THE BENEFITS OF AN EXTRA-CURRICULAR 'READING FOR ENJOYMENT' PROGRAMME FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL LEARNERS

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THE BENEFITS OF AN EXTRA-CURRICULAR 'READING FOR ENJOYMENT' PROGRAMME FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL LEARNERS

By

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DECLARATION

I, Jaclyn Wendy Trytsman, declare that *The Benefits of an Extra-Curricular 'Reading for Enjoyment' Programme for Primary School Learners* is my own work. It has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

JACLYN WENDY TRYTSMAN

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ABSTRACT

Changing perceptions of literacy over the past few decades have produced new approaches to the problem of how best to improve the literacy competence of primary school learners. Literacy remains a continuous problem in South Africa, as learners lack motivation to read or are struggling to read, write, and learn in a language that is unfamiliar to them. Researchers such as Street (2005) believe that literacy should not be viewed only as a set of skills to be mastered, but rather as something which must be understood in its broader social context. In accordance with this theory, the South African organisation PRAESA uses their Nal'ibali campaign to promote 'reading for enjoyment' and the formation of 'reading clubs' in order to improve learners' motivation to read and thus their literacy competence by increasing their exposure to pleasurable reading experiences.

In this study it is argued that reading for enjoyment is beneficial to primary school learners' literacy competence as well as their personal and social development. In this study, Grade 5, 6, and 7 learners belonging to the reading club at a primary school in Port Elizabeth were observed over a six-month period. Data was collected through ethnographic observation of the reading club sessions and compiled into a detailed expository and sequential report. This narrative was then analysed in order to determine to what extent the learners had benefited in terms of their development from their participation in the reading club's activities. The analysis of the narrative demonstrated that learners' literacy competence, as well as personal and social skills such as self-confidence and tolerance, had been enhanced by the learners' voluntary participation in enjoyment-centred experiences with literacy. The findings of this study demonstrate that, in under-resourced schools and communities lacking a strong reading culture, an extra-curricular 'reading club' with a focus on reading for enjoyment was able to improve learners' literacy skills and provide opportunities for holistic growth by increasing learners' motivation to read.

Keywords: extra-curricular, holistic development, literacy, multicultural, multilingual, primary school, reading for enjoyment, reading club.

ABBREVIATIONS

CAPS	:	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
FAL	:	First Additional Language
HL	:	Home Language
IIAL	:	Incremental Introduction of African Languages
LoLT	:	Language of Learning and Teaching
NCS	:	National Curriculum Statement
NLS	:	New Literacy Studies
PIRLS	:	Project in International Reading Literacy Study
PRAESA	:	Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa

CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

1.1 RESEARCHER'S PERSONAL INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This chapter offers a brief explanation of the context of the study from a personal perspective, in order to introduce the topic through the researcher's discussion of the factors that inspired this study. After this introduction, the research objectives and research questions are stated, and the chapter ends with an overview of the study in which the content of each chapter is outlined.

In 2010, I came across a magazine article which may be considered the catalyst for this study. At this time, I was completing the practical semester of my Post Graduate Certificate in Education, in the capacity of student teacher at Collegiate Girls' High School. While looking online for a potential text to use as a reading comprehension exercise for one of my classes, I came across a letter to Oprah Winfrey written by Harper Lee, the author of *To Kill a Mockingbird,* which had appeared in the July 2006 issue of *O*, *The Oprah Winfrey Magazine*. After my first reading, I felt that Lee's letter, which expressed her childhood memories of reading, and the role books played in her life, could have been written by me. I felt a strong connection to Lee and her letter, expressing simply yet lyrically the extent to which books and reading influenced her life. As a primary school English teacher, I have often been felt frustration, followed by sadness, at my learners' lack of motivation to delve into books, unknown tales and familiar stories, to explore the imaginations of others and thus their own, to experience characters and adventures through paper and ink instead of movies and television. I had adored reading as a child and I struggled to understand why any child would not want to read.

In an echo of my thoughts, Lee opens her letter by asking, “Do you remember when you learned to read, or like me, can you not even remember a time when you didn't know how?”

and explains how this unconscious learning must have taken place—from being read to by her family: “My sisters and brother, much older, read aloud to keep me from pestering them; my mother read me a story every day, usually a children's classic, and my father read from the four newspapers he got through every evening”. Lee did not consider her ability to read in the first grade unusual— “Early signs of genius? Far from it. Reading was an accomplishment I shared with several local contemporaries”. Lee and her literate peers viewed those who came to first grade unable to read with scorn, saying that they “were impatient with them for having to catch up. We ignored them”. One could be forgiven for thinking that Lee was the product of an affluent community, where homes and libraries brimmed with books, but in reality, it was the 1930s Depression era, and as Lee succinctly puts it, “Books were scarce.” There was no public library and no bookshop nearby, and so any books the children received as Christmas presents were lent and traded amongst themselves until everyone had read everyone else's entire collection.

The picture created by Harper Lee's letter is far removed from what is happening in many South African communities today, including what is happening in the school community where I have been teaching since 2012. Here, a child who learns to read in Grade One, let alone before that, is considered a rare exception, and most learners do not read for pleasure—their reading is restricted to the bare minimum required for school work, and homes are devoid of books and bedtime stories. Like many South African learners, Lee grew up in what she calls 'a remote village' where there were no distractions available to children such as films or parks, and families were suffering economically. Just like many South African learners, Lee had no bookshop or library in close proximity. But, unlike the majority of South Africa's learners, Lee lived in a community which shared a love for reading. Books were precious and were to be shared, and being able to read was not an accomplishment, but a norm. It was the only source of amusement because, according to Lee, “youngsters had little to do but read”. In contemporary society learners have so many other distractions, most of them technological, that reading is simply not something that many of them do for fun. Lee calls ours “an abundant society where people have laptops,

cell phones, iPods, and minds like empty rooms". Yet, despite the decline of printed media, literacy remains one of the most important skills necessary for learners to achieve well in school.

Many South African learners, particularly those in high-poverty areas, are coming to the classroom with reading abilities far below the expected standard, yet they are still expected to reach the same standards of literacy achievement as learners from more affluent backgrounds (Sailors, 2007: 367). Unfortunately, this is the start of a cycle which continues throughout a learner's school career. Grade One teachers complain that some learners start school without ever having held a book or pencil in their hands, Intermediate Phase teachers struggle with Grade Four learners who have left the Foundation Phase unable to read, and high school teachers accuse the Grade Seven teachers of sending them learners who can barely read or write. There are, in my opinion, two principal reasons why so many of today's learners differ so in their reading abilities in comparison to those of Harper Lee's generation. Firstly, as already mentioned, the culture of reading is in a decline in not all, but many areas of South African society. Although Lee also came from a poor community, it was one which valued books both as a form of education and entertainment, unlike in many underprivileged communities nowadays, where status-symbol forms of technology such as cell phones are preferred for both information and recreation.

The second reason is, quite simply, the problem of language. Harper Lee grew up in the American South, where English was and remains the official language. Children grew up hearing English, reading in English, were taught in English, and learned in English. In contrast, South Africa has a rich linguistic heritage of eleven official languages. The majority of the population speak one of the nine African languages at home, yet many learners do not attend school in their home language. A child may grow up learning, say, isiXhosa, and attend an isiXhosa-medium Grade R class, but then be placed in the English Home Language class of an English-Afrikaans school in Grade One, without having ever heard English or Afrikaans at home. English now becomes the child's Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT), and Afrikaans becomes the First Additional Language, despite them

both being unfamiliar. These are the languages the child learns to read and write, but their true home language, isiXhosa, remains only a spoken one, as the child is seldom exposed to the written word in their home language and is hardly ever given the opportunity to practice writing in it.

In English Home Language classes across the country, teachers are facing the dilemma of teaching a home language syllabus to non-home language speakers. This is further complicated by the class population being bilingual and even multilingual. In many cases, the learners' true home language is unfamiliar to the teacher, who cannot offer translations to assist his or her class. While learners may be able to communicate effectively on a verbal level in the LoLT, their level of literacy in this language is far below what is expected for learners in that grade. Yet these learners must complete the same assessment tasks, read and understand the same stories and poems, and write the same external examination as learners who have grown up hearing, speaking, and reading English almost exclusively.

