part of the research for this thesis. However, an internal evaluation of the process was conducted by the project team.

I argued from the beginning of the project that particular points along the way were pivotal to the success of the project, and repeatedly emphasised this with the various members of the team involved in each of these steps:

### *The consultative workshops*

These were the workshops held at the start of the process to find out from women what they wanted in the Handbook. If these were not done well enough, the issues raised would not necessarily be the ones that women were having the most problem with, or would not be representative. If this were the case, the Handbook would be useless, and we might as well not continue the process.

### ***The research***

If we were not accurate enough in our research about the things to be included in the book, then women would get incorrect information; they would not accomplish what they set out to achieve; even worse, if this were the case, they might no longer trust the book, and make no further attempt to read it or use it; and even worse than that, they might never make another attempt to do anything to change their lives for the better. Thus we had a moral obligation to ensure accuracy.

### ***The writing and layout***

If the writing was too hard, or too vague, women would be put off, and would not read it. Again, the Handbook would be useless to the women we most wanted to target (rural women with little education), and we might as well not have developed it. Similarly, the layout had to be reader-friendly enough for women to be able easily to find the information they were looking for.

### ***The distribution***

If the Handbook did not go to the ordinary women we were hoping to reach, again, we might as well not have developed it.

Thus much of the effort in the conceptualisation and planning of the project went into ensuring that these four aspects were carefully and thoughtfully dealt with.

But how well did we actually implement this? How good was the process we used? And did we use the correct process?

As I have argued, the nature of the Handbook and the Handbook project is relatively complex, given that we drew on a number of disciplines and theoretical positions in our thinking about it. Given this, I think that the process used to develop the Handbook needs to be critiqued against the key learnings which can be drawn from the theoretical position/s which influenced the Handbook - feminism, feminist pedagogy and feminist research; human rights and citizenship; Freirian/critical pedagogy, particularly as it pertains to adults; and action research.

In this chapter, then, I intend to look at what is broadly considered best practice from the particular theoretical perspective which influenced the Handbook as discussed in Chapter 5. I will first compare the actual process used in developing the Handbook to the best practice statements of those involved in materials development, particularly materials targeting adults with low levels of reading competence falling within an emancipatory framework, since the Handbook is first and foremost a piece of material. I will then consider best practice statements by those involved in research within the research paradigms most relevant to the Handbook, and test the Handbook project against these. In doing this, I will take into account the critique of those who were actually involved in the development process in the internal evaluation conducted in mid-1999.

## 'Best practice' in developing educational material targeting adults with low reading ability - the process

The *Guidebook for development and production of materials for neo-literates*, published by the Asian Cultural Centre for Unesco (ACCU) in 1985, argues that there are two main approaches to the production of materials for neo-literates. In the first approach, the presumptive or unsystematic approach, writers or producers presume that they know, because of their own instincts or intuition, what is good for the target audience:

In this approach there seems to be sympathy or concern for the neo-literates, but what is lacking is empathy, the ability to look at the problems they face from their point of view by placing oneself in their position (1985:12).

Not surprisingly, given that the Guidebook falls squarely within a Freirian approach, it dubs this approach 'undesirable'.

In the second approach, the planned and organised approach, the target audience is placed 'squarely in the centre of the picture' (1985:12).

The Guidebook argues that there are certain key characteristics which neo-literate materials should display, many of them related to this need for learner-centredness. These include:

The materials should focus on the real and immediate problems of the learners and the environment in which they are living.

They should promote active learning i.e., they should help to develop a critical attitude towards problems, reflect on them, analyse them, discuss about them and take proper decisions in time.

There must be special types of materials for special groups and programmes (women, minorities, immigrants, aged people, etc).

The neo-literate materials should incorporate learners' participation and draw on their experiences.

The neo-literate materials should as far as possible use resources from the culture, folk wisdom and day-to-day experiences of the learners (1985:8).

This learner-centred approach requires numerous stages in the development process:

1. **A survey or context study** of the area and the target audience to identify problems and constraints in their lives and examine social, economic and cultural factors:

[M]aterials production begins with surveying the needs of the target neo-literates by actually visiting their villages/communities. Without knowing the actual situation of the target group by field-visiting, one cannot develop any suitable and beneficial materials for them (1985:12).

The Guidebook gives very detailed instructions on how such a survey should be done, including observation, interviews, and what the Guidebook calls 'unconventional methods' (17-22). Once the data has been collected, needs should be prioritised.

2. **Identifying the problems and sub-problems** of the target audience. General problems (such as poverty) need to be broken down into smaller, more manageable, pieces. These must then be prioritised, and topics (the Guidebook uses the term 'themes') chosen.
3. **Arranging for the preparation of the materials.** The Guidebook stresses the need to find competent writers, illustrators and material producers:

It is good to keep in mind that writing for neo-literates is an extremely difficult task. To write simply but effectively to suit the adult learners is an art which has to be acquired (1985:13).

Those involved in the development process need to be trained. This should be in the form of a workshop under the guidance of 'experienced experts on materials production', and should include a general introduction of the writers and illustrators to the target group ('It is desirable that the writer and the illustrator be taken to the actual places where the neo-literates live' (14)), as well as talks by subject matter specialists, and detailed discussions on how to write for neo-literates.

4. **Developing the materials.** This stage involves multiple steps, including:
  - topic selection. Once topics (themes) have been selected, the data needed to write about these topics, and where this data can be found, can be determined.
  - format selection. In choosing a format, the developers need to take into account the needs and literacy level of the target audience, the location and conditions in which the materials will be used, how the materials will be used, and the production costs.
  - contents arrangement
  - script (text) preparation. During the writing process, the Guidebook proposes that writers meet after writing a draft text so that their writings can be read, discussed and adjusted. The Guidebook suggests that materials be developed in the mother tongue of the readers (see below)
  - illustration (see below)
  - arrangement (layout - see below) and editing for both accuracy and readability, as well as proof-reading. Editing needs to ensure that grammar, punctuation, spelling and so on is correct, make sure that the distribution of text, illustrations, layout and so on is not monotonous, adjust the text and illustrations from the point of view of the target audience.
  - the finalisation of title and headings/captions.
  - field testing the materials.
  - revising the materials.
5. **Mass producing the materials.**
6. **Printing the materials.**
7. **Distributing the materials.**

8. **Evaluating the materials.** The Guidebook argues that this should be done pre- and post-publication. Pre-publication evaluation should include both a technical evaluation of the text, the illustrations, and the arrangement of the content, and a learners' reaction test to check for readability and acceptability. Post-publication evaluation should include a learners' reaction test. Learner reaction tests at both the pre- and post-publication stages should be done in a structured situation (i.e. in organised adult literacy programmes), in semi-structured situations (such as libraries or reading centres), and in unstructured situations (in the community itself). The Guidebook emphasises the need for evaluations to be scientific:

Scientific evaluation is the best method to uncover the merits and demerits of a particular material. Scientific and systematic evaluation is the only way to receive a coherent feedback. The practical experience of users...in the use of the material is the basis of any proper feedback (ACCU Guidebook 1985:82).

In his *How to prepare materials for neo-literates*, published in 1990, Taichi Sasaoka identifies nine steps in the materials development process:

1. Identify the needs of the target group through a field survey
2. Select a theme from these
3. Select the format, based on the literacy level of the target audience, how and where the materials will be used, and the cost of production
4. Prepare the script and illustrations
5. Edit
6. Finalise the captions and title
7. Field test
8. Revise
9. Mass produce, and ensure good distribution.

As can be seen, Sasaoka's steps are almost identical to those identified in the ACCU Guidebook. Indeed, much of the literature published on this subject in nearly two decades since the publication of the ACCU Guidebook appears to be based on either the Guidebook or Sasaoka's work (which is itself strongly influenced by the Guidebook) (See, for example, Reghu 1998). The ACCU Guidebook thus remains one of the most influential texts in the production of neo-literate materials.

Rhegu, writing in 1998, and drawing on the experience of the highly successful literacy campaign in Kerala, India, identifies six main stages in the preparation of books for neo-literates, and gives some detail about each:

1. **Planning stage.** The developers should study the background of the target group, and then identify topics relevant to the target group. The materials should focus on the immediate problems of the target group, since books should be useful for improving their quality of life.
2. **Identify persons to write the book.** Writers should have some experience in literacy, and some knowledge of the background of the target audience.

3. Organise a workshop for those involved in the development process. The workshop should include the writers, experts in non-formal education, adult education workers, psychologists, linguists, artists/illustrators. There should be no more than 35-40 participants. The workshop should discuss topics, content, presentation style, printing and publication. Writers should bring their prepared scripts to the workshop for discussion.
4. Produce a draft of the book, and test it. Based on the workshop, writers should modify their drafts. Then the drafts should be tested with actual readers 'if possible'. The drafts should then be modified with special references to language, presentation, illustration, length of material, and so on.
5. Publication and distribution of the material. The materials should preferably be distributed free of charge to the learners through literacy centres, rural libraries, youth groups, women's groups, and so on.
6. Evaluation and follow up. The published materials should be evaluated by getting opinions and suggestions from readers, authors, experts, artists, linguists, adult education workers, and so on. The material should then be revised accordingly (Rhegu 1998).

The ACCU Guidebook clearly falls within a particular understanding of adult basic education and its purpose, and this is reflected in the process outlined above. However, even materials developers who would not define themselves as falling within the same philosophy of adult basic education now argue that it is important to place the target audience in the centre of the frame if the material is to be successful in its educational purpose. For example, Zimmerman et al (1996:7-9) argue that it is essential that there be repeated interaction with the target audience during the development of materials to ensure that the materials are accurate, well understood and responsive to the readers' needs and concerns.

It should be noted that there is an important alternative view to this process, although this largely deals with materials for use in the classroom/as part of a mediated process of literacy learning. This is the model proposed by REFLECT (Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques), a methodology that combines the theory of Freire with the practice of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). Advocates of PRA argue that there should be no pre-printed materials at all. Rather, a group of adults (called a circle) develop their own materials through the things they use to represent their local reality - these might include maps, diagrams etc. These are initially created on the ground, and then transferred to a large sheet of paper. This then forms a 'code'. In the Freirian sense - the graphic creates discussion which leads to the addition of key words to the paper and so on:

The fact that participants construct their own materials in REFLECT circles leads to a strong ownership of the issues that come up - which it would be impossible to achieve through introducing issues in a primer. This has led to local action and a strong link between the literacy programme and other developmental activities (Archer and Cottingham 1996:6).