This perhaps explains why South African learners continue to do so badly in the PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) evaluations. Despite numerous curriculum changes in the last twenty years, South African learners are struggling to read—not simply to read, but to be literate, to understand what they read. Many leave Grade Three, the final year of the Foundation Phase, with weak literacy skills, mostly due to their having learned to read in a language which is not their home language. From Grade Four onwards, reading is no longer taught, it is simply practised, and these learners now struggle to understand the content-laden textbooks which they are expected to read independently (Perry, 2008: 62). It is now that children who did not develop the necessary reading skills in the first three years of schooling fall badly behind their peers, because their limited understanding of the LoLT restricts their access to the knowledge being taught (Perry, 2008: 62). A central concern of the initial years of education is to ensure that children become competent readers and writers. Hannon explains why:

> Educationally, literacy is the key to the rest of the curriculum. Virtually all schooling, after the first year or two, assumes pupil literacy. This is particularly

> so to the extent that children are expected to work independently of teachers, for that requires them to read worksheets, written directions, reference materials, and so on. Many schools are anxious to establish this pattern of pupil learning from the earliest possible stage—which means establishing literacy as soon as possible after school entry. The corollary is that children who find reading and writing difficult are disadvantaged in all areas of the curriculum.
>
> (Hannon, 1995, p. 5–6)

However, how we think about literacy has undergone a radical change in the last few decades. Literacy is no longer thought of as merely reading and writing. Contemporary opinions (such as Street, 2005: 417) have broadened the definition of literacy to include an understanding and proficiency in all forms of communication, media and even popular culture. The world of the written word has changed, with paper giving way to screens. Yet, despite almost constant access to information via television, the internet, and mobile phones, today's learners seem less informed than the learners of the past who had only books and relatives from which to glean their knowledge (McMillan and O'Neill, 2012: 31). Despite being able to use such technology with apparent ease for recreational purposes, many learners become overwhelmed by the vast amount of information available online – they lack the skills to identify what is important and relevant, and are thus unable to effectively use such technology to aid them in their learning (Conradi, 2014: 56).

Literacy is, therefore, an undeniable problem in many South African schools. As from the start of the Intermediate Phase (Grade Four), basic reading skills are no longer formally taught, but literature is, and learners are expected to read and comprehend a variety of genres: short stories, fables, folk tales, poems, novels and dramas (Department of Basic Education, 2011: 17). Thus, the closest thing to a 'reading' lesson in the Intersen (Intermediate and Senior) phase would be a literature lesson. However, if one reads the current National Curriculum Statement (NCS) Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for English Home Language, literature does not appear to be fully integrated with the rest of the English curriculum.

Despite the CAPS document making a brave effort to guide educators in integrating texts into their teaching, mostly by offering a long list of various genres of texts which could be

used to teach English contextually, it does offer some contradictions, the most worrying one being the suggestion that teachers should "read as much of the text in class as possible without breaking for any other activity" (Department of Education, 2011: 10). Many teachers who themselves lack the necessary literary knowledge and skills to teach literature study as it should be taught will do just that; due to lack of time, experience, resources and often—sadly—enthusiasm, a typical literature lesson usually involves the teacher reading long sections of the text aloud, alternated with learners being chosen to reluctantly read a paragraph, and the occasional commentary by the teacher on the plot, characters, or theme. This means that many learners with poor literacy skills may feel real fear at the thought of being made to read in front of the class, and many of those who can read often read the text without comprehending what they read, expecting that the teacher will 'explain' the story to them, even if they have not understood it. Literature is thus presented instead as something unfamiliar and intimidating which exists on the periphery of English as a subject.

However, due to what could be seen as the failure of traditional literacy instruction, initiatives such as PRAESA's Nal'ibali campaign are promoting regular reading as a reliable way of developing children's literacy—not regulated, enforced classroom reading, but reading for pleasure. Attempts at developing new effective methods for teaching literacy have not been successful; researchers return to the same conclusion: The best way for a child to improve their literacy is through recreational reading (Krashen, 1989: 454). This is why reading clubs and other similar extra-curricular reading programs have experienced a surge in popularity. These reading clubs encourage learners to read for pleasure by letting them choose what and how they read, by offering exposure without judgement and correction, and by making literacy a real and relevant part of their daily lives.

This dissertation will investigate how Grade Six and Seven learners in an underprivileged and under-resourced school may benefit from joining a reading club. The recently-launched Nal'ibali campaign aims to promote literacy development among children by encouraging schools, communities, and individuals to start reading clubs. These are groups of learners, led by volunteer adults, which meet on a regular basis to participate in reading- and

storytelling-related activities. What happens in a reading club session is different from what would normally happen during a classroom literacy lesson. There are no assessments or assignments, and learners are not forced to perform any of the activities. The fundamental principle behind the Nal'ibali reading clubs is 'reading for enjoyment': if children experience books and reading as a source of pleasure, they will in turn read more, thus leading to an improvement in their literacy abilities. In this dissertation, I aimed to—through my own experience and observation of a reading club in progress—investigate the potential positive impact that such a reading club could have on primary school learners, and in doing so, hopefully encourage other teachers or individuals to start and run reading clubs in their community. Thus, in this study, I analysed reading clubs in general, as well as observing and describing a specific reading club in operation at a school which is situated in a community lacking a strong reading culture, in order to show how the reading club and its activities contributed to the development—social, personal, and academic—of the learners who participated in the reading club sessions.

1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

The objective of this study was to investigate how reading clubs and their related activities may benefit learners in terms of their literacy development as well as their personal and social development. In order to do this, I conducted a sample study of a group of linguistically-diverse learners whose group cohesion, group co-operation and personal confidence and motivation were being developed along with their literacy skills through participating in reading club activities.

My ultimate objective was to formulate a rationale for reading clubs and their activities, investigating through first-hand observation how the reading club itself (as a social rather than institutional environment) and what learners do at a reading club could prove valuable to children's literacy development, as well as building a stronger reading culture in the school and a stronger sense of community in general. This rationale could serve to promote

the advantages of reading clubs by justifying, with reference to my research, how the activities can benefit learners, thus encouraging teachers working in similar contexts to use reading clubs as a means to encourage the development of a stronger reading culture in similarly underprivileged and under-resourced communities.

The primary research question which was investigated was: How do reading clubs contribute to the holistic development of learners? The related sub-questions were:

- How does the reading club itself, its principles, its way of operating, and its values, contribute to the development of a stronger community identity amongst the learners, encouraging appreciation of both their own and others' culture?
- How can reading for enjoyment contribute to the development of learners' literacy skills?

Desired Outcome

The desired outcome was to be able to demonstrate that frequent exposure to enjoyment-centred literacy activities in an informal setting leads to increased literacy competence and development of enhanced personal and social skills in primary school learners.

1.3 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The learners were informed at the very first reading club session that the researcher would be using the sessions to gather data for a study. They were informed in writing about the study and were given letters to take home to their parents regarding the study. Both the learners and the parents were informed that the reading club was being used as the subject

of a study, but that learners' privacy would not be compromised, and that learners would not be forced to attend sessions, participate in any activities, or do anything with which they were not comfortable during the sessions. It was also made clear that learners would not be examined or tested in any way. Parents and learners were also informed that the research had been approved by the Department of Education and the principal of the school. The Applied Languages Departmental Ethics Committee provided the researcher with permission to conduct the study.

1.4 CHAPTER OUTLINES

This study is divided into seven main chapters:

Chapter One introduces the study and presents the researcher's personal feelings towards the topic as well as a brief contextualisation of the topic. It also provides the research objectives, the research questions, and the research outline.

Chapter Two provides some background to the current *status quo* of literacy in South Africa. It also provides a detailed description of the school environment where this study was conducted, providing insight regarding the learners, teachers, parents, and community surrounding the school.

Chapter Three provides a theoretical framework for this study. This chapter provides an outline of the major theories which underpin this study in order to construct a logical framework for this research.

Chapter Four provides a review of literature related to the field of study. Both local South African and international studies related to this study are discussed in order to situate this study among related prior studies in the same field.

Chapter Five presents the research methodology of the study. It describes the methods of data collection and data analysis, as well as providing an overview of the main

characteristics of ethnographic research. This chapter also offers a brief description of the research site and the participants.

Chapter Six discusses the results of the study. This chapter examines the data collected through observation in order to determine whether and to what extent the learners benefited from their participation in the reading club activities. A summary of the key results in relation to the research questions is also provided.

Chapter Seven provides the conclusion, in which the findings of the study are summarised in relation to prior research in the field. The pedagogical implications of the study are discussed also discussed. This chapter also mentions challenges associated with the study, as well as recommendations for further research.

The primary data in the form of a reflexive and descriptive narrative compiled from rough notes taken during the reading club sessions that took place during the observation period, appears as an **Appendix.**

CHAPTER TWO:
CONCEPTUALISATION AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2.1 INTRODUCTION TO LITERACY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Chapter Two provides some background as to the current situation regarding literacy in South Africa, in order to situate this study within the context in which it was conducted. Firstly, South Africa's PIRLS results of 2011 are discussed, in order to highlight the severity of the literacy crisis in many South African schools, as well as to identify any correlations which may exist between reading competence and other factors, such as personal motivation or parental involvement. The aims and principles of the Nal'ibali campaign are discussed in order to provide a conceptual overview of the theories and principles which underpinned the facilitation of the reading club which features in this study. This chapter also provides a detailed description of the school where this study was conducted, describing the learners, teachers, parents, and community in which the school is situated.