However, for stand-alone materials, writers broadly concur about the main steps. Best practice in each of these steps can be summarised as follows:

Step	Process to follow
planning	decide on aims of materials decide on nature of material (information only, or praxis) identify primary audience
survey	visit villages/communities or in some way study the background of the target audience include physical, economic, political, cultural, living conditions beware of the possibility that women may be unable to identify problems requiring structural change
identify the problems and sub-problems to be dealt with in the material	must reflect the immediate problems/living conditions of the target audience break down general problems into smaller problems prioritise these choose themes (i.e. decide on content)
develop the material (i.e. research, write, illustrate)	find experienced writers, illustrators, layout people train them, including introduction to the target group, how to write for neo-literates work out what data are needed, and where to get this work out how content will be structured write, and meet often to discuss writing illustrate layout keep target audience in mind throughout the process/meet repeatedly with target audience to ensure accuracy, responsiveness to readers' needs
edit	edit for accuracy of content edit for correct use of grammar, punctuation, spelling edit for clarity and style make sure headings and captions are suited to content make sure layout is not monotonous proof-read
field test/pilot	test materials with target audience for readability and acceptability in community itself
revise	based on field test results
mass produce	how can greatest number of copies at the appropriate level of quality be provided at the least expense?
distribute	preferably free of charge distribute through literacy centres, rural libraries, youth groups, women's groups etc be strategic - make sure primary target is reached
evaluate	get opinions and suggestions from readers, authors, experts, artists, linguists, adult education workers, and so on evaluation must be scientific and systematic ask users take context of user into account

## Developing the Women's Handbook - the process

The process used in the development of the Handbook was remarkably similar to that given above:

Best practice suggestions	Handbook process
planning	planning/funding proposal
survey	consultative workshops with women in communities to identify problems, and prioritise these decide on final content and shape of product
identify the problems and sub-problems to be dealt with in the material	
develop the material (i.e. research, write, illustrate)	develop the material (i.e. research, write, illustrate)
edit	edit
field test	field test
revise	revise
mass produce	mass produce
distribute	distribute
evaluate	evaluate (internally, and through this thesis)

Each of these steps, as actually conducted within the Handbook project, will now be discussed in detail in order to compare it to the best practice identified above.

### Planning and conceptualisation

I originally conceived of the Handbook a few days after the first democratic elections in South Africa on 27 April 1994. At this time, I thought of it only as a fairly short booklet, for women living in Pietermaritzburg, and one which would simply explain their rights and the services available to them.

I took this idea to the women's group of the Midlands Region of the Black Sash, the local branch of a women's organisation which had been working for some 35 years for human rights in South Africa, and in which I was actively involved. Here it was welcomed, and we agreed to begin the process of drafting such a booklet. But since the women involved in the group were all involved on a voluntary basis, and all worked full-time, the project never really took off, and we agreed to ask for help from the Midlands Women's Group. The Midlands Region of the Black Sash had been involved in the MWG since its inception, and many of us were personally actively involved in the MWG.

The MWG also welcomed the project. Again the issue of voluntarism became an obstacle (since the MWG was entirely voluntary at this stage), and the project again never really happened. I thus proposed the Handbook as a project within the Centre for Adult Education,



where I worked as a researcher. It was discussed by the Centre, and staff agreed that we should attempt to raise funding for the development of the Handbook, which would be done in partnership with the Midlands Women's Group.

I thus developed an initial funding proposal, which was vetted by the Midlands Women's Group forum (Handbook Project. 1997. Funding Proposal 1). At this stage, the proposal was still for a Handbook aimed at only at women living in the greater Pietermaritzburg area. Women at the forum (a structure made up of ordinary women) where the proposal was discussed asked that it include women in rural areas, and thus be expanded to cover the whole of the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands (Handbook Project. 1997. Funding Proposal 2).

In July 1997, as has been mentioned, the MWG inherited its own staff, and its capacity was thus greatly increased. At this point, the project was resurrected. At the same time, the Chairperson of the MWG, Phumelele Ntombela-Nzimande, was appointed as a member of the Commission on Gender Equality, a statutory body created in terms of the 1996 Constitution. Phumelele felt that the Handbook project would be of interest to the Commission, and that the Commission could act as a funding conduit, since many funders interested in gender and women's issue were approaching the Commission for projects to fund.

The then CEO of the Commission, Colleen Lowe-Morna, together with Phumelele Ntombela-Nzimande, thus approached the Swedish International Development and Co-operation Agency (SIDA), which had expressed an interest in projects targeting women's rights. The initial proposal was thus redeveloped to comply with SIDA's funding requirements (See Handbook Project. 1997. Funding Proposal 3). In late 1997 SIDA agreed to fund a much expanded version of the original Handbook project.

Best practice suggests the following are important components of the planning stage:

- deciding on the aims of materials
- deciding on the nature of material (information only, or praxis)
- identifying the primary audience

As can be seen, we generally complied with these requirements, although the nature of the Handbook, and its primary target, shifted somewhat - from material simply for information to material for praxis, and from women in the Pietermaritzburg area to women in the Midlands. This shift was because of the involvement of the Midlands Women's Group in the project - and hence, in a sense, of ordinary women, since they comprise the Midlands Women's Group.

At this early stage, the funder (SIDA) in fact played little or no role in shaping the project, possibly because it had been fairly thoroughly conceptualised before we approached the funder, possibly because the deal was brokered by the Commission on Gender Equality which carried a great deal more authority than CAE or MWG would have on their own. As will be seen, the funder did influence later phases of the project.

## The consultative workshops

Given the fact that the Reference Group included the Deputy-Mayor of Pietermaritzburg-Umsunduzi; the regional Director of the Black Sash Advice Office; and the head of the Women and Law project of the Centre for Criminal Justice, as well as a Gender Commissioner, much of the collecting of women's perceived needs occurred from within the Reference Group in the process of drawing up the Funding Proposal itself. Input from the Midlands Women's Group forum meetings, the Pietermaritzburg Gender Forum, and a number of Advice Offices throughout the region was also obtained. However, we believed that the primary source of this information should be ordinary women themselves, and thus a number of consultative workshops with women were held.

These initial consultative workshops, as I have suggested above, were considered a critical part of the process. Initially, we planned to hold 6 consultative workshops, and had included these in the project budget. However, our funding proposal did not specify where these would be held, or how we would decide this.

Thus the first task of the project was to decide where the workshops should be held, and who should be invited to attend each. The Reference Group agreed that the Community Education Programme (CEP) of the Centre for Adult Education would be given the task of deciding where the workshops should be held, and of designing and facilitating these, and asked for proposals about this from the CEP. The CEP, together with the rest of the field team (fieldworkers from the Midlands Women's Group), presented a proposal which argued that separate workshops should be held for different groups of women, since the different backgrounds and experiences of different groups of women 'will to a large extent determine their needs':

Combining women from different backgrounds into a single workshop with the aim of finding out their needs might not work because some of the women will be dominated by others (Handbook Project. 1998. Proposal from the field team).

The field team suggested running workshops in the five administrative sub-regions of the Midlands, each one targeting a particular group of women. The Reference Group, however, felt that although workshops should be held in the different sub-regions, they should target women in general, rather than a specific group of women:

It was recognised that this would mean that the workshops would have to be very carefully designed and facilitated, to make sure that participation was even (Handbook Project. 1998. Minutes of Reference Group meeting, 27 February 1998).

It was agreed that a workshop to look at the workshops in depth should be held, and this took place on 17 March 1998, and included the field team, myself, and members of the Reference Group. This 'workshopping the workshops' was designed and facilitated by John Aitchison, then the Director of the Centre for Adult Education and a key member of the Reference Group. The workshop looked at what it was that the consultative workshops hoped to achieve, and what might prevent this from happening. The workshop identified a variety of groups of women, such as rural, peri-urban, and urban women; business women, farmworkers, and domestic workers; young women and old women; women of different

races, cultures and religions; and so on; all of whom needed to be consulted. A member of the field team was asked to identify possible workshop venues which would take into account the need to reach all of these different groups, and achieve geographical spread.

The following venues were identified:

Greytown  
Impendle  
Ixopo  
Kranskop  
Matatiele.  
Nottingham Road  
Pietermaritzburg  
Richmond

This ensured a spread across the five sub-regions of the iNdllovu Regional Council area; easy access in terms of transport and distance; and the opportunity for women from all of the identified groups to participate.

### Midlands region - places we held the workshops



(In the event, no workshops were held in Richmond, because the ongoing political violence in that area potentially placed women who attended the workshops at risk. Instead, women from the Richmond area were encouraged to attend the Pietermaritzburg workshops.)

Once the venues had been chosen, the work of setting these up and advertising them began. Our funding proposal said about this:

[The] workshops will be advertised through notices in the local press (in English, Zulu and Afrikaans), through letters to women on the mailing lists of local women's organisations, through pamphlets made available at libraries, taxi ranks, supermarkets, clinics and other public places, and through word of mouth (Handbook Project. 1997. Funding Proposal 3).

This approach was reiterated by the Reference Group at a meeting in February 1998, where it was agreed that we would advertise the workshops at

places where women usually gather (pension payout points, clinics, hospitals, taxi ranks, maintenance courts, sewing and burial clubs, stokvels, trading stores) as well as radio, newspapers, loudhailer, mailing lists...and the Regional Council offices (Handbook Project. 1998. Minutes of Reference Group meeting, 27 February 1998).

In practice, this process was hardly used at all. Only in two cases, Matatiele and Pietermaritzburg, was the public media used, in both cases with adverse consequences. In Pietermaritzburg, an advertisement was placed in the *Echo*, a weekly supplement of *The Natal Witness* targeting a Zulu-language audience, and was probably one of the reasons why no white, Indian or coloured women attended the workshop; and in Matatiele, an announcement over the local radio station resulted in well over 100 women attending the workshop, making it impossible to run effectively, and blowing the budget.

In fact, the process we decided on (before either the Matatiele or the Pietermaritzburg workshops) was to make use of local structures and leaders in each area, both to overcome logistical difficulties (especially where workshops were held far from Pietermaritzburg), and also to ensure that local community leaders supported the Project. The field team would set up a meeting in the area in which the workshop would be run, and invite all the major players in that community, such as women's groups, NGOs, CBOs, clinic staff, and councillors. This meeting would then set up a Task Team. The Task Team was made up of local community leaders such as representatives of local advice offices or resource organisations, teachers, clinic sisters, local councillors or TLC officials, and so on. Each Task Team was responsible for drawing up a budget, setting a date for the workshop in consultation with the community, and organising venues, transport and catering. The Task Team was also responsible for inviting local women to attend. The Task Teams decided how each area would be represented at the workshop, and by whom. Thus 'invitations are to be done at local level by local people through local structures' (Handbook Project. Minutes of Working Group meeting. 2 April 1998).

Wherever possible, local women were contracted to do the catering, and local taxi operators or private vehicle owners for transport, so that money from the Project could go directly into the community.

Whilst this process was even more participatory than our original plan, it did mean that we lost some control over the process; we were not aware whether any screening (conscious or unconscious) was taking place by Task Teams.

Obviously, the process used within the workshops themselves was critical, and the design of the workshops was also given considerable thought. The CEP were asked to propose a design, and their original design was methodologically innovative and progressive, incorporating the use of statues/images/still pictures, a deliberately unfamiliar method so that all participants would be forced to participate as equals. This approach was one developed by Augusto Baol, a peer and compatriot of Paulo Freire (Handbook Project. 1998. Proposed workshop design). This design was dramatically altered to a far more conventional one, which was used in the workshops. I am not really sure how and why this occurred, but I do remember being personally uncomfortable with the original design, probably because I was unfamiliar with the methodology. I know that we were concerned about how long the workshop would take, and this also impacted on the final design.

The workshops were held between April and August 1998. A high number of women attended the workshops:

Greytown: 80

Impendle: 44

iXhobo: 64

Kokstad: 20

Matatiele: 173

Nottingham Road: 60

Pietermaritzburg: 70

The very high number of women attending the Matatiele workshop was the result of a member of Task Team in that area announcing the workshop on a local radio station. The high numbers at this workshop severely affected the budget for this first round of workshops, since it in effect used the budget allocation for three workshops. This meant that the first round of workshops cost considerably more than budgeted for.

A workshop was also held in Mpophomeni (a black African township near Howick) on request from a local women's group. The costs of this workshop were covered by the group concerned.

### **The CEO of the Gender Commission and myself listen in, Kokstad workshop**



**Project field team members at the Greytown workshop**





**Women at work: Greytown,  
Mpophomeni, Matatiele**



The workshops each generated a list of issues (Handbook Project. 1998. Reports on the various workshops). Women at each workshop were asked to prioritise these into a list of five, but ultimately all of the issues were included in the Handbook. The consolidated list arising from the consultative workshop process was as follows (not in any specific order):

- telephones
- water
- roads
- electricity
- clinics
- creches
- training centres/skills training
- tertiary institutions
- HIV/AIDS
- out-of-school youth/delinquency
- unemployment/lack of jobs
- sexual harassment
- old age homes
- drugs/alcohol abuse
- child abuse
- domestic violence
- schools for disabled children

maintenance  
divorce  
the new child grant  
pensions  
death  
police - corruption, lack of follow up, arrests, investigation, female officers to deal with rape cases  
organisational development skills - funding proposal etc  
ambulances/emergency services  
career guidance  
stress

The issues raised by women during this process included a number of issues which had not been identified by the project partners in the process of developing the funding proposal. The issues varied from one workshop to the next, although not considerably. Lack of services such as water and electricity was identified as a major concern in all of the rural workshops. The need for skills and entrepreneurial training was also emphasized. Great concern was expressed by women for youth in their areas in terms of both opportunities for education and employment, and delinquency. Child abuse, and violence against women, were identified in all the workshops.

A debriefing evaluation of the workshops was held by myself and the field team, and concern was expressed that some of the identified groups of women had not been sufficiently represented (Handbook Project. 1998. Minutes a meeting to evaluate the initial workshops, 7 July 1998). To accommodate this, follow-up mini-workshops were held with groups of domestic workers, 'coloured' women, and Indian women between August and October 1998 (Handbook project. 1998. Report back of domestic workers workshop held on the 13<sup>th</sup> August 1998 at Scotts Building; Handbook Project. 1998. Report on mini-workshop held in Ghost Town, Happy Valley, 16<sup>th</sup> October 1998). These workshops did not throw up any new issues, and served to confirm that all issues of importance to women in the region had been identified. One issue, that of homosexuality, was not raised at any of the workshops. However, the Reference Group decided that this issue should be included in the Handbook.

The lists of issues from the urban and rural workshops were very similar; the primary difference was one of emphasis. In November 1998, I proposed to the Reference Group that only one book be produced, rather than an urban and a rural version:

This was because most of the issues covered in the books were identical, and those that weren't (because they hadn't been raised by women in the rural/urban workshops) should really be included because they were highly relevant. In addition, many of the resources available to women were only available in Pietermaritzburg (Handbook Project. 1998. Minutes of Reference Group meeting, 2 November 1998).

I also argued that many women moved constantly between urban and rural settings, and it would be difficult to know who should get what book. The Reference Group thus decided that one Handbook should be produced, rather than separate Handbooks for rural and urban women. This would also allow a lower unit cost due to a larger print-run.

The initial consultative workshops profoundly impacted on the both the project and the product in a number of ways.

**Firstly**, they obviously affected the content, as they were intended to do, and this in turn impacted on the ultimate size and shape of the final Handbook. For example, the lack of any significant differences in the issues identified by rural and urban women meant that it became sensible to pool resources into a single Handbook, rather than the separate urban and rural Handbooks originally conceived, and the identification of a considerable number of issues by women in the initial workshops meant that the Handbook expanded from an envisaged 100 page book to over 400 pages.

**Secondly**, they raised issues about the languages in which we should develop the Handbook, because the consultation process in sub-Region 5 (Matatiele/Kokstad) put pressure on the Project to produce the Handbook in Afrikaans and Xhosa, as well as the envisaged English- and Zulu-language copies. The Project agreed to do this, and an Afrikaans version was written (although never printed). This had enormous implications for the development process (we needed to find writers and editors in two additional languages), and the budget (we needed to pay for the writers and the editors, and finance the printing of two additional versions).

**Thirdly**, the cost of the workshops, the fact that the Handbook would now be considerably longer, and the addition of two languages, impacted significantly on the budget, thus affecting the remainder of the project. Budgetary issues concerning the workshops remained a constant problem from very early on in the project. As early as February 1998, before any workshops had even been held, the Reference Group decided to redeploy money allocated in the budget for research to the workshops, 'because the success of the workshops was critical to the success of the project, and all of the skill and experience possible should be deployed to the workshops' (Handbook Project. 1998. Minutes of Reference Group meeting, 5 February 1998). At its meeting in May, I reported to the Reference Group that a revised budget had been drawn up, to cover 40 workshops of 80 participants each. This resulted from the much higher than budgeted costs of the workshops held by then (Greytown and Matatiele) (Handbook Project. 1998. Minutes of Reference Group meeting, 7 May 1998). (Later that month, it was decided that the Richmond workshop be combined with the Pietermaritzburg workshop, because of a fear of political violence in the Richmond area).

**Fourthly**, they questioned our own assumptions about women's experiences. In an article in *The Natal Witness* in August 1999, I am quoted as saying:

We first decided to have a 100-page book with separate copies for urban and rural women. Through a process of consultation, we ended up with a single 400-page book and found that many problems were common to both urban and rural women. For example, it was the women in Matatiele who asked us to include a section on alcohol abuse. We had originally thought this would be an urban problem (Naidoo, 1999).

The project team, in its internal evaluation, had the following to say about the consultative workshops:



The workshops were extremely successful. This was the result of the considerable care taken in their design, as well as the process used in setting them up. Should the Project be replicated, the following should be retained:

1. thorough preliminary fieldwork and situational analysis
2. the setting up of Task Teams in each workshop venue to deal with logistics and organisational issues
3. the careful training of workshop facilitators
4. the workshopping of the design of the workshops, including an identification of potential problems and preparation of strategies to overcome these
5. the regular evaluation of workshops so that design changes can be made or follow-up workshops where appropriate

Workshop facilitators also need to be politically impartial and culturally sensitive. Perhaps predictable problems were the large number of women who attended in some areas, creating budgetary problems; the time pressure (it is difficult, if not impossible, to hold workshops at times convenient to the Project, rather than to the community); and the fact that political violence prevented workshops from being held in Richmond (Handbook Project. 1999: Internal evaluation).

The in-depth interviews I held with members of the Reference Group elicited a general feeling that the process of finding out what needed to be in the Handbook was a good one:

Given the conventional understanding about how to get information without silencing anyone, or giving undue voice to those whose jobs depend on needs, the process was good (John Aitchison, interview 18 November 2002).

John Aitchison argues that the process could not, and should not, have been made shorter. The unexpected results we obtained (for example, the high incidence of alcohol abuse in the Matatiele area) shows that a less in-depth process might have resulted in incomplete content. Indeed, the very fact that the Handbook ended up a far longer book than imagined showed that more issues needed to be covered, at greater depth, than we had first imagined (Interview, 18 November 2002).

## The issue-based workshops

In addition to the consultative workshops, issue-based workshops were held as a follow-up to the initial workshops. The purpose of these workshops was multifold:

- to help women in a specific area begin to deal with the issues they had identified in the initial workshop, by giving them the kind of information they would receive in the Handbook
- to help the Project identify exactly what problems women were experiencing in relation to specific, prioritised, issues
- to ensure that women had faith in the Handbook Project process, and that they did not feel that they had been abandoned during the lengthy research, writing and layout phase of the Project.

The issues addressed in this second round of workshops were drawn from the prioritised lists (of 5 issues each) developed at each of the initial workshops. This was done in consultation with the women themselves (at the initial workshops), and with the Task Team in each area. The fact that it would be far easier to prepare meaningful workshops on fewer topics, rather than a different one for each area, was also taken into consideration.



The following workshops were held:

- A workshop on rights to water and accessing water was held in four areas (Matatiele, iXhobo, Kokstad and Impendle). This workshop was designed and facilitated in collaboration with the Regional Consultative Forum.
- A workshop on income-generation and skills training was held in Greytown, in collaboration with the Business Advice Centre in Pietermaritzburg.
- A workshop on opportunities for youth was held in Nottingham Road;
- A workshop on housing was held in Pietermaritzburg in collaboration with the Housing Department of the Pietermaritzburg-Umsunduzi TLC.

**Facilitator at one of the water workshops**

Best practice suggests the following are important components of the survey and problem-identification stages:

- visit villages/communities or in some way study the background of the target audience
- include physical, economic, political, cultural, living conditions
- beware of the possibility that women may be unable to identify problems requiring structural change
- reflect the immediate problems/living conditions of the target audience
- break down general problems into smaller problems
- prioritise these
- choose themes (i.e. decide on content)

I think that the process we used to determine content was an unusually thorough one, and is perhaps one of the greatest strengths of the project. Thus the issues we include did indeed reflect the immediate concerns of women's daily lives, as has been discussed in the previous chapter. However, we could perhaps be criticised for attempting to include so much information; for not really prioritising in the way best practice suggests. Although women in the workshops were asked to prioritise their lists, we actually included everything they identified, with the exception of information on adult basic education - and this simply because we ran out of time and energy to research and write this.

We also didn't really try to put the different issues covered in the book into any sort of order, or group them thematically. Thus each issue remained discrete, apparently unrelated to any other. In reality, of course, this is simply not so - and perhaps compounded our relative lack of deep structural analysis of the individual issues.

## Developing the material

The conceptualisation of the Handbook and its development began very early on in the project. A meeting was held at Tembaletu Community Education Centre in September 1997, to which a variety of interested organisations and individuals were invited, to discuss the project (Handbook Project. 1997. Minutes of a meeting to discuss the Women's Handbook, Tembaletu, 17 September 1997). At this meeting, a member of the Centre for Adult Education's materials development unit talked about the stages involved in developing materials, and emphasised the need to be clear about the target audience. This meeting agreed that the target audience was ordinary women, not mediators, and the repercussions of this on the materials development process was emphasised:

- the text would need to be simple
- the font would need to be larger than normal
- there would need to be a lot of white space
- the text would need to be conceptually simple - everything would need to be stated, nothing could be inferred
- illustrations would need to be appropriate to the target audience, and would need to be tested
- the layout must be predictable - it must be the same for each section, so that the reader could easily find her way around
- the text for a book of this nature could not be developed for an audience with less than seven years of schooling.

This meeting also identified the overall content of the Handbook, and designed a very basic structure for this:

- It must have issue pages (eg. HIV/AIDS), and theme or section pages (eg. Health)
- It must reflect what the Bill of Rights/Constitution says, and what the Women's Charter says
- It must have practical steps that women can follow
- It must have the names and contact details of organisations that women can contact for help. These should be in the margin, in colour so that they stand out

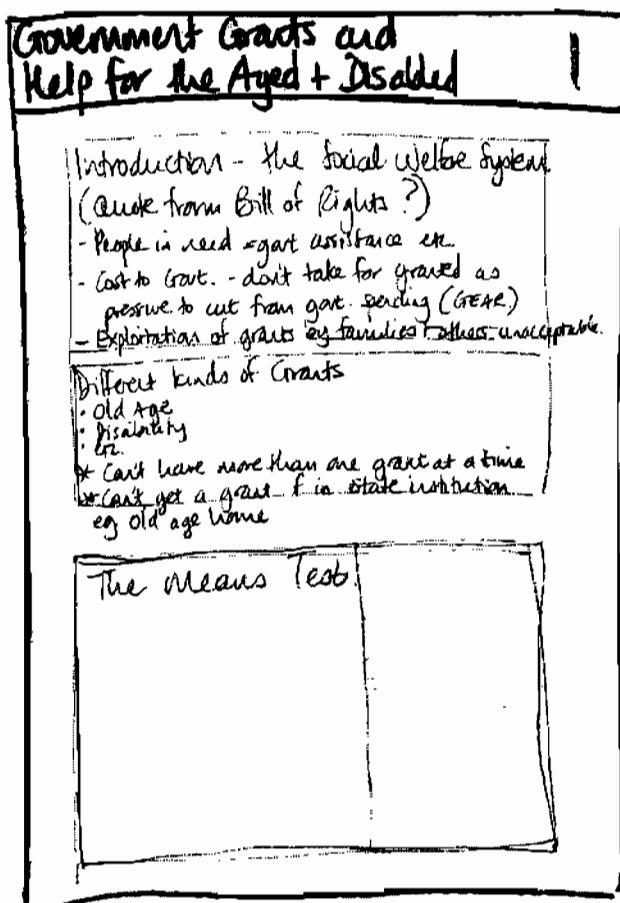
Each issue should be introduced with one page highlighting the human element, i.e. statistics about women affected by this problem, or stories of women who have had this experience or been through this process. The second page should state what the reader's legal rights are about the subject. The step-by-step process should then be given, with the organisations that can help in the margins (Handbook Project. 1997. Minutes of a meeting to discuss the Women's Handbook, Tembaletu, 17 September 1997).