It is a fact that many thousands of South Africans leave the schooling system unable to read on even the most basic, functional level. How and why does this happen? How is it possible that individuals spend nine years in the schooling system, from Grade One to Grade Nine, and not succeed in acquiring what is considered the most fundamental academic achievement: to be able to read and write? Unfortunately, the situation in South Africa is multi-layered and complex. The finger cannot be pointed only at poverty, or under-resourced schools, or ineffective teachers. There are many more factors which contribute to South Africa's poor literacy achievement levels. The following chapter highlights important information from the PIRLS 2011 study, which provides an assessment of South African learners' literacy abilities as well as an extensive and detailed analysis of the factors affecting literacy in South Africa and the world.

2.2 PIRLS 2011

In 2011, South Africa was one of 49 countries to participate in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), having previously participated in PIRLS 2006. The PIRLS study focuses on literacy as reading for two purposes: firstly, for literary experience, and secondly, to use and acquire information. The assessment used fictional passages to assess reading for literary experience, and informational articles to assess reading to acquire

and use information (Howie et al, 2012: xv). The following statistics and information are taken from the *PIRLS 2011 South African Children's Reading Literacy Achievement Summary Report* of December 2011.

PIRLS 2011 was conducted for Grade Four in all eleven official languages, and for Grade Five in English and Afrikaans only. The Grade Four testing was conducted using an easier assessment known as prePIRLS, which allows learners from previously low-achieving countries to perform at a different level to those involved in the standard PIRLS assessment. Three hundred and forty-one schools from South Africa participated in the Grade Four prePIRLS assessment and 91 in the Grade Five PIRLS (Howie et al, 2012: 6). The PIRLS assessment rates achievement on a scale from 0 to 1000, with 500 being the International Centre point, acting as a point of reference. Most learners worldwide score between 300 and 700 (Howie et al, 2012: xv).

Grade Four prePIRLS

The PIRLS 2011 study showed that South Africa ranks almost at the bottom of the table. The Netherlands, Russian Federation, Hong Kong, Finland, Denmark and Croatia are the top achieving countries out of the 45 who participated in the Grade Four PIRLS, with almost 100 percent of their respective learners achieving the basic level of reading known as the Low International benchmark. However, despite South African Grade Four learners writing the easier prePIRLS assessment, the average score was 461, and only 71 percent could attain the Low International benchmark (400 points). While six percent of learners were able to read at an advanced level (625 points), more than half of learners tested in Sepedi and Tshivenda were unable to reach even the most basic level of reading achievement, the Low International benchmark. Overall, almost one in three learners could not reach the Low International benchmark. Language played an important role in the results, as on average, English and Afrikaans learners scored 100 to 150 points higher than their African-language peers. Significantly, 29 percent of learners did not write the test in their home languages,

learners achieved higher scores when tested in their home language (Howie et al, 2012: 28 – 29).

Grade Five PIRLS

In the Grade Five PIRLS assessment, South African learners achieved an average score of 421, which is 148 points fewer than the top-scoring benchmarking region of Florida, USA (Howie et al, 2012: 35). Forty-three percent of South African learners were unable to reach the Low International benchmark of 400 points. Hong Kong, Russian Federation, Finland and Singapore were the top achievers out of the 49 countries participating in the Grade Five PIRLS, with close to 100 percent of learners being able to read at the Low International Benchmark level. Although South Africa scored similarly to its neighbour Botswana, and slightly higher than Oman and Morocco (Howie et al, 2012: 36-37), this PIRLS assessment tested only English and Afrikaans learners, meaning it does not truly reflect South African learners' abilities. As seen in the prePIRLS, learners writing in African languages scored lower overall than those writing in English or Afrikaans. As in the prePIRLS, the learners who wrote in their home language scored better than those writing in a language that is not their home language. Of particular interest is the fact that the Home Language English learners attained a significantly high average of 134 points higher than their non-home language counterparts, while the difference between Home Language and non-Home Language Afrikaans learners was only 34 points (Howie et al, 2012:38).

An international pattern which emerged in PIRLS 2011 was the gap in gender performance, with girls outperforming boys in every country except for Columbia, Italy, France, Spain and Israel, in which no discrepancies between genders was noticeable. In South Africa, girls outperform boys by an average of 26 points (Howie et al, 2012: 42-43).

Attitudes and Behaviour to Reading

Only 16 percent of South African learners claimed to 'like reading' on the prePIRLS Learner Attitudes and Behaviour to Reading study, which is less than the International average of 28 percent. Tellingly, learners who claimed to 'like reading' achieved on average almost 100 points more than learners who 'did not like reading', showing a strong positive relationship between reading achievement and attitude to reading (Howie et al, 2012: 56-57). Similarly, the 68 percent of South African learners who 'were motivated to read', again achieved 100 points more than the 10 percent who stated they 'were not motivated to read'. More English and Afrikaans learners were 'motivated to read' than learners speaking African languages (Howie et al, 2012: 58). The 18 percent of South African learners who claimed to be 'confident' in their reading ability achieved more than 100 points more than the 18 percent of learners who saw themselves as 'not confident' when reading (Howie et al, 2012: 60).

Home Support for Learners

Parents of the participating learners were questioned regarding three types of home resources previously linked to reading achievement—parents' education, parental occupation, and the number of books in the home. The 18 percent of South African Grade Four learners who claimed to have 'many resources' at home scored an average of 571 points, while the nine percent of learners with 'few resources' scored on average 448 points. In the Grade Five study, learners with 'many resources' scored 219 points more than those with 'few resources', showing a clear relationship between home resources and literacy achievement (Howie et al, 2012: 61-62). Also, it was found that the children of parents who 'like reading' scored 79 points more than children of parents who 'do not like reading' (Howie et al, 2012: 62).

Classroom, Teachers, and Instruction Factors

Most learners (96 percent) were affected, even if only slightly, by a shortage of resources at school and in the classroom. The four percent of learners who were not affected in this way achieved on average 100 points more than those who were greatly affected (Howie et al, 2012: 85). Fifty-nine percent of Grade Five learners and 31 percent of Grade Four learners attend schools with no school library, and these learners performed worse on the test than those whose schools have libraries (Howie et al, 2012: 89).

Surprisingly, there was no noticeable relationship between the amount of time spent on reading instruction in the classroom, and learner achievement, possibly suggesting that much of the teaching and learning which takes place is simply ineffective, as opposed to insufficient in terms of time (Howie et al, 2012: 95). Teachers who completed the questionnaire indicated they spend more time on teaching the basic skills of reading than on developing inferential and critical abilities. More advanced reading skills, such as making generalisations and describing the text style tend to be taught later in South African school than in other countries (Howie et al, 2012: 99).

Conclusion

The PIRLS report offers some fascinating insights into the current state of literacy in South Africa as well as some of its contributing factors. In addition to the above-mentioned factors, other factors cited by PIRLS 2011 as possibly affecting learner achievement are: the working conditions for teachers at the school, bullying, safety and organisation of schools, the location of the school (e.g. Rural, township, or urban), qualifications of teachers, and the amount of reading homework assigned per week (Howie et al, 2012: 91, 109). In summary of what is outlined above, the PIRLS report suggests that learners in the following categories are more likely to be linked to high reading literacy achievement:

1. Learners who wrote the test in English or Afrikaans
2. Learners whose LoLT is the same as their home language.

3. Learners who are female
4. Learners who like reading
5. Learners who are motivated to read
6. Learners who are confident in their reading ability
7. Learners with many resources at home
8. Learners with parents who like reading
9. Learners not affected by shortages of school resources
10. Learners exposed at an earlier grade to more complex reading skills
11. Learners attending schools in urban areas
12. Learners with teachers with a university degree or honours degree
13. Learners attending schools which provide good teacher working conditions, a school library, a safe and orderly environment, and low levels of bullying.
14. Learners being assigned reading homework 1 to 2 times per week.

Implications of These Findings with Regards to this Study

Many of these factors contributing to improved literacy are significant where this study is concerned, and offer important points for consideration. Admittedly, there are many of these factors over which learners themselves as well as the classroom teacher have no control—for instance, the home language and gender of learners, and the location of the school. However, some of these factors should be taken into account with regards to adapting the current curriculum in order to promote better achievement in literacy.

Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, learners performed best who both liked reading and were motivated to read, suggesting that learners with a positive attitude towards reading become better readers. Therefore, both classroom reading and extra-curricular activities, such as a reading club, must endeavour to improve learners' attitude towards reading by presenting reading as something enjoyable and rewarding, in order to develop their confidence and self-esteem when reading. Learners should be exposed to more complex reading skills in order to develop their critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, for example through questioning or explaining why, in their opinion, a character behaved as they did.

Parents who like reading tend to pass this characteristic on to their children, thus the reading club or school curriculum should aim to involve parents in their children's literacy. This will create a more supportive and encouraging home environment for learners, even if they lack home resources in the form of books, and will involve the learners' family members more in their literacy development. This will in turn create opportunities for parents and learners to engage in literacy events together, such as visiting a library or reading bedtime stories. With regards to the presence of violence and bullying in the school environment, while perhaps the levels of bullying across the entire school might be difficult to change, reading clubs are able to bring about social change by reading bullying-related texts and role-plays, so as to encourage a respectful and non-violent attitude towards others.

2.3 LITERACY IN THE CLASSROOM: THE CAPS CURRICULUM

This section examines how literacy is currently presented in terms of the recent adjustment of the South African curriculum, and discusses how the curriculum's way of handling literacy may affect learners' attitudes towards it. Between 2012 and 2014, the Department of Basic Education revised and implemented the individual subject policies for the *National Curriculum Statement for Grades R to Twelve* (NCS), also known as CAPS: Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements. The NCS is comprised of the CAPS document for each subject, along with the *National Policy pertaining to the Programme and Promotion*

Requirements Grades R to Twelve, and the *National Protocol for Assessment Grades R to Twelve*. The subject-specific CAPS document aims to replace the *Subject Statements, Learning Programme Guidelines,* and *Subject Assessment Guidelines* and combine these three separate documents into one comprehensive document. The CAPS documents are by no means a 'new' curriculum, but are instead intended as a simpler, more teacher-friendly adaptation of the NCS. By 2014, CAPS has been implemented in all grades from R to Twelve and all schools are meant to be CAPS-compliant in terms of their planning, teaching, and assessment.

The CAPS document for English Home Language (properly the *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement, Senior Phase, Grades 7 – 9: English Home Language*) is 136 pages long, and contains most of what a teacher needs to know in order to plan their teaching of the subject. The CAPS document covers how much time is to be spent on English per week, how this time should be shared among the four learning areas of English, and detailed teaching and assessment plans for the year, but as it is only intended as a guideline, does not suggest activities and methods of teaching. However, when one considers that the core values of the entire subject are contained in this single document, what the CAPS document says about the subject can be a telling source of information. For example, it offers the following explanation of 'language':

> Language is a tool for thought and communication. It is also a cultural and aesthetic means commonly shared among a people to make better sense of the world they live in. Learning to use language effectively enables learners to acquire knowledge, to express their identity, feelings and ideas, to interact with others, and to manage their world. It also provides learners with a rich, powerful and deeply rooted set of images and ideas that can be used to make their world other than it is; better and clearer than it is. It is through language that cultural diversity and social relations are expressed and constructed, and it is through language that such constructions can be altered, broadened and refined.
>
> (Department of Basic Education, 2011: 8)

Based on this description, language is 'a tool', 'cultural and aesthetic', for the acquisition of

knowledge and expression of self, for interaction, making sense of the world and responding to it. These are all very valid points when considering the use of language in our daily lives. This definition also mentions the transformative power of language, by saying that language has the power to alter or broaden cultural diversity and social relations. However, the curriculum itself does not allow for this vision of language to be fully realised, as explained below.

The document stresses the importance of using various approaches to teaching English in the classroom, namely text-based, communicative and process approaches. The document cites the purpose of the text-based approach to be "to enable learners to become competent, confident and critical readers, writers, viewers and designers of texts" (Department of Basic Education, 2011: 9). A communicative approach to teaching involves exposing the learners to the language and providing "many opportunities to practise and produce the language by communicating for social or practical purposes" (Department of Basic Education, 2011: 8). It also suggests teaching language in an integrated way, involving the teacher modelling good practice and the learners practising skills in groups before attempting it individually. The process approach is used to guide learners when producing oral and written texts, making them focus on the audience and purpose of the text, and teaching skills such as drafting and editing. All three of the suggested approaches for teaching language sound promising, with the potential to engage learners and encourage confidence as they develop their language skills.

Under the heading of 'Approaches to teaching literature' the CAPS documents uses phrases such as: "learners...respond to the aesthetic qualities of a literary text", "understand and appreciate elements of literary texts", "develop sensitivity to a special use of language that is more refined, literary, figurative symbolic, and deeply meaningful", "imaginative use of language is an added method of revealing, reinforcing, and highlighting their ideas", "writers...have ideas, thoughts and issues; principles, ideologies and beliefs that they most want to share with or reveal" (Department of Basic Education, 2011: 10). Further down the page, the document states that "the purpose of teaching literary texts is to show learners how

their home language can be used with subtlety, intelligence, imagination and flair" (Department of Basic Education, 2011: 10). It goes on to say that "such work might involve examining the presence or absence of imagery; what kind of imagery is being selected by the writer and why, [and] sentence structures and paragraphing" (Department of Basic Education, 2011: 10). All of these features—imagery, sentence structures, paragraphing—actually form part of the learning area of "Language Structures and Conventions" and appear in the term plans in this column, not the literature column. The CAPS document, thus, sees language and literature as closely related, identical in many aspects and aims, and arguably, part of each other: language is a part of literature, and literature is part of a language. Yet, many teachers might interpret the CAPS document to mean that language structures are to be taught separately to literature, which could result in making literature seem intimidating and unrelated to the rest of the English curriculum. Curriculum designers and subject advisors should make more effort to fully integrate literature into the language as it appears as a subject, despite placing high priority on teaching language by using a "text-based, communicative, integrated and process-orientated approach" (Department of Basic Education, 2011: 9).

There is slightly over one page devoted to "Approaches to teaching literature" and another page covering "Formal study of literary texts". These pages offer some sound advice to the teacher—there is a particularly good suggestion about linking creative writing assignments to the study of a text in order to help learners reach more creative levels of appreciation—but some of the advice seems contradictory to the spirit of the rest of the chapter, such as the suggestion that teachers "make every attempt to read as much of the text in class as possible without breaking for any other activity" (Department of Basic Education, 2011: 10), which surely, is not the way to encourage learner interest and engagement in a novel or play. According to the CAPS document, the required texts for learning literature are a reader or literature anthology (containing texts from various genres, namely folk tales, poetry, short stories, and drama) and a novel. The novel, however, is not a novel in the traditional sense of a full-length piece of fiction written by an independent author. Rather, the CAPS

document suggests a length of 30 to 40 pages for a 'novel' in Grade Seven (Department of Basic Education, 2011b: 35), equivalent to the typical length of an illustrated chapter book usually intended for much younger children. The textbook publishing houses produce texts to fit these CAPS requirements, either commissioning texts written with the sole intention of being marketed as a CAPS-compliant novel or by heavily abridging and simplifying existing works which are often classics of children's literature in their own right.

For example, in 2014 the learners in the Grade Seven English Home Language class at Winterson Primary were provided with copies of *Treasure Island* as their novel to be studied. However, this was not Robert Louis Stevenson's roughly 350-page original version, but rather a 'rewritten' edition of barely 40 pages long (including roughly 10 pages of illustrations), with language, dialogue, plot, and vocabulary heavily edited and simplified, stripped of all 'literary' qualities. While the learners clearly enjoyed the ‘story’ of *Treasure Island*, they were denied exposure to Stevenson’s characteristic evocative descriptions and skilful narration. Learners, therefore, are not exposed to an authentic novel but something more akin to a synopsis or summary of the original, yet this is classed by the curriculum as a novel. Similarly, the other novels produced by the publishers have been specially commissioned to be CAPS-compliant, and seem to lack true literary quality in their writing, which is consciously simplistic in its sentence structure and vocabulary, which does not quite conform to the aim of having learners read novels, which is to allow them opportunities to engage with a more challenging text (usually of higher literary quality) than they would ordinarily read. Perhaps academic publishing houses should attempt to abridge novels in a way that shortens them without removing that which makes the text memorable as a work of literature.

It could be argued that the CAPS document does not prescribe any particular titles for literary study up to Grade Nine, and thus teachers are free to use any text of their choice in the classroom. However, the CAPS curriculum is demanding on both learners and teachers, requiring almost perpetual formal assessment in the form of oral tasks, writing, tests, language, and reading comprehension, as well as a required number of poems, folk tales,

short stories, and one-act plays to be read and studied, meaning that teachers wanting to study a full-length novel with their classes, or teachers who would like to provide their learners with the chance to read for pleasure several times a week, would be sorely pushed for time. This means that sadly, learners could, by the end of their ninth year in the South African schooling system, never have read a complete, full-length, authentic novel.