Although each issue ended up being far, far longer than the four pages envisaged at this meeting, this basic design remained remarkably consistent throughout the development process, and the final Handbook reflects this.

Before work even began on the Handbook, a workshop on materials development was run by the Centre for Adult Education's Materials Development Unit for members of the Project. The workshop emphasised the need to conceptualise the language and layout of the final Handbook before writing began. The workshop determined that the Handbook would be A4 in size, and structured to allow for clear identification of the different kinds of information (legal rights; steps to take; resources available). Text would need to be large enough to be easily read by women still struggling with reading, with white space and other techniques used to divide text into manageable chunks. Where necessary, illustrations would be used to add meaning to the text.

It was also decided that logos would be used to identify each of the issues covered by the Handbook, so that women would be able to easily access the information they sought.

Meetings were held to brainstorm each of the issues covered by the Handbook. These meetings included the co-ordinator, members of the Reference Group, the field team, the research team, and, where necessary, an expert on that particular issue. The involvement of the Regional Director of the Black Sash in this process was particularly useful.



A member of the Materials Development Unit of the Centre and myself subsequently drew up a draft layout for each of the sections, using these brainstorming sessions as the basis for what would be included. This draft was used to guide the researchers, writers and layout people - the researchers, by indicating what kind of information was required on each section; the writers by indicating how pieces of information related to each other, and roughly how much emphasis to give to the various pieces of information; and the layout people by giving an indication of how the information should appear on the page.

These drafts were intended merely to guide those involved in the development of the Handbook, and the final Handbook is significantly longer than the draft layout, as well as being modified in appearance. However, the process ensured that the final product remained a focus of the work at all times.

The drafts were handed over to the research team which was composed of the co-ordinator, a research assistant, and a number of research interns drawn from the University of Natal, the University of Cork, and the University of Georgia. None of these interns was paid, since this work formed part of their university course.

The research team reviewed a vast quantity of information from a wide variety of sources. Much of this information was obtained through visiting organisations, individuals or officials, or through telephonic interviews. The information was written up by the co-ordinator and a member of the research team in the form of research notes from which the writers could work. These were provided to the writers on a weekly basis, so that the research and writing process could happen in tandem. Weekly meetings between the researchers and writers served to clarify any questions the writers had about the material. Information gaps were researched by the research team and the additional information was provided to the writers.

Writing teams of two writers per language were established. Initially, this included writers in English, Afrikaans, Zulu and Xhosa. However, the Xhosa writers proved unsatisfactory, and their services were suspended. Each team was drawn from people with experience in writing for adults with a low level of education. All had the language in which they were writing as their mother-tongue. All of the writers were asked to complete a section of the Handbook, the draft layout with the applicable research notes. This was vetted by the co-ordinator in conjunction with the appropriate editor.

A workshop was held for the writers at the beginning of the process. This was designed and facilitated by the director of the Centre for Adult Education, Professor John Aitchison, an authority on adult basic education. It covered issues such as identifying the audience, level of language, and cultural sensitivity.

Each pair of writers subsequently divided the sections of the Handbook between them. They were given research notes and a copy of the draft layout for each section, and returned the completed text at set deadlines. The research and writing process was completed over a three-month period.

In our internal evaluation held at the end of the development process, we identified a number of problems with the production process:

***Researchers:***

The researchers used in the Project were of uneven quality, and many gaps were left in the research products (sometimes the result of time-pressure). Considerable and productive use was made of intern researchers, and it should be noted that the involvement in the Project had a considerable impact on many of these researchers. Should the Project be replicated, some general advice regarding the research process would be:

- the need for a close link between the researchers and workshop facilitators
- the need for the researchers to buy into the Handbook development process fully
- the importance of the field workshops as a means of orientating and briefing the researchers and gaining their full commitment

The co-ordinator [i.e. myself] should ideally not be a researcher, but rather a dedicated co-ordinator.

### ***Writers:***

- The writers were considerably hampered by time-pressure problems. This resulted in insufficient interaction between the writers in the different languages.
- The writers believe that the concept of simultaneous dynamic translation into plain language texts in the target languages (i.e. the fact that they were given what were essentially our research notes in English to write as a plain language text in English, or in Zulu, or in Afrikaans) failed. Given the budgetary and time constraints, they argued, the development process would have benefited from a master text, in this case in English. In other words, they felt it would have been better if the research notes had been given first to the writers of the English plain language text, and their plain language text had then been given to the Zulu and Afrikaans writers to translate.
- A clearer sequencing of the writing and editing process is required, with better feedback from the editors to the writers. Ideally, writing and editing should occur simultaneously.
- Many of these problems could be overcome by an increased budget and a longer development phase.
- There needs to be a clearer agreement about style and convention from the inception of the writing process.

### ***Layout:***

- There was a gross underestimation of the time that the much larger Handbooks would take to be laid out. This was exacerbated by the fact that both writing and editing were not fully completed before material was handed over for layout.
- The draft layout was of mixed value, since it in some cases constrained, rather than aided, the writers.

Best practice suggests the following are important components of the development stage:

- find experienced writers, illustrators, layout people
- train them, including introduction to the target group, how to write for neo-literates
- work out what data are needed, and where to get this
- work out how content will be structured
- write, and meet often to discuss writing
- illustrate
- layout
- keep target audience in mind throughout the process/meet repeatedly with target audience to ensure accuracy, responsiveness to readers' needs

I think one of the biggest problems we experienced with the development process was time pressure - we simply tried to research and write the book far too quickly. This was partially because the workshops took longer to complete than we had planned, and we felt under pressure to produce; and partially because of pressure from the funder. Under the circumstances, we complied fairly well with best practice.

## Editing the material

Three levels of editing were done:

- the accuracy of the content was checked
- the viability of actually following the steps given was checked
- the language level, style, etc. was checked

### *Content checking*

Once the various issues had been written up in English, but before they were laid out, they were given to experts in that issue. In most cases, more than one person content-checked each section. One member of the Reference Group (the Director of the Black Sash Advice Office, Ashnie Padarath) also read all sections. For example, the section on children and youth was read by an organisation specialising in the training of EduCare teachers; by a member of the South African Police Service's Family Violence, Child Abuse and Sexual Offences Unit; by a member of Childline, a child abuse NGO; by a medical doctor; and by an Advice Office worker.

The content checking done by experts in the various fields resulted in very few changes in factual content; however, many content editors had their own views (sometimes conflicting, where there was more than one editor of the same issue) about how the information should be structured and weighted. Interestingly, the issues which gave rise to most of this kind of debate about where to put the emphasis were those concerning violence against women and child abuse. This is probably not very surprising, given that these are highly emotive subjects, and there is some debate about how best to tackle them. The Reference Group discussed this problem at a meeting in mid-November, and agreed 'that the priority was to ensure that the information was accurate and accessible, rather than popular with "experts"' (Handbook Project. 1998. Minutes of Reference Group meeting, 16 November 1998).

At this point, the Reference Group and I were confident that the information contained in the English language draft was accurate in theory; but there was a concern that the practical reality in local communities might mean that there was a very real gap between the theory of how, for example, a woman could set about accessing a particular right, and the actual situation. It was thus decided that the Handbook be field-tested - not for the accuracy of the information (although this was also done), but for on-the-ground circumstances that might undermine the usefulness of the information.

### *Field checking*

The field-check team was composed of the members of the field-team and two researchers. A workshop, designed by John Aitchison (who also facilitated) and myself, explored what the field-check should cover, in terms of both geographical area and information. At this workshop it was agreed that the field check would check two key areas:

1. Did the steps we gave in the Handbook actually work? If not, why not? Where is the breakdown happening - at an administrative or attitudinal level?
2. Are local organisations active, and do they have the capacity to help?

A fairly detailed process was designed at the planning workshop. At each place to be visited, a Zulu-speaking member of the team would go in first and try to complete the steps as given in the Handbook:

This will check both the administrative and attitudinal problems a woman using the Handbook might encounter (Handbook Project, Minutes of field check planning meeting, 14 October 1998).

After this, one of the two white research interns, as official representatives of the project, would go in to ask whether the information we had was correct. This would provide a contrast in attitude and efficiency. On occasion, the one male member of the team would be used to check differences in attitude and service to men versus women (Handbook Project. 1998. Minutes of field check planning meeting, 14 October 1998).

I developed a very detailed package of questionnaires that the team would use in the field check, comprising not only the steps to be checked, but the availability of the relevant forms in the various languages; the helpfulness of staff, and the languages they could speak; accessibility of buildings/offices to the disabled and elderly; how long queues were; whether certain services were offered (for example, HIV testing at clinics) and so on, for each place. The team was also supposed to find out about any additional services offered by local organisations that we didn't yet know about, and the costs involved.

The field-check team visited a number of small towns throughout the Midlands (including the places where workshops had been held, but not only these places) over a two-week period. At each town, they visited a range of locations, including:

- magistrate's courts
- post offices
- police stations
- clinics
- Government offices (Department of Welfare; Department of Home Affairs)
- trading stores
- TLC offices
- Regional Council offices
- advice offices
- other NGOs or service organisations
- district surgeons

The field check did not really go as planned. The fact that we had not envisaged the field check at all at the time we had drawn up the funding proposal, and hence it was not budgeted for, meant that many places had to be visited within a single day, to keep transport costs down. This meant that one person only usually visited each place, and simply checked things off on the questionnaire, rather than the more subtle process we had planned. The various places were indeed visited, although sometimes they were closed or the relevant person was not available, for example if the team arrived at lunch time. Thus the field check did a fairly thorough job of checking accuracy and checking whether things like forms or Zulu-speaking people were available, but didn't really help as far as checking for attitude was concerned.



The field-check confirmed that by this stage the content was very accurate. But it also showed that government officials were not always aware of the procedures that were supposed to be followed, particularly as far as new legislation was concerned. The magistrate in Impendle, for example, was delighted to see our steps for accessing an interdict against a spouse who was abusing a woman, since he had a case coming up, and refused to let the field team have the relevant page of the questionnaire back. Unfortunately, the process had completely changed a few months before (to the protection order), a fact which I was aware of, but had wanted to test whether magistrates and police officers were aware of. Thus the information the magistrate was so delighted to receive was deliberately out-of-date (a fact which, sadly, the field team was also unaware of).

I think we had not really thought through what we planned to do about the data we got back from the field check; the problem of government officials (attitude, corruption, only speaking English or Afrikaans) had been raised over and over at the initial consultative workshops, and to some extent the careful process we had originally planned for the field check was a response to this, but the field check could only really deny or reflect that reality. I still think the field check was a good idea, since it did help us to check accuracy on-the-ground (and primed government officials of what to expect). But the most we could really do in response was put in a bit more about how to complain about officials. As has been seen, the problem of officials came out again, very vehemently, in the focus groups held as part of this evaluation. This is clearly an issue which mitigates against women being able to access rights and services, and the Handbook (or any piece of material) can't really address this issue, although the focus group data suggests that the Handbook has helped women move perhaps one step further in processes they have undertaken than might otherwise be the case (this is discussed further in Chapter 8).

### *Language edit*

Once the field-check had been completed, and the drafts revised accordingly, the drafts of each language text were then handed over to the layout team. At this point, due to time constraints, the Afrikaans text was set aside. Priority was given to English text, since the content-checking process meant that the English text needed to be used by the editors of the Afrikaans and Zulu texts. A layout template had been developed by the layout leader, using the guidelines established at the first materials development workshop, as well as the draft layout pages developed by the co-ordinator and layout leader.

## Government grants and help for the aged and disabled



# Government grants and help for the aged and disabled

### *The Bill of Rights says:*

- People who cannot help themselves have a right to get help from the government

### *The Women's Charter says:*

- The Women's Charter says that special groups of people such as rural women, disabled people, old people, and single parents must get social services.
- Women who need social pensions and disability grants must get them.
- All women who need mental health services must get them.

At the moment the government agrees that it needs to look after people who can't look after themselves. These are children, old people or disabled people. The government gives grants (money) to these people to help them.

The Bill of Rights in the Constitution says that people who can't help themselves have a right to get help from the government. But these grants cost the country a lot of money. Also some people say that people should look after themselves. So we do not know if the government will always give grants to people who need them.

Government grants are only for the people who need help.

### Different kinds of grants

There are different kinds of grants which the government gives to help people who are in need. Here are the most important:

- Old age pensions
- Special pensions
- Disability grant
- Care dependency grant
- Child support grant
- Foster care grant

All of these grants are paid monthly. You can only get one grant at a time. You can't get a grant if the government is already looking after you. So if you are living in a government institution (like an old age home, hospital, or a home for the disabled), you can't apply for a government grant.

The draft texts in English and Zulu were also given to an editor in that language. The editors were highly experienced adult educators and materials developers. They were briefed by myself, and were given a checklist to guide their editing process, which included level of language, style, layout, cross-referencing, and so on. The Zulu editor was also required to check the content of the Zulu draft against the English version, since the English had been content checked by experts.

The need to produce a fairly acceptable draft by the launch date of 10 December 1999 put pressure on the editing and layout process. In effect, this resulted in the layout team having to re-layout sections multiple times as they were edited and reworked. This process continued after the launch, and greatly delayed the completion of the English-language text. Since neither the Zulu nor Afrikaans texts could be completed until the completion of the English text, both of these were delayed even further.

Delays in final editing and layout impacted on the research in that the passing of new legislation meant that information in the Handbook became out of date. Thus final changes had constantly to be made to the text by the co-ordinator, editors and typesetters, without the expertise of the writers.

Although indications are that the decision to write the Handbook in the different languages, rather than translate from one language to another, made the Handbook very accessible, it also resulted in a significant problem. The writers of the Zulu text summarised the information to a far greater degree than the writers of the English and Afrikaans texts. Since this discrepancy was only brought to light in the editing process, when the English text was compared to the Zulu text, the necessary rewriting of the Zulu text delayed its completion.

The effects of the time constraints and intense pressure outlined above is clearly reflected in the internal evaluation:

***Editing:***

- As indicated in the issues raised in relation to the writers, the distinction between writing and editing was blurred, and there was some confusion about responsibilities regarding gaps in text.

***Proofreading:***

- It is essential that careful proofreading of the text in all languages is carried out.

***Updating:***

- The absolute necessity of constant updating of the information contained in the Handbook, both in the initial Project, and in any replication of the Project, cannot be over emphasised. The developers seriously underestimated the amount of material that would needed to be changed during the development process (Handbook Project. 1999. Internal evaluation).

Best practice suggests the following are important components of the editing stage:

- edit for accuracy of content
- edit for correct use of grammar, punctuation, spelling
- edit for clarity and style
- make sure headings and captions are suited to content
- make sure layout is not monotonous
- proof-read

Obviously, our editing process, whilst fairly thorough, was not as straightforward as it should have been, and was, I think, one of the weaknesses of the project. We should have finished writing, then finished editing, then layed out the material, and then checked this. Instead, we had a difficult backwards-and-forwards process in which layout was changed over and over both as the result of editing and because the delays meant new research and writing was constantly being done.

To some extent, this is inevitable in a project of this size, with the kind of content we had, in the context we were working in - things were constantly changing, in terms of new legislation, new policy, and even new addresses as government departments shifted.

## Field testing the material with the women

Prior to the launch of the Handbook on 10 December 1998, three assessment workshops were held. The Reference Group had decided that no assessment workshops should be held in Kokstad or Matatiele until the Xhosa draft was completed (Handbook Project. 1998. Minutes of Reference Group meeting, 2 November 1998). This was because women in these areas might feel aggrieved if they were asked to comment on a Zulu or English version, rather than the Xhosa version they had requested (and been promised). However, the field team were very unhappy with this decision, since they felt women would be angrier with having to wait. The Reference Group thus agreed that assessment workshops in this area should go ahead (Handbook Project. 1998. Minutes of Reference Group meeting, 16 November 1998), and thus assessment workshops were held in Matatiele, Impendle, and Pietermaritzburg.

Only these three assessment workshops were held, although it had originally been planned to hold such workshops in each area where the initial consultative workshops had been held. This was for a number of reasons. Firstly, by this stage, the budget was under considerable pressure, despite the MWG's agreement to contribute an addition R25 000 from its own budget towards the project (Handbook Project. 1998. Minutes of Reference Group meeting, 7 May 1998). Secondly, the time frame of the project as a whole was under considerable pressure, since SIDA required the funding to be spent within a specified time frame. In addition, it had been agreed that the Handbook should be launched on or about Human Rights Day (10 December), since it was politically important to publically announce the completion of the project, and it was desirable to attach this to a relevant significant date to maximise the chances of it being covered by the mass media.

At the assessment workshops, women were given photocopies of certain, completed sections, to comment on. The women at the workshops were overwhelmingly enthusiastic about the drafts (to the extent that, in Matatiele, the women could not be persuaded to give back the drafts!). They found the language very accessible, the layout easy to follow, and were particularly excited about the use of logos to guide them through the issues.

Best practice suggests the following are important components of the testing stage:

- test materials with target audience for readability and acceptability in community itself

I would argue that this was without doubt the single greatest weakness of the project. The time pressure by this stage simply did not allow us to do the field testing properly. I don't think three assessment workshops were enough; and I don't think we tested the material enough (we didn't even test an entire book - only photocopied sections of it).

I do think the results of the tests were sufficiently encouraging for us not to be too worried about the lack of thoroughness of the process - and the extent to which the book was actually used, as has been seen, confirms these results.

## Revising the material

Best practice suggests the following are important components of the revision stage:

- revise based on field test results

We never really revised the book as a result of the field testing, although as we have seen we revised it over and over in response to the editing process and the changing context. We didn't revise the book because, according to the results of the field testing, we didn't have to. As I have suggested above, this could be because we didn't do a very thorough job of field testing!

## Mass producing the material

The vexed issue of languages plagued the Reference Group for some time. In November 1998, the Reference Group agreed that the final ratio for printing the Handbooks should be seven Zulu copies to each three English copies to each one Xhosa copy to each half a Afrikaans copy, since there were far more women with Zulu as their mother-tongue, and far fewer Xhosa- and Afrikaans-speaking women. However, since smaller print runs were likely to be far more expensive per copy than larger runs, it was also agreed that R80 000 of the R100 000 printing budget should be reserved for the Zulu and English copies (Handbook Project. 1998. Minutes of Reference Group meeting, 2 November 1998).

As soon as it was ready, in June 1999, 1 000 copies, plus a run-on of an additional 220 copies, were printed, at a total cost of R51 600 (or R43 per copy). This clearly left far too little to print significant numbers of the Zulu version, and the response to the English made us believe that it was essential to print at least 10 000 copies.

In my August 1999 report to the Commission on Gender Equality on the Handbook project, I commented:

The response to the English version of the Handbook has been extremely positive. The Centre for Adult Education and the Midlands Women's Group have received numerous phone calls, personal visits, and letters and faxes by individuals and organisations who have seen copies of the Handbook...

Many of these included requests for more copies. The overwhelming response has led the Centre and the MWG to attempt to raise additional funds to reprint further copies of the English version, and to print a far greater number of Zulu copies (the SIDA funding allows for the printing of 2 000 copies; we are hoping to raise sufficient funding to print 10 000 copies) (Harley 1999:32-33).

Thus additional money had to be raised. The iNdllovu Regional Council was approached for assistance, and donated R60 000 towards the project, and SAPPI (one of the largest plantation forestry companies in South Africa) also donated R15 000. The Natal Witness, who had printed the English version, agreed to subsidise the commercial cost of the Zulu print run and ultimately, in June 2000, 10 000 copies were printed at a total cost of R166 212 (or R16.62 per copy).

Printing the Handbook thus cost far more than the R100 000 for 10 000 copies we had budgeted for. This was because the Handbook had quadrupled in size since our initial funding proposal, and because the cost of paper rose steeply during the course of the project. Thus, although a small printer was contracted to undertake the printing of the Xhosa and Afrikaans versions, and the paper for this was purchased to prevent the rising cost of paper from causing a delay in printing these versions, no Afrikaans or Xhosa copies were ever printed, because no funding for this was ever secured.

Best practice suggests the following are important components of the mass production stage:

- providing the greatest number of copies at the appropriate level of quality at the least expense

Printing is expensive. We knew this from the start, and it is clear that this was a major preoccupation throughout the life of the project. Things were made worse by the economic climate in South Africa at the time - high inflation, poor exchange rates - which meant that the cost of printing (primarily because of the cost of paper) escalated dramatically during the course of the project. I think, on balance, we did as well as we could under the circumstances.

## Distributing the material

One of the very first project meetings, a broadly consultative meeting which included representatives of various relevant organisations held in September 1997, debated the issue of whom the Handbook was really targeting, and agreed that ordinary women should be the target (Handbook Project. 1997. Minutes of meeting to discuss the Women's Handbook, Tembaletu, 17 September 1997). This decision naturally affected the entire development process, but also made it clear to whom the Handbook needed to be distributed.

How this would happen was decided by the Reference Group at a meeting in November:

Copies will be directly distributed to women by the Midlands Women's Group, rather than indirectly through NGOs, government offices and so on, since the indirect option would almost certainly result in many copies never reaching women. The MWG would distribute copies at places that women gather, such as clinics, maintenance courts, pension pay-out points and so on. Copies would be distributed proportionate to the number of women in each sub-region, to make sure they were evenly distributed (Handbook Project. 1998. Minutes of Reference Group meeting, 2 November 1998).

This then was the distribution process announced at the launch of the Handbook on 10 December 1998. A wide variety of people were invited to the launch, including members of the press; Regional Councillors; local councillors; Members of Parliament and of the Provincial Legislature; all of the organisations approached during the Project; members of the Task Teams set up to run the workshops; various funders; various foreign embassies; members of the Midlands Women's Group; the Commission on Gender Equality; and SIDA.