The CAPS document for Grade 7 to 9 Home Language does make reference to reading for enjoyment, including a paragraph on 'Extended Independent Reading/Viewing' in which it is suggested that learners should read a wide range of texts “for pleasure and research” both during and after class (Department of Basic Education, 2011b: 31). Seeing as this is not part of the official weekly teaching plans, however, there is no guarantee that this suggestion will be followed by learners or teachers already struggling to cover the required work for the term. In the CAPS document for Grade 4 to 6, no such mention of leisure reading is made. In short, the CAPS document offers some helpful suggestions as to how to teach language and literature, but does not openly encourage the reading of literature for enjoyment for all ages of learners. With the exception of in the senior phase, most reading specified by the curriculum is academic; learners are required to read in order for their reading comprehension to be assessed, or to formally study a piece of literature. Reading authentic texts for pleasure is not part of the intermediate phase curriculum, but occurs as part of formal assessments and literature study, meaning that learners are not given the chance to improve their reading without the pressures of having to perform literacy tasks for academic, rather than meaningful, real-life reasons. The following section of this chapter will examine the Nal'ibali campaign, which attempts to supplement the CAPS curriculum by promoting reading for enjoyment, instead of only for academic reasons.

2.4 THE NAL'IBALI CAMPAIGN

Background and Principles of PRAESA's Nal'ibali campaign

PRAESA is an independent research and development unit attached to the University of

Cape Town. Founded in 1992 by Dr Neville Alexander, the focus of PRAESA is on language policy in education, especially the key area of language-in-education policy implementation, and related areas such as language planning and policy formulation at national and provincial government levels, in-service teacher education, research into multilingual classrooms, early literacy teaching and learning, and promoting a culture of reading (PRAESA, n.d.). Since 2006, a particular concentration has been on the establishment of community-based reading-for-pleasure groups known as 'reading clubs', of which the Vulindlela Reading Club in Langa may be considered the flagship. In 2012, PRAESA began a focus on biliteracy development with the initiation of the national Nal'ibali campaign, intended to promote reading for enjoyment (PRAESA, n.d.).

Nal'ibali (meaning 'Here's the story' in isiXhosa) was launched by PRAESA (Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa) in June 2012 as a campaign to promote the premise that oral and written stories are as important for literacy development as the more technical aspects such as spelling, phonics, handwriting, and grammar. The campaign's principal argument is that children who are immersed in hearing and reading stories develop a rich storehouse of language, imagination, and vocabulary and, importantly, are more motivated to read. Nal'ibali promotes making reading and writing a firmly-rooted part of children's everyday lives, instead of something only done for school-related tasks. Nal'ibali also promotes reading in one's home language, as well as in English, which is the most common Language of Learning and Teaching in South Africa (Edwards, 2013: 2).

The Nal'ibali campaign consists of three components: a media awareness campaign; mentoring and training for teachers, parents, and other volunteers, predominantly through workshops; and content development, which involves the production of multilingual stories and other resources, predominantly the Nal'ibali supplements which are distributed weekly inside local newspapers in five of South Africa's nine provinces (Edwards, 2013: 2). The supplements are also distributed in larger numbers to reading clubs, schools, and other groups which have requested this service from Nal'ibali. Much of the success of the Nal'ibali supplements can perhaps be attributed to the fact that, with the exception of the

price of a daily newspaper for individual readers, they are available for free. They can be downloaded from the Nal'ibali website, and the bulk deliveries made to schools and reading clubs are done at no cost to the institution.

These supplements are bilingual, containing English and one other language spoken in the region of distribution, either isiXhosa, isiZulu, Afrikaans, or Sesotho. Importantly, the supplements are endearingly illustrated and are printed in full colour, which increases their appeal to both adults and children. The aim of the supplements is to address two major concerns in for literacy development in South Africa: Firstly,

> the dearth of reading-for-enjoyment materials for children in African languages, fundamental to the delivery of mother-tongue-based bilingual education which, as the international research literature suggests, leads to the best possible educational outcomes. The second relates to the need to move away from approaches to the teaching of reading which stress technical issues as at the expense of reading for enjoyment, thus creating appropriate learning opportunities—formal and informal—for all children
>
> (Edwards, 2013: 2).

The supplements are fairly formulaic and contain similar materials each week: a bilingual story, another story in the form of a cut-out-and-keep mini storybook, a front page feature offering advice to teachers and caregivers for encouraging reading in their children, and various other small columns. Nal'ibali also boasts a website and a mobisite (a website specially designed to be accessed from devices such as cellular phones) on which the supplements and stories are available to read online. Nal'ibali's extensive website and their relatively new mobisite seem to emphasise the core message of Nal'ibali, as well as modern understandings of literacy—the idea that literacy is not simply about paper-and-ink texts, but about all forms and formats of text, especially in this age of technology, where computers and cell phones are often more appealing to children than books. The website offers information and ideas for teachers, parents, and volunteers, as well as downloadable back issues of the supplements. The mobisite features the Story Corner stories for viewing and downloading via smart-phone, and is proving even more popular than the website

(Edwards, 2013: 4).

Contents of the Printed Nal'ibali Supplements

The cut-out-and-keep storybooks found in the supplements are 14-page storybooks, normally targeted at primary school learners. They are adapted or abridged versions of existing children's books, all local publications, meaning many of the characters and settings are relevant to South African children. Although adapted for the supplement format, these stories retain as many literary characteristics of the original text as possible. In order for the pages of newsprint to be transformed into a storybook, the pages must be folded and cut along printed lines. According to Edwards, "the engagement with the process [of constructing the storybook] is an unforeseen benefit. The total absorption of children observed making books...seem[s] to add to the evident enjoyment of the stories that follo[w]" (2013: 3). Several times a year, the cut-out-and-keep story is replaced with a cut-out 'zigzag' book for very young children or a longer story for teenage readers. The popularity of these cut-out-and keep stories might be due to the fact that they offer a chance for children to have their own copies of stories that they enjoyed in the reading club, a copy which they can take home and read again, or share with their siblings or parents. Importantly, these stories appear in book form, with cover and back pages, page numbers, and illustrations, allowing learners who might have limited exposure to real books the chance to become acquainted with them and build up a collection for reading at home or at the reading club.

The story corner, found on the back page of the supplement, consists of a specially commissioned story, often a retelling of a traditional folk tale, of about 350 words in length. These stories are presented bilingually according to the languages of the supplement. Often, due to limited space, the story is spread over two issues of the supplement, in two parts. These stories were originally intended to provide adults with materials for retelling or reading aloud. As explained by Carole Bloch, director of PRAESA,

> Reading aloud is one of our major challenges, as this is not seen to be a

> significant practice—more commonly it is understood that you read a picture story to children that they will then read, so the impetus is to practice reading so as to learn HOW to read, rather than to bring a story alive for children. So this [storytelling] is a new challenge for many—and most adults are not yet comfortable or adept at reading aloud. This practice needs practice!
>
> (Bloch, quoted in Edwards, 2013: 3).

Through reading or telling stories aloud, adults also model good practice for the children, which gives the children something to emulate and aspire to. These stories are also suitable for more confident readers to read independently or together, and the fact that the story is presented in two languages can help children improve their knowledge of English or another language, by referring to both language versions concurrently.

The Principles of Nal'ibali Reading Clubs

As well as distributing the weekly supplements, another core component of Nal'ibali is to encourage the formation of 'reading clubs', consisting of groups of children who gather regularly, led by an adult (parent, caregiver, teacher, or individual) to develop their literacy skills in an enjoyable, non-academic environment. Nal'ibali holds frequent workshops in order to promote reading clubs and offer guidance and support to potential reading club facilitators.

The fundamental principle theory which underpins the idea of reading clubs is motivation. As demonstrated by the PIRLS research, the children who perform at literacy-related tasks are the ones who enjoy reading and are motivated to read, for the simple reason that if one enjoys something, one wants to do it more and more; the more one does it, the better one becomes. With regards to literacy, this motivation comes through experiencing, appreciating, and exploring the power of reading through books and stories (Alexander et al, 2011: 1). In homes where reading culture is well-developed, with shelves full of books

available for reading and storytelling, parents who model reading for enjoyment and meaningful reasons for writing and share these experiences with their children, appreciation for books and stories and motivation to read is learned informally and 'naturally' by children. However, these essential aspects of literacy are seldom taught and developed at school. School-based literacy is predominantly skills-based, concentrating on teaching technical skills such as recognising letters and sounds, and sentence construction (Alexander et al, 2011: 1), and reading to answer comprehension questions on the text. This does little to encourage the child who is already intimated by the process and pressures of learning to read.

The socio-economic conditions prevalent in South Africa are another contributing factor towards the lack of reading culture in many homes and communities. In poor urban and rural communities, unemployment, drug abuse, alcoholism, violence, crime, and HIV/AIDS are rife, making daily hand-to-mouth survival people's main priority. Semi-literate parents, mostly unable to help their children with reading and school work, have to ensure basic needs such as food and shelter before they can concern themselves with reading stories. At school, children often do not receive the support they require—literacy is presented as a set of de-contextualised skills, many school do not have libraries, and there is a shortage of resources particularly in African languages (Alexander et al, 2011: 1- 2). Many children are barely able to function academically in their home language before English takes over as the language of instruction. Teachers are often not confident teaching in this medium, and resort to enforcing a system of rote learning using question-and-response techniques.

However, Nal'ibali reading clubs are attempting to change this by offering learners opportunities to improve their reading without the pressure of marks and assessments. The flagship reading clubs are the Vulindlela Reading Clubs, founded by PRAESA. The first Vulindlela reading club was launched in 2006 in Langa township, Cape Town, as a means of addressing the low literacy scores of South African school children (Alexander et al, 2011: 2). The club is still in operation today, with 80 to 120 children meeting for two hours on Saturday mornings. The volunteers and facilitators are made up of parents, teachers,

lecturers, and high school students. PRAESA staff are usually available to mentor volunteers (Alexander et al, 2011: 3). Although the reading club sessions take place in the grounds of a primary school, it was made clear from the outset that the Vulindlela reading club is a community-, not school-based, reading club. This decision was taken deliberately so as to avoid the negative associations children might have with a school-based programme. The children come from various schools throughout Langa, some even come from outside the township. All children are welcome and all attendance is voluntary.

The aim of the reading club, which serves as the aim of all reading clubs run according to Nal'ibali guidelines, is to create an atmosphere which encourages experimentation and exploration with books and other texts, as well as writing activities. This is done by emphasising the enjoyment factor of reading and writing, without the pressures and expectations of a school environment (that is, no assessments or obligatory tasks). The reading club also provides interaction with good adult role models who model good reading and writing practice. This environment stimulates interest in reading, motivating learners to improve their skills (Alexander et al, 2011: 3).

The Theories Underpinning the Nal'ibali Reading Clubs

The predominant aspects of Nal'ibali reading clubs and the supplements are based on sound principles. The fundamental aim of Nal'ibali, which is to promote reading for enjoyment, is derived from the notion that voluntary 'free' reading is the 'missing ingredient' in successful learning, and that reading for enjoyment is the way to develop language (Krashen, 1993, cited in Alexander et al, 2011: 2). Nal'ibali's promotion of bilingualism is based on the idea that learning in one's home language as well as in English provides the best opportunities for learning in South Africa's multicultural society (Alexander et al, 2011: 2). The use of experienced and interested adult volunteers to facilitate the reading clubs and to model useful, motivational reading and writing comes from Rogoff's (1990) theory that children learn the cultural ways of their communities through guided participation with interactive

role models. The Nal'ibali campaign is also rooted in the sociocultural theories of literacy, subscribing to the idea that literacy is art of people's regular social and cultural practices, as stated by Street (1984) and Barton (1994).

The Success of the Nal'ibali Campaign

The campaign's primary objective, to increase accessibility of stories in African languages, has been achieved: 200 000 copies of the supplement are distributed each week to individuals, schools, reading clubs, and other organisations which might never have had access to the wealth of stories and other resources, importantly, in African languages, provided by the supplements (Edwards, 2013: 9). While there are some concerns about the quality of the stories in the supplements (selected mostly due to availability and length instead of literary quality) the stories are generally well received by children and adults alike, and allow reading clubs and individuals with an ongoing resource in the form of a collection of books and stories to refer to, share, and recommend to each other (Edwards, 2013: 5). Bloch points out the benefit of this regular exposure to new stories:

> If you're using the supplement properly, it means that every week you're getting to know a new story, and you become more discerning: this is a book for a very little child, I don't like this story because I'm sick of stories about this and so on. That discernment happens book by book.
>
> (Bloch, quoted in Edwards, 2013: 5)

The development of this discernment among children and adults is important for improving literacy, because readers who are able to pinpoint what they enjoy reading will be drawn to these stories and be encouraged to read more. Parents should also develop a sense of discernment when choosing books and stories for their children, making sure to select age- and ability-appropriate texts, which feature themes or topics which will interest the child, and characters to whom the child can relate. There is a more detailed discussion on selecting appropriate children's reading material in Chapter Three.

Despite English being the predominant language of publication and media in South Africa, English is not the first language of most South Africans, underlining the need for greater advocacy of bilingual education. The bilingual storybooks and stories in the Nal'ibali supplements provide numerous opportunities for bilingual education, both for children learning English as an additional language as well as for children who will shortly be learning African languages under the Department of Education's Incremental Introduction of African Languages policy (IIAL). Edwards sums up the success of the Nal'ibali campaign by saying,

> Nal'ibali has clearly created a template for delivering children's stories in African languages and English that reinforces a message of fundamental importance: reading is useful, meaningful, and enjoyable. When children enjoy reading, they read more. The more they read, the better they become.
>
> (Edwards, 2013: 10)

2.5 WINTERSON PRIMARY SCHOOL, THE COMMUNITY, AND LEARNERS

The previous section detailed how the Nal'ibali campaign is attempting to improve children's literacy through a number of strategies. In this study, the Nal'ibali principles and strategies were applied to a group of learners who volunteered to attend a reading club following the same basic principles promoted by Nal'ibali. This research took place in the context of the primary school where the researcher has been teaching since January 2011. The following is a detailed description of the school, its learners, staff, and parents, and the environment in which it is situated.

The Community

The community surrounding the school is a socio-economically disadvantaged area, where most homes are either shacks or state-built 'RDP' houses. Often several families or an extended family will share one house, with informal structures in the yard or attached the house providing accommodation for other family groups. The population surrounding the school is mostly coloured, although there is a growing population of black families.

Many learners come from unstable home environments, bearing witness to issues such as divorce and separation, single parents, teenage parents, alcoholism and unemployment. For many parents, the monthly unemployment and childcare grants are their only source of income. For those parents who are fortunate enough to be employed, this often means working shifts and leaving for work before one's child has left for school, resulting in frequent truancy as learners simply stay at home. Many learners come from foster homes or stay with a grandparent or other relative instead of their biological parents.

The School

Winterson Primary School (not the school's real name) is a state-funded school situated in Extension 31, Bethelsdorp, in the so-called Northern Areas of Port Elizabeth, a large area with a predominantly coloured population. Since 2012, the school has been a no-fee school. Previously, the annual school fees per child were R200 which parents seldom paid. Although the school is situated in what is known as a 'coloured' area, many black parents choose to send their children to 'coloured' schools, believing the quality of education to be higher than that of the schools in the black townships. A growing number of black families lives in the area, while many other black children are transported to school daily from the black townships. At the moment, approximately 10 percent of the learners in the school are black, and approximately 90 percent are coloured.

The school has approximately 1180 learners from Grade R to Grade Seven, and currently there are 24 state-employed teachers plus one principal, making the teacher: learner ratio almost 1: 41. The school currently employs three teachers in School Governing Body posts for a small monthly stipend. The school battles to pay these teachers' small salaries as fund-raising efforts are not well supported by parents. Most classes have at least 40 learners in them, with some having more than 50 learners to one teacher. Due to small classroom sizes and lack of desks, learners in these classes often have to sit three to a desk.

The school has a feeding scheme, whereby each child is given a basic meal once a day,

usually samp and beans, maize porridge, or tinned fish and pasta. Despite the simplicity of the food, most learners line up willingly for their daily portion. For many learners, this is their only guaranteed meal of the day.

The school does not have a fully-functioning library or computer laboratory, and the nearest public library is almost three kilometres away from the school and is not open over the weekends, making it difficult for learners to do research for assignments. There is a small school library available for foundation phase learners to borrow books from, but the choice of books is limited and many of the books, acquired through donations of mostly used books, are unappealing or unsuitable for learners of their reading level. There are very few reference books and the books are not organised by genre or alphabetically, meaning that choosing a book is a fairly random process. There are no tables or chairs in the 'library', meaning that learners come in, choose a book, and leave again. For most learners, the books they encounter at school and the textbooks they are issued with are their only experience of books. While some learners are fortunate enough to have computers and books, most do not have any books or learning resources in their homes. They are unfamiliar with how to handle books carefully, and how to perform basic function such as using a contents page or looking something up in an index.