However, the issue of 'direct' distribution to individual women by the MWG versus 'indirect' distribution via mediating agencies (such as NGOs or government departments) continued to be thorny one, particularly as pressure mounted from these agencies - and government departments in particular. In addition, there was an ongoing concern about reaching women who were functionally illiterate. The internal evaluation was held before the Handbook was distributed, and these issues were evident:

- There is an unresolved debate about who should receive the Handbook. The small budget for printing the Handbook has meant that hard and forced choices have had to be made between strategically placed users and ordinary women. There is an urgent need to print a far greater number of copies to cope with anticipated demand from both ordinary women and intermediaries such as government officials, and service organisations.
- The Handbook will be a valuable resource in adult education centres, if backed up by a teachers' guide (Handbook Project. 1999. Internal evaluation).

The MWG began distribution as soon as the English version was available. The MWG used both direct and indirect distribution; and where possible, the MWG mediated the direct distribution by running workshops at which women were given the book and shown how to use it. The English could only really be distributed to places where there were high levels of education, and, of course, proficiency in English, and this, plus the fact that there weren't that many copies to distribute, meant that the workshop process worked well.

Thus, once the Zulu Handbooks were printed, the MWG tried to use primarily direct distribution in communities or through these 'Handbook training' workshops. The MWG initially kept a fairly careful record of how many books were being distributed to whom, for example:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>To whom distributed, and how</b>
22/07/2000	Umlaas Road	Women farmworkers at a Handbook training workshop(no numbers given, but the workshop was reported to be 'well attended')
02/08/2000	Ashdown Township	30 women, 4 men at a Handbook training workshop
03/08/2000	Esigodini	35 women at a Handbook training workshop
18/09/2000	Howick	28 women at a Handbook training workshop
03/10/2000	Msinga	15 women from different villages, plus local nurses and teachers, at a Handbook training workshop
18/10/2000	Ixopo/Inhlazuka	100 women, plus local nurses and social workers, at a Handbook training workshop
19/10/2000	Impendle	10 boxes were delivered, and with the help of the local Induna, most were distributed to women at the pension payout. The remainder were given to the Induna's wife, a member of a number of women's groups in the area
22/10/2000	Kranskop	? No numbers given
24/10/2000	Matimatolo	100 women at a Handbook training workshop
25/10/2000	Richmond	100 women at a Handbook training workshop
28/10/2000	Mooi River	35 women and 10 men, all farmworkers, at a Handbook training workshop

(MWG. 2000. Senior Fieldworker's monthly report, July/August and October;

MWG. 2000. Co-ordinator's monthly report, October.

Registers for some of these meetings are also available.)

Although coupling training in the use of the Handbook with its distribution was undoubtedly an admirable strategy, it wasn't really practical, given the large number of books that had to be distributed - in the MWG's Chairperson's report to the Annual Consultative Forum of the organisation on 20 October 2001, the chairperson reported that by then (only) 600 women had attended workshops at which they had received the Handbook and been trained in using it. Thus the organisation had already decided to use mediating agencies to help with the distribution process by September 2000 (MWG. 2000. Minutes of staff and MANCO meeting. 9 September 2000; MWG. 2000. Minutes of MWG Forum meeting. 9 September 2000). The organisation agreed 'a very clear note' would be kept of who received the books, in order to 'help with the evaluation process' (MWG. 2000. Minutes of staff and MANCO meeting. 9 September 2000), because 'The books must get to the women who really need them' (MWG. 2000. Minutes of MWG Forum meeting. 9 September 2000).



Thus boxes of books were given to a number of agencies to distribute, including:

Type of agency	Name of agency
NGO	Tembaletu Community Education Centre (and its satellite centres, who distributed books to all its adult learners) Training and Resources in Early Education (TREE) Project for the Survivors of Violence/Sinani Association for Rural Advancement (AFRA) Lifeline/Rape Crisis Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness (PACSA) Family and Marriage Society of South Africa (FAMSA) Thandanani Career Resource Centre
Paralegal	Matatiele Advice Centre Kokstad Justice Centre Black Sash Advice Office Centre for Criminal Justice (Victim Support Centres) Children in Distress (CINDI) Pietermaritzburg Association for the Aged (PADCA)
Church	St. Mary's (Richmond)
Government	Department of Labour (Richmond) Department of Welfare (Pietermaritzburg) Department of Health (Pietermaritzburg) Department of Welfare (Ixopo) Clinics (Ixopo) Mountain Rise Police Station Loop Street Police Station Ndlovu Regional Council Richmond Chest Hospital Public libraries in the Midlands

The agencies were supposed to either directly distribute the books to women with whom they worked, or use them to enhance their advice to women, or make them available to women to read. A number of these agencies had participated in the Task Teams which set up the initial workshops.

Unfortunately, no careful record was actually kept of how many books were given to the these agencies - and indeed, the first question on the questionnaire sent to them as part of this evaluation was how many they had received (of those who responded, many weren't sure).

An order form for the Handbook was also included on the front page of *Learn with Echo*, together with an article about the Handbook, and elicited requests for hundreds of copies of the book from all over the Midlands (and further afield), which were posted out by the MWG.

By November 2000, the MWG Co-ordinator reported that 98% (i.e. 9 800) of the books had been distributed (MWG. 2000. Co-ordinator's monthly report, October). I believe this was probably an exaggeration (I simply cannot see how they could have physically managed to distribute that number of copies in such a short time), but certainly by the end of 2000, most of the books had gone.

We also made the Handbook available on the Internet via the CAE website (although as a single .PDF file which was really very large and rather unwieldy); and on CD, which we sold at R25 a copy.

Best practice suggests the following are important components of the distribution stage:

- preferably free of charge
- distribute through literacy centres, rural libraries, youth groups, women's groups etc
- be strategic - make sure primary target is reached

We did indeed provide the book free of charge, through multiple methods. I think in the event we gave far too many copies to NGOs and government departments to distribute - and we did this despite our repeated decision not to. To some extent, this was because it was logistically actually quite hard for the MWG to distribute the books in the way we had imagined - they had only one vehicle, and limited funding. To some extent, it was because of the enormous pressure put on us, particularly by government structures and departments, to give them copies - we became aware fairly early on that the information was as desperately needed by government officials as by ordinary women. Thus, for example, the South African Police Services wanted a copy for every police station; the Land Claims Commission requested 50 copies; the Health Department wanted one for each clinic, and so on. (Many people suggested we ask for payment for these copies - but this was really beside the point. Selling these copies didn't mean there were then more copies available for ordinary women, because we couldn't reprint another small run with the money we would have received in this way (a small run would mean that each copy would have been extremely expensive); and the administration required to sell copies was simply beyond our capacity).

Thus many copies actually did go to government (as has been seen, the MWG did not keep sufficiently detailed records, so it's hard to say how many, but certainly hundreds - the minutes of an MWG Forum meeting states that 300 copies would go to the Ndlovu Regional Council alone (MWG. 2000. Minutes of MWG Forum meeting. 9 September 2000). In some cases, we hoped that this would make copies accessible to ordinary women who might otherwise not see them - but we had no way of ensuring that this was the case. We did receive a few anecdotal reports some years later that there were still dusty piles of plastic-wrapped Handbooks sitting in offices - and this may still be the case. Even copies that were specifically given to NGOs working on paralegal issues, whom we knew to be acting as mediators, didn't always get used. For example, one of the women who attended the Matatiele focus group worked for a paralegal organisation; she knew they had a copy, but hadn't even looked at it (and said no-one else in the office had either). She was given a copy by her sister, who had received it at an MWG workshop in Kokstad, and used it herself - and only then realised how useful it would be in her work. She now uses it all the time.

Part of the problem was that the distribution, although seen from the start as an important part of the project, happened a long time after the project had officially ended - at least as far as the funder was concerned. The Zulu version was only completed in mid-2000 - 18 months after the official launch!

## Evaluating the material

By September 1998, the project was running overbudget because the consultative workshops had cost considerably more than anticipated. Thus, even at this early stage, we began to talk about trying to fund the final evaluative workshops from some other source, and using the money budgeted for these to finance the initial workshops.

We were legally obliged to run both an internal and external evaluation in terms of our contract with SIDA. As has been seen, the internal evaluation was run; but the external evaluation in fact never happened (even this thesis is clearly not an external evaluation).

Best practice suggests the following are important components of the evaluation stage:

- get opinions and suggestions from readers, authors, experts, artists, linguists, adult education workers, and so on
- evaluation must be 'scientific' and systematic
- ask users
- take context of user into account

Regrettably, we didn't comply with any of these requirements!

## The Handbook as a research project

Clearly, one component of the Handbook as a materials development project was the research required to:

- find out what women wanted in the Handbook;
- find out about each of the issues identified for inclusion in the Handbook;
- find out what women thought about the pre-published material.

In Chapter 1 I looked at the research paradigms I think hold most import for this thesis/evaluation; but these hold similar import for the research undertaken as part of the process of developing the Handbook. The above detailed analysis of the process used in developing the Handbook allows for an examination of the extent to which the Handbook process reflects good practice drawn from these research paradigms, as well as from the broadly emancipatory framework within which I have located the project in Chapter 5.

The key ideas of the various emancipatory/critical research paradigms appropriate to the Handbook as discussed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 5 can be summarised as follows:

<b>Research paradigm</b>	<b>Key ideas</b>
Action research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• small-scale intervention, and close examination of the effects of this</li> <li>• formative - thus the definition of the problem, the aims and the methodology may alter during the process</li> </ul>
Feminist research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• process is as important as product, because it raises the consciousness of the participants towards transformative social action</li> <li>• possibility of value-free research is neither possible nor desirable</li> <li>• emphasis on everyday experiences of women</li> <li>• dialogue between the researcher and the researched is important</li> <li>• committed to changing the position of women and society</li> </ul>
Participatory research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• include ordinary people in the process and thereby mobilise and empower them</li> <li>• demystify research and place it in the hands of the researched</li> </ul>
Praxis-oriented research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• encourage self-reflection and deeper understanding on the part of the researched</li> <li>• reflexive - researcher must constantly ask 'how do my value commitments insert themselves?'</li> <li>• use triangulation, reflexivity and member checks (being careful of false consciousness), as well as 'conscientisation' (i.e. praxis), to check validity</li> </ul>

In many ways the Handbook is a good example of most of these theories in practice. Thus the Handbook was indeed a small-scale intervention, limited as it was to a particular geographical area (rather than being a Handbook for women in South Africa), and a particular group (women). It was formative, in the sense that the process impacted considerably on the product, as was discussed above. It had a very clear ideological stance - to empower women - and used ordinary women, and their everyday experiences, to inform the content of the Handbook. It certainly intended to raise the consciousness of women, and mobilise them, though the extent to which it did so is, I think, limited - this will be examined in detail in the final chapter. And I believe it tried to demystify the research process, by explaining all along what was going to happen next and the role of the women in the process. Indeed, this had been one of the original intentions of the project, as is outlined in the funding proposal:

[The] workshops will also be used to inform women of how the research is being conducted, and to introduce basic research methods to women. It is hoped that these workshops will be built on in future by the Midlands Women's Group, so that research capacity amongst women in Pietermaritzburg (sic) is developed (Handbook Project. 1997. Funding Proposal 3).

However, other than explaining to women what we planned to do, and how we planned to do it, I don't really think we came close to this aim. We certainly didn't get research participants into 'a self-sustaining process of critical analysis and enlightened action', as Comstock (quoted in Lather 1991:62) argues it is part of the emancipatory researcher's task to do.