The School's Language Policy

Each grade has one English Home Language class (the 'A' class) and either two or three Afrikaans Home Language classes (the 'B', 'C' and 'D' classes). Regarding the 'A' classes, there are few learners who are truly English speaking as their home language. Most speak Afrikaans at home, and the black learners speak predominantly isiXhosa, but many parents consider that learning English as a home language will be more advantageous to their children in the future. There is a strong multilingual presence in these 'A' classes; the isiXhosa-speaking learners have learned to converse with their classmates in Afrikaans, and

several of the coloured learners are fluent in isiXhosa. Officially, however, the school is classed as an Afrikaans-medium school, so assemblies, prayers, and announcements are conducted mostly in Afrikaans, and often letters go out to parents written only in Afrikaans; isiXhosa-speaking children often have to ask their teacher to translate the letter into English so that their parents will be able to understand it.

Many of the parents do not have a high level of education and struggle with reading and writing themselves, meaning they are unable to help their children with tasks and homework. Even in the English Home Language classes, many of the learners' parents are not sufficiently competent in English, thus the learners do not hear standard English being spoken at home and are unable to go to their parents for help with reading and writing tasks. Parents of learners in the English Home Language classes normally ask that teachers speak to them in Afrikaans, because they do not understand English, yet their child is expected to read, write, and speak English on a Home Language level.

Culture of Learning and Parental Involvement

Generally, the culture of academic learning amongst the learners and their parents is not very strong. With the exception of the small proportion of learners who work hard and achieve well, supported by their parents, many learners have a poor work ethic and a casual attitude towards their school work. They lack responsibility for themselves and their work, and are unperturbed by the threat of poor marks, retention, or punishment for not having done their homework or handed in an assignment. Basic organisational skills such as note-taking, time management and keeping a homework diary are sorely lacking amongst the learners. Many of the learners frequently neglect to hand in tasks and assignments, and many of them admit that they hardly ever study for tests or exams.

Parents are often uninvolved due to other priorities such as work, or disinterested, seldom checking their child's books, helping with homework, or enquiring about tests and tasks. The attendance at parent-teacher consultation evenings is generally poor, particularly

amongst parents of the Intermediate and Senior phase learners. The children whose parents who do attend such meetings are generally performing adequately in class, while the parents of children who perform poorly seldom make an effort to meet with the teachers.

The Learners

The Grade 7A English Home Language class at the school is quite typical of the contextual overview expressed above, and their general reading abilities and characteristics will be described below in order to provide an indication of the standard present throughout the school. In 2015 the number of learners in the class was unusually low. There were sixteen boys and eighteen girls, giving the class a total of 34 learners. The youngest learner in the class was 11 years old (born 2002) and the oldest was fifteen (born 1999). Of the 34 learners in the class, 6 were black and listed isiXhosa as their home language, while the remaining 28 were coloured, mostly Afrikaans-speaking learners. Although most of them were not true English Home Language speakers, the 7A learners were able to speak English fairly confidently. Although they did make some typical Afrikaans-influenced grammatical errors and occasionally lack vocabulary, generally they spoke English easily and enthusiastically in informal situations, such as chatting to the teacher, or sharing their experiences with the class, but struggled to participate in class discussions regarding school work. They also tended to revert back to their home language when talking to each other or doing group work; even the isiXhosa learners were able to converse in Afrikaans, and most of the Afrikaans learners understand the basics of isiXhosa, so there was a strong multilingual culture in the classroom. Their reading, however, was generally poor. The majority of the learners read hesitantly, focusing on individual words instead of phrases, and with little comprehension. Many of them frequently read only the first few letters of a word and then guessed what the rest of the word was (for example, reading the word 'specify' as 'special') and they also ignored the endings of words, especially verbs (for example, reading 'decide' instead of 'decided'). If they could not immediately decode a word or recognise it as a

familiar one, they struggled to break it up into its syllables in order to read it, and they tended to 'freeze' on difficult words until prompted by the teacher. They frequently ignored punctuation and read without expression. With the exception of a handful of learners, the learners performed badly in comprehension tests. Many of them tended to lift entire sentences or even paragraphs from the text and copy them verbatim as their answer, without truly understanding either the question or the answer they gave. They struggled to formulate their own answers to the questions and express them in their own words, and often the answers they provided were irrelevant to the question. They often misinterpreted the question and ignored instructions on the question paper telling them how to answer (for example, “quote to show that...”, “explain the difference between...”).

There is a high occurrence of barriers to learning amongst the learners at the school (such as dyslexia, ADD/ADHD and Foetal Alcohol Syndrome), with many learners going undiagnosed simply being 'pushed through' to the next grade despite poor marks due to departmental regulations. Many have been diagnosed and referred to special schools, but remain in the mainstream system due to a lack of space at a specialised school. Parents are normally reluctant to admit that their child has a learning disability, often maintaining that their child does not need to be tested for learning problems or receive remedial help, they are 'just lazy'. Other parents are aware that their child is experiencing difficulties in the classroom, but do not seek assistance early enough, often hoping that the child will 'catch up' in the next grade. By the time the child is in Grade Seven and can barely read or write, parents will usually only then concede that perhaps their child is in need of some remedial help (and usually only because they are concerned about the child's being accepted into a high school) (K. Kivido, observation, October 2014).

Many learners are two, sometimes three years older than the conventional age for each grade, and these are often the learners who tend to be the most disruptive and ill-disciplined in the classroom. Amongst these older learners, particularly in Grade Seven, the involvement with gangs and substance abuse is also a problem. The rate of absenteeism is also very high, especially in the older grades. Often learners in Grade Six or Seven will simply stop coming

to school for long periods of time, resulting in their retention in the grade for another year due to having missed too many days of school. For instance, there is currently a learner at the school who is 14 years old, and only in Grade Four, because he has had to repeat the grade several times due to absenteeism.

The Teachers

The teachers at the school are all female except for the principal, deputy principal, and one Head of Department, and two other teachers. With the exception of two white teachers, all of the staff members are coloured and mostly Afrikaans-speaking. There are no black or isiXhosa-speaking staff members. There are only three members of staff under the age of 40, meaning that most of the staff have been teaching for at least 15 to 20 years, mostly at the same school, and are somewhat jaded and 'set in their ways'. Teaching occurs using very traditional methods, as most lessons involve learners copying long sections of text from the blackboard or textbook, and learners who ask questions or express their opinions in class are often reprimanded for 'interrupting' or 'looking for attention' (J. Domingo, observation, May 2014). If reading occurs during the lesson, most teachers have the whole class read the same paragraph aloud, chanting together in a sing-song fashion (B. Peterson, observation, April 2014). Lessons are seldom made interesting for interactive for the learners, mostly due to lack of resources and lack of effort from teachers.

With the exception of three teachers, all of the teachers who teach English as a subject in the Intersen (Intermediate and Senior) Phase, or who teach 'English Home Language' Foundation Phase classes, are themselves Afrikaans Home Language speakers. These teachers frequently model incorrect English pronunciation and grammatical structures to their learners, either through general conversation or, in many cases, actually teaching learners incorrect spelling and grammar rules. These errors usually occur in the form of subject-verb agreement errors, and incorrect tense construction. For example, sentences have been observed on the blackboard in a Grade One classroom which read, “Our school

have many children. The children is friendly. The children likes to play games" (M. Africa, observation, March 2014).

As seen from the above description, Winterson Primary is a school facing many issues, including lack of funding and resources, lack of parental involvement, learners with many barriers to learning and poor attitudes to learning, all of which contribute to the poor literacy levels at the school. What follows is a description of the reading club, which was formed as an attempt to improve the literacy competencies and attitudes to reading of at least some of the learners.

2.6 THE READING CLUB AT WINTERSON PRIMARY

The reading club currently in operation at Winterson Primary School has been running since February 2014. The reading club follows the basic guiding principles of the Nal'ibali initiative, meaning that the focus is on reading for enjoyment and all activities are voluntary. The reading club meets once a week on Tuesdays after school during term time, for about an hour and a half to two hours. Tuesdays were chosen because during the winter terms (approximately April to September) that is the school's 'sport day', meaning that school is dismissed earlier than normal to allow participating learners time to prepare for sports matches. The decision was made to hold the reading club on the same day due to the high frequency of violence and criminal activity in the area surrounding the school. Most of the learners, particularly those in Grades Six and Seven, walk home from school without parental supervision and it was not considered safe for those participating in reading club to walk home alone in the late afternoon. Holding the reading club on the school's early closure day meant that learners would be able to make their way home at roughly the same time as they would on a regular school day. However, holding the reading club on the same day as other extracurricular activities means that learners who participate in sport are unable to join the reading club. During the summer terms (January to March, and October to December) the school does not participate in sports matches, but this meant that the school's early

closing day became the most common day on which staff meetings were held. On many occasions in 2014, reading club sessions had to be cancelled due to the facilitator's having to attend a staff meeting. Thus, holding reading club on Tuesdays was reconsidered for the following year.