What we also did not do is question our role (power?) as the researchers/developers, and we did not enter into a dialogue with the researched. Although I attended many of the consultative workshops, I never explored with the women involved in the workshops my own gender oppression (although I remember telling women in Impendle the kind of information I

wanted to find out about - where the nearest Well Baby Clinic was to my home). Of course, communication was fairly difficult anyway, since I speak no Zulu. Certainly, the fact that I am white, and was introduced by the facilitators as being from the University, created (or simply reinforced?) an enormous gap between me and the majority of women at the workshops. On the other hand, to my recollection the women facilitators (Zulu-speaking women with strong ties to rural areas) also did not engage in a dialogue with participants about their own oppression/s.

The potential class/race gap was obviously also the case with a number of other people involved in the project, many of whom were middle class and white. This issue was never really raised as a problem; the only potential problem raised was the fact that one of the English writers, one of the Zulu writers, and both of the Afrikaans writers were men, and ultimately this was dismissed since they had no control over the actual content, and the way they wrote about the issues would be edited by a number of women. In addition, the fact that two of the facilitators running the consultative workshops were men was also never really seen as a problem, although we did acknowledge that women might not be prepared to speak if other men were present, and a strategy for dealing with men if they did come was devised beforehand. I think that we believed that we women automatically shared a bond across race and class with other women; and that the (undoubted) facilitative skills of the men, and the fact that they were 'feminists' was good enough.

Nor was much time spent in the workshop on why women were experiencing the problems they raised. In the workshop in Pietermaritzburg, the subject of child abuse (often by fathers) was repeatedly raised. A woman in the workshop, a nurse, ascribed the problem to the fact that she had to work night shifts, and was thus not home to service her husband's night-time sexual 'needs'. At the same workshop, one of the themes which came up very strongly was that of culture. Thus many women argued that the reason for the high rate of child abuse, rape, and domestic violence was because traditional cultural values (and in particular Ubuntu<sup>1</sup>) had broken down and been replaced by Western values. Women argued that such issues had never been a feature of 'traditional' life<sup>2</sup> (one woman said that 'Western' dress was the cause of rape, since it was so much more revealing than 'traditional' dress - it is hard to imagine what she had in mind). Although some discussion was held in small groups between women, and in plenary, the problems they raised were never thoroughly problematised. We were not overly concerned about this at the time, since we saw the Handbook itself as doing this - but I don't think the Handbook actually does. I will return to this in the next chapter.

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<sup>1</sup> This is a Zulu/Xhosa term which can be literally translated as "humanness". As a concept, it means that a person is only a person through other people, that interconnectedness or interrelatedness of people is fundamental to the survival of the individual.

<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to contrast to this to the attack I received from black men in an iNdllovu Regional Council executive committee meeting, to which I had been asked to make a presentation about the Handbook. These men accused me of attacking 'traditional' Zulu culture by encouraging their (polygamous) wives to divorce them.

## The Handbook as an educational project

The key ideas of the educational paradigms appropriate to the Handbook as discussed in Chapter 5 can be summarised as follows:

Educational paradigm	Key ideas
Human rights/citizenship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• both knowledge of rights and self-confidence to act on these is necessary</li> <li>• affective dimension is important in educating people about their rights</li> <li>• should be learner-centred, so take into account the real life experiences of learners</li> <li>• ask communities what problems they face, and build on experiences and issues they can identify with</li> </ul>
Feminism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• don't lose sight of multiple oppressions, especially race and class</li> <li>• problematise issues, to show their gendered nature</li> <li>• focus on the actual situation, women's practical needs, and their strategic interests</li> </ul>
Freirian/critical pedagogy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• start with the experiences of ordinary people</li> <li>• problematise them</li> <li>• offer an alternative vision of how things could be</li> <li>• education should lead to social action</li> </ul>

As the above discussion suggests, much of what is summarised here is applicable to the Handbook, and particularly the injunction to start with the experiences of ordinary people, ask communities what problems they face, and build on these. However, the extent to which the project problematised these issues is debatable, as I have suggested. In addition, the multiple oppressions faced by women were not really raised either in the Handbook itself, or in the various workshops run as part of the development process. The fact that we had an enormously diverse target audience (all women living in the Midlands of the KwaZulu-Natal), which we clearly acknowledged as being diverse, was never really problematised by ourselves to ourselves; as long as we heard all of their voices, and including all of the issues they raised, the book would be useful to them.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

In Chapter 1, I identified this evaluation as both summative and formative, or, in Chen's typology (1996:123) both process-assessment and outcome-assessment, and process-improvement and outcome-improvement. I also argued that it needed to be theory-driven, as is asserted by leading practitioners in the field (Patton (1989), Chen (1990), Fitz-Gibbon and Morris (1996), Weiss (1997), and Clarke (1999)).

This evaluation thus considered both the process of developing the Handbook, and its effectiveness (whether the outcome was achieved, and to what extent - whether women actually used it, and how). It did this by considering best-practice in the development of materials targeting women with relatively low levels of reading ability, drawing on appropriate theory; and by considering data drawn from the research conducted as part of this evaluation.

Evaluation, as we have seen, is ultimately a judgement, and hence this conclusion must ultimately be a judgement about the worth of the Handbook.

I think, by any standards, *The Women's Handbook* is a good piece of material. I think this is because it drew so heavily (and so consciously) on appropriate best practice and theory in terms of its development, its content, its language and its layout. I think this is one of the reasons why women who have accessed the Handbook have indeed read it (or parts of it), and in reading it, know a great deal more about their rights. And knowing their rights, and how to access them, has provided them with a base from which to attempt to access them.

Thus the Handbook could be seen as having achieved its outcome - women did in fact read the Handbook; did know more as a result of reading it; and did use it. However, I don't think this goes far enough. To what extent did they use it? Did it improve their lives?

Women have used the book in some extraordinary, and often extremely brave, ways, as has been discussed. And yet they have not used the book in ways in which we thought (hoped?) they would, most notably:

- Women have not used the book to even attempt to access water, land, housing - basic needs with which women struggle on a daily basis;
- Women have not acted collectively, except insofar as they have accompanied one another to government offices to apply for, for example, social grants.

Why is this?

As has been seen, the Handbook project was premised on a notion that women **could** act, that they had, in other words, agency<sup>1</sup>. It was our contention, as the developers of the Handbook, that having information, and reflecting on this information, *as long as this was directly relevant to them*, would lead women to choose to take action to improve their own circumstances. This belief was, at least in part, derived from the Freierian notion of humans as subjects (rather than objects) who, through a process of conscientisation could come to understand the structures that shaped and oppressed them, and take action to change their lives for the better.

This premise of subject and agency also underlies feminist theory, and critical education, both of which, as we have seen, profoundly influenced the Handbook. Thus, for example, critical educationist Moacir Gadotti starts from the premise that human history is the product of the struggle of men and women against inequality (Gadotti 1996:xix).

It has to be said that this is not an uncontested notion; and indeed there has been considerable debate amongst social theorists about the extent (and even existence) of human agency. Many social theorists have argued from a more determinist view, in which the structural shapes human experience in such profound and inevitable ways that personal action is both unlikely and ultimately meaningless. Postmodernism, on the other hand, in arguing for multiple realities and rejecting any notion of metatheories/metastructures, has tended to reject the notion of the individual as subject, as an autonomous individual capable of full consciousness (Lather 1991: 5; 37-38)<sup>2</sup>.

Possibly, thus, the failure of women to act in the ways we had hoped is simply a function of the theory on which the Handbook is based being wrong.

I would argue that some of the actions women did take were fairly profound, in the sense that they required an understanding of existing relations of power, of the unfairness of these, and of their own self-worth, and then determined action to overturn these to their own advantage. This was certainly the case for those women who restructured their relationships with their partners as regards home obligations and the sharing of work, domestic violence, and inheritance and property rights. There is no doubt in my mind that these constitute valid examples of (these) women acting as subjects, as agents.

I am reluctant, therefore, to abandon the theory which underlies the Handbook (and my own personal philosophy). I believe that understanding why women acted (or didn't act) in the ways they did (or didn't) requires a further exploration of the notion of human agency, rather than a rejection of it.

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<sup>1</sup> Human agency is typically taken to mean that individuals are autonomous, purposive actors, capable of choice and carrying out actions in furtherance of choices made, 'of concretely becoming the person one chooses to be through carrying out those actions that express one's purposes and needs' (Gould 1988:47).

<sup>2</sup> Those who suggest that our thoughts and actions are predetermined by our genetic make-up could also be added to this list.



Lister (1997), in her work on citizenship and feminism, emphasises the point that having agency is not enough - it is the knowing one has agency that is required for action to take place:

To act as a citizen requires first a sense of agency, the belief that one *can* act...agency is not simply about the capacity to choose and act but is also about a conscious capacity which is important to the individual's identity (1997:38).

But even knowing one can act is not a guarantee either that one will act, or that this will bring about change. Feminists and critical educationists have long argued that for someone to take action, they need to understand what it is they are taking action against, and that they have been influenced by this - they need to understand the nature of their own oppression. This was consistently argued by Paolo Freire, and has been echoed by other influential writers, such as Henry Giroux:

...[S]ince people do not exist apart from the world, apart from reality, the movement must begin with the human-world relationship. Accordingly, the point of departure must always be with men and women in the "here and now", which constitutes the situation within which they are submerged, from which they emerge, and in which they intervene. Only by starting from this situation - which determines their perception of it - can they begin to move (Freire 1996:66).

If we are to take human agency seriously, we must acknowledge the degree to which historical and objective forces leave their ideological imprint on the psyche itself. To do so is to lay the groundwork for a critical encounter between oneself and the dominant society, to acknowledge what this society has made of us and decide whether that is what we truly want to be (Giroux 1983:149).

The reason why we need to fully understand the ways in which we are shaped by our context is because, as feminist writer Kathleen Weiler argues, 'making sense' of the world is often done within the bounds of internalised ideology. So even when we believe ourselves to be making choices, 'they are choices made within a kind of logic of existing social structures and ideology. And this logic is learned very early and is reinforced through many institutions' (Weiler 1988:89). This is the case, she says, with patriarchy, where women internalise male hegemony. Thus women need to understand the nature of patriarchy and the way in which it has affected not just their lives but their understanding of the world and their place in it.

Giroux (2001) argues that a critical part of this understanding must be our own feelings about our context:

Not only do [people] need to understand the ideological, economic and political interests that shape the nature of their...experiences, they must also address the strong emotional investments they may bring to such beliefs (2001).

But even this is not enough. Knowing that we can act, and being conscious (or conscientised) of what it is we are acting against, cannot and will not automatically lead us to take action. This is partly because there are multiple curbs on this, at both a structural and a personal level, as Weiler (1988) argues:

There is a constant struggle between people's capacity to think critically and the power of hegemonic ideology and the material constraints that act upon us (1988:74).

So overcoming these curbs is important - but even more critical is believing that it is possible to do so. This notion - of the need for an individual to believe that change is possible - has influenced much of the work of critical educationists, as is obvious from the titles chosen for many of their seminal works (Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of hope*; Roger Simon's *Teaching against the grain: Texts for a pedagogy of possibility*; and more recently, Henry Giroux's *Pedagogy of the depressed*). Freire, in his first major work *The pedagogy of the oppressed*, first argued this point, saying that people must 'perceive their state not as fated and unalterable, but merely as limiting - and therefore challenging' (1996:66).

Thus, action which brings about meaningful change in our lives requires that we believe that we can act; that we fully understand what it is we are acting against, and that we believe that our action can bring about meaningful change.

How does this help us understand the kinds of actions women took (or didn't take)?

What is at issue here is not whether women acted or not - they did. We must thus suppose a certain level of belief in the ability to act (since they did so). The issue is thus how they acted and how they did not act, and why they acted in some ways and not others.

The women who attended the focus groups did not report a single instance of even trying to access, for example, water (which they had identified as a key issue in the initial workshop), or land or housing (which we believed, rightly or wrongly, to be a key issue).

This would not, of course, be a problem if these were not issues for women - if they had no reason to act on them. Water was raised as a critical issue in every single workshop we ran in the initial phase of the project - and it was included in the priority list of five issues of almost all of the workshops (Handbook Project. 1998. Reports on workshops). Land and housing, on the other hand, were not. In fact, in the workshop we held to evaluate the initial workshops, we specifically noted this point, drawing on our own knowledge of these issues:

Concern was raised that issues around access to and ownership of land **had not been raised** in any of the rural workshops, although this issue is probably a very pertinent one for rural women.

It was not clear why this had happened - one suggestion was that not having rights to land were so taken for granted that women did not even consider this a problem (Handbook Project. 1998. Minutes a meeting to evaluate the initial workshops, 7 July 1998).

I think this is a very telling point. It shows an assumption on our part about what women truly considered important, even though they didn't say it - the old problem of 'false consciousness'. So, perhaps we were wrong, and land and housing really isn't an issue for women (although there is a considerable body of research, not to mention personal knowledge, that suggests otherwise). This is clearly not the case, however, with water.

As has been mentioned, water was raised consistently as a major problem in the initial workshops. Women spoke about the distances they needed to walk in order to fetch water for drinking, cooking, cleaning, bathing; about the time it took to do so; about the heaviness of the load that had to be carried; about the potential for disease because of dirty, contaminated water.

Water is fundamental to life. In his hierarchy of needs, Maslow (1954) includes water as a deficiency need, and places it in the first level of his hierarchy (physiological needs). Maslow argued that until these fundamental, physiological needs had been met, an individual would not move up the hierarchy to attempt to satisfy a higher-order need.

Why, then, did women not attempt to address this issue?

I think this is partially because although water was clearly a problem for women, impacting significantly on their daily lives, dealing with it was not a fundamental need in the sense that it wasn't that they didn't have water - it was just that getting it was a great inconvenience and difficulty. Overcoming this required getting clean water closer to where they lived. The Handbook explains how this can be done. The section on water is divided into two parts - 'Getting water yourself', and 'Getting help from government'. Getting water yourself involved collective, public action to do things like spring protection, water harvesting, etc. Getting help from government required collective, public action to form a water committee to apply to the appropriate government department. Dealing with water thus required two things of women - it required that they act collectively (either with other women, or with women and men), and it required that they act in the public sphere.

And this is why I think no woman reported having done anything about one of the most significant issues affecting them.

One of the things which is significant about the kinds of action women *did* take is that they pretty much all happened within the private sphere - they concerned themselves, their families. I remain hugely admiring of what women attempted (and achieved) within these private spaces; but it seems to me that what was required of them to move beyond this and into the public sphere was simply too much.

I would argue that this is because of the patriarchal system within which these women live. I think that this operates at the level of community to make it difficult for women to act in the public sphere outside of accepted roles; and at the level of government to ensure that women face an ongoing battle against prejudice and discrimination by public officials.

Clearly, there has been a change at the macro level over the last decade, with the introduction of the 1996 Constitution and a number of significant legislative achievements for women. However, the patriarchy remains enormously strong, despite government intervention:

It is possible to legalise a woman's right to choose to terminate a pregnancy. But it is more difficult to legislate the attitude a service provider ought to have while engaging a client or conducting the termination procedure. It is possible to pass a law enabling a woman to own land in her own name but difficult to conceive of a law that would compel community to acceptance of women who make this choice (Friedman 1999:14).

So despite a legislative and rights-based framework, the daily experience of women is one of ongoing structural barriers, often resulting from patriarchal attitudes, as women reported at the focus groups when asked to comment on what happened when they had attempted to use the Handbook for something (as has been discussed in Chapter 4).

Thus women experience real difficulties with front-line government officials they encounter as they first attempt to obtain basic documentation or make applications for grants and services. The Handbook appears to have had some success in helping women deal with some of these problems. For example, in the case of the woman who was told she was ineligible for a Child Support Grant, she brought the Handbook to the official, and insisted that she be allowed to apply. She was ultimately successful in receiving the grant. In the case of the elderly woman who was told she should remarry, a local woman who had the Handbook returned with the elderly woman (and the Handbook) to the pensions office and insisted that she be allowed to apply. She now receives the pension. However, the problems with officials must discourage many women from even making the attempt; and when this is combined with having to move from the private (applying for a Child Support Grant) to the public (applying for a water project), the odds are simply insurmountable.

Which begs the question of why women have not even begun any kind of collective action, even to deal with some of the ongoing frustrations reported above (nearly every single woman at the Greytown focus group had something to say about the sexual abuse by the man at the local Home Affairs office. When I asked why they hadn't done anything about it, since clearly all women were affected, they looked a bit ashamed, but gave no answer. Subsequent to the focus group, and working with the MWG, the women staged a march through the streets of Greytown. The man was subsequently charged).

The Handbook had a clear philosophical bent towards collective action. This was because we believed, as Collins (1991) has argued, the expression of individual agency needs to be translated into collective action for real change to occur.

Thus we included a section entitled 'Women working together' to encourage collective action, and argued in this section that 'it is important that women also work together, as well as alone':

If a woman works alone, she can make a difference to her own life. But when a woman works with other women, she can change things in her own life *and* in the lives of other women. She can also change things in the lives of her children and her family (*The Women's Handbook* 1999:400).

This section included advice on how women might work together to form, for example, a women's group, how they might network with others, and how they could lobby for change.

However, on the whole, women have not embarked on joint action, either to access rights and services, or to deal with the problems they face concerning government officials. The women in the focus groups gave many examples of individuals helping other individuals, one example of a group of women who together went about accessing the Child Support Grant, and one example of the wives in a polygamous marriage jointly tackling their husband about equal inheritance for their sons and daughters; but there has been no evidence of women coming together to jointly tackle a problem related to accessing rights (such as the government official requiring sexual favours), even when they know that a particular problem is experienced by others.

Indeed, women raised as a specific problem the very opposite of collective action - the fact that women undermined each other. For example, women at the Nhlazuka focus group said that conflict amongst women in the area was very high, and that women did not work together on projects because they did not trust each other, and were jealous of each other. They said that gossip (about each other) was a problem, as were accusations about witchcraft.

Why is this? Why do women act in ways which weaken each other (and thus, if one subscribes to the theory of collective action as a necessary requirement for social change), themselves?

Paulo Freire argues that this is an inevitable phase in the struggle for liberation:

But almost always, during the initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or "sub-oppressors". The very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped... This phenomenon derives from the fact that the oppressed, at a certain moment of their existential experience, adopt an attitude of "adhesion" to the oppressor (1996:27).

This phenomenon, when members of an oppressed group enforce or reinforce their subordinate status on other members of the oppressed group, is often called 'horizontal oppression', and has been widely theorised by those working in the field of oppression, including feminists (see for example Adam, Bell and Griffin 1997; Gilbert and Wright 2002).

So I believe that women understood that they had agency. I think that to some extent they understood the gendered nature of control of, and access to, things like water. But I believe that they did not take any action regarding water because they did not believe that their action could bring about meaningful change - and indeed, might come at personal cost, rather than personal gain.

And, although I think women do have some understanding of the gendered nature of their daily experience, I'm not convinced it is as a result of the Handbook. Indeed, I don't think the Handbook really does what either Freire or radical feminists would expect it to do. I think that although we made a genuine attempt to reflect the lived reality of women (and I think we did it quite well), we never really critiqued this reality; we never really attempted to raise anyone's consciousness. I also think we were being too politically careful. An example of this would be the way we handled the issue of virginity testing, a women's rights issue if there ever was one, and one which came to prominence while we were developing the Handbook.

We knew we had to deal with it, but we were never quite sure how. The issue was discussed as the last item at one of the last Reference Group meetings:

Anne requested guidance on how the issue of virginity testing should be handled in the Handbook. After some discussion, it was agreed to include this in the Youth section where issues about sex are discussed, and to present virginity testing in this context. The arguments for and against virginity testing would be made (Handbook Project, 1998. Minutes of Reference Group meeting, 2 November 1998).

This is exactly what we did - we tried to write it so that any right-minded citizen would realise that virginity testing was an abomination. But we never said that.

But then, can any material, particularly stand-alone, unmediated material, really act in this way, as a conscientising mechanism? And could the Handbook ever actually achieve collective action? In other words, could we have done something differently, or better, that might have induced women to take public, collective action in solidarity with each other? On the whole, I think not. I think the forces governing whether or not a woman is inclined to action, and particularly to collective action, are simply way beyond the ability of a single piece of material to resist. These are multiple, and powerful, forces - of class, of hegemony, of power, of the patriarchy.

This suggests that whilst educational material can provide both information and the encouragement to use it, collective action, particularly in the public sphere, requires a great deal more.

But this is not to negate the considerable achievements of the Handbook. What became clear in the focus groups was that women did not have most of the information provided to them in the Handbook prior to receiving it. Indeed, the women in the Sobantu, Impendle and Matatiele groups who had not had access to the Handbook, showed far less of an understanding of their rights, and were quite surprised to hear from those who had accessed the Handbook what they were entitled to. This was particularly the case for issues such as customary marriage (in terms of recent legislation, women married under customary law now have rights equivalent to women married under civil law, and are legal majors), and the traditional practice of having to marry the brother of a deceased husband (which these women were surprised to hear had no legal basis). It was also clear that for most women the Handbook constitutes the only source of such information available to them. And for the women who now have this information, whatever they choose to do with it, they are the stronger for knowing.

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## **Interviews**

Interview with Prof. J.J.W. Aitchison, Pietermaritzburg, 18 November 2002

Interview with Ashnie Padarath, Pietermaritzburg, 14 November 2002

## Appendix 1: Focus group questionnaire

1. Where did you get the Women's Handbook from?
2. What information do you remember most from the Women's Handbook?
3. How often have you used the Women's Handbook?
4. How easy is to find the things you are looking for in the Handbook?
5. How easy is it to understand the information in the Handbook? Is the language easy or hard? Which bits are hard to understand?
6. How useful is the information in the Women's Handbook to you?
7. Do you think the Women's Handbook is too thick?
8. Have you used the Handbook to help you with any of your own problems? If not, why not? If so, what have you used it for? What happened?
9. Have you used the Handbook to help anyone else with their problems? If not, why not? If so, what have you used it for? Who have you used it to help? What happened?
10. Have you used any of the contact details in the Handbook to contact any organisation or institution or department? If not, why not? If so, which ones? Why? What happened?
11. Is there anything you do differently now because of information in the Handbook? If so, what? Why?
12. Have you talked to other women about women's issues because of the Handbook? If so, what issues have you talked about? Who have you talked to?
13. What do we need to do to make the Handbook better? Is there any information that is missing from the Handbook?
14. Are you still using the Women's Handbook? If so, what are you using it for?
15. Do you know of anyone else who has used the Handbook? If so, what did they use it for? What happened?
16. Would it be helpful to have information that is in the Handbook in a different form? (Eg. radio, comics, booklets, community drama, telephone help line, other)
17. Is there anything else you would like to say about the Handbook?