Despite the difficulties with scheduling, the reading club enjoyed a small but enthusiastic membership in 2015. The reading club was limited to Grade Six and Seven learners only in 2014 in order to keep things manageable for the facilitator, who was the sole staff member involved with the reading club. Initially, the attendance numbers were over 40 learners, but soon levelled out to about 25 learners who attended the sessions regularly. The decision was made to open the reading club to Grade Five learners as well in 2015.

The reading club sessions take place in the facilitator's classroom. Ideally, a reading club should meet in an informal and unstructured space that encourages relaxation and distancing from the school environment, such as a carpeted room with cushions on the floor. However, due to a lack of any other suitable space and lack of funding, the reading club meets in a classroom and the learners sit in the desks as though they were in class. Because the school does not have a fully functioning library open to the Intermediate and Senior Phase learners (Grades Four to Seven), the reading club has limited resources. There are about 50 books kept in a classroom cupboard which are brought out for reading club. Because of the vandalism and theft that occurs in the school, the lack of space in the classroom, as well as the classroom being as used over weekends for meetings of a local church group, it is currently not possible for the facilitator to have the books out on display in the classroom at all times.

The books used for reading club are mostly new, and range from picture books to young-adult novels. The books are mostly fiction but there are some non-fiction books as well. The books are mostly in English, with some in Afrikaans, and a very small number of books in isiXhosa, the languages spoken by the majority of learners at the school. The books were mostly donated by General Motors South Africa Foundation (a group working closely with

the school to improve infrastructure and management and a partner in the Nal'ibali programme) donated by a bookshop, or purchased by the facilitator.

Another resource used frequently by the reading club is the Nal'ibali supplement which is published on a weekly basis in local newspapers, and distributed to reading clubs registered with Nal'ibali at no extra cost. These bilingual supplements normally contain, amongst other things, an article for parents and teachers about how to encourage literacy development, a short story written in two languages, and a cut-out-and-fold 'mini storybook', usually an adapted version of an existing picture book by a local author, which also appears bilingually. The reading club at Winterson Primary receives 30 copies of the English-isiXhosa supplement a week, which are used in the reading club sessions, or if they are not used, are sent home with the learners.

As previously mentioned, the basic idea of a reading club is to encourage learners to read and write without the pressures and expectations of school-based reading and writing, so the emphasis of the reading club is on enjoyment. Initially, the learners seemed to treat the reading club as an extension of school, sitting quietly in their desks, reluctant to make a noise. However, with repeated encouragement from the facilitator they began to relax more and realise that they were allowed to enjoy themselves, as long as they still displayed good manners. Most reading club sessions begin with a simple game that can be played in a large group, such as 'Broken Telephone' or 'Who Stole the Cookie from the Cookie Jar?'. Sometimes if more space is needed for the game, the group will leave the classroom and go onto the school's playground. After the game, the facilitator will either read or tell a story to the group, usually a story from one of the Nal'ibali supplements, or a folk tale. Sometimes the facilitator will read one of the books in the reading club's collection to the learners, and accompany the reading with showing them the pictures. Despite the learners being 11 years old and older, they get excited at the thought of hearing a story and enjoy participating in the telling by joining in with the repetition of certain phrases, actions, and pointing out things they notice in the illustrations.

After the storytelling, the Nal'ibali supplements are handed out, and learners have the chance to read them together or in pairs if they prefer, or to cut out and fold the mini-storybook found inside the supplement. Sometimes the story in the supplements will be used for a group reading exercise, such as each learner who is willing to read aloud taking a turn to read a sentence until the entire story has been read, followed by a facilitator-led discussion about the story, characters, plot and themes. Learners are keen to relate the story to their own lives and experiences by often volunteering anecdotes similar to something that happened in the story. Occasionally, learners will stand up in front of the rest of the group and act out the story in an impromptu drama.

Sometimes the supplements are handed out to the learners to read at home, and another activity is provided for them, such as making cards for upcoming special occasions (for example, Mothers' Day or Easter), or writing and illustrating their own books. The last half an hour of the session is usually 'free reading' time, when the club's collection of books is laid out on the desks for learners to choose one and read as they please. Some choose to read on their own, silently or out loud, others get into groups or pairs to read, some enjoy simply paging through books looking at the pictures. When it is time for the session to end, the learners help to pack the books away.

2. 7 CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided a contextualisation of primary school literacy in South Africa, by examining South Africa's 2011 PIRLS results in order to determine what reasons for learners' poor literacy performances are indicated by these results. The background of the Nal'ibali campaign and its principles have been provided in order to provide an overview of how the campaign is attempting to improve literacy in South Africa by promoting reading for enjoyment. This chapter also presented a detailed contextual description of the community and school where the research was conducted, so that the reader may have a better understanding of the environmental and social factors which have an impact on teaching and learning at the school.

The following chapter presents a literature review in order to provide a theoretical foundation for this study. The literature review includes a critical discussion of several local and international studies which examine the positive effects reading and listening to stories may have on learners' literacy competence, in order to provide an overview of studies similar to this one and their results. This will provide an indication of what results could be expected to arise from this study. There is also a discussion of teaching strategies for use in multilingual teaching environments, as well as a discussion of why culturally relevant literature is an important factor in improving children's literacy abilities. This discussion of cultural factors is of particular importance when one considers the rich multicultural heritage of South Africa which often results in multilingual classroom environments where many learners are learning in a language that is not their mother tongue.

CHAPTER THREE:

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A MULTI-LITERACIES FRAMEWORK FOR LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

3.1 INTRODUCTION: DEFINING LITERACY

The previous chapter provided a contextual overview of literacy in South Africa, and the typical factors at home, school, and community level which may contribute towards the low literacy levels in many South African schools. This chapter will define exactly what this study means by 'literacy', and provides an overview of the theoretical framework which supports this study.

When one considers related words such as literate, illiterate and even illiteracy, finding a suitable definition for the concept of literacy becomes even more complicated. Barton (1994) points out that 'illiterate' and 'literate' are not opposites; ‘non-literate' is a less pejorative alternative to illiterate, and does not have quite the same connotations. The definition of 'literacy' has clearly altered over the centuries, but even its application in academic fields has evolved to mean much more than simply reading and writing, although it is often still perceived as such by learners, parents, and teachers. Perhaps the most common metaphor used in educational practice to describe literacy is as a skill or a set of skills which must be acquired, which has greatly influenced the design of reading programmes at all levels of education (Barton, 1994: 11). According to Barton,

> the act of reading is broken down into a set of skills and sub-skills. These skills are ordered into a set of stages, starting with pre-reading skills and then taught in a particular order, each skill building upon the previous one. Literacy is seen as a psychological variable which can be measured and assessed. Skills are treated as things which people own or possess...learning to read becomes a technical problem and the successful reader is a *skilled* reader. As a school-based definition of literacy, this view is very powerful, and it is one which spills over into the rest of society
>
> (Barton, 1994: 11-12).

This widespread view of literacy as simply a set of skills which must be mastered is possibly one of the many reasons why so many children do not achieve success in literacy. This generalised, almost mechanical, approach does not take the individual learner into account: their home and school context, their experience of books and reading, their abilities and interpretations. Those learners who fall one step behind in the process of 'learning to read' are simply unable to master the necessary skills. Pretorius and Mokhwesana refer to research done in the USA, which has found that a learner's reading ability by the end of Grade 3 is a strong indicator of whether or not that learner will successfully complete high school (Pretorius and Mokhwesana, 2009: 2).

However, Barton points out that “one cannot isolate print literacy when trying to understand the complexity of people's lives or the demands of education and other spheres” (1994: 23). In other words, literacy cannot be limited to only print literacy, but must take into account the wide variety of literacies encountered by daily by people in their myriad social contexts. For example, Street (2005: 419) claims that many people classified as 'illiterate' may in fact, if viewed in terms of the social contexts in which they experience literacy, be said to make significant use of literacy practices in specific contexts and for specific purposes. Similarly, Gee (2001: 724) claims that all children enter the schooling system with large vocabularies, complex grammatical abilities, and a deep understanding of narratives and experiences. Therefore, the reason that some learners struggle with literacy at school is not because they are illiterate, but rather that they lack the specific literacy abilities linked to specific school-based literacy practices and discourses they are not familiar with.

This broader definition of literacy, which links it to social and cultural practices, is the definition of literacy which will be applied in this study. The reading club allowed learners access to a form of literacy with which many of them were previously unfamiliar – literacy as a social event instead of as something purely school-related. The following sections of this chapter will expand on this notion of literacy, and provide arguments in support of the effectiveness of embracing a multi-literacies, socially- and culturally-orientated approach to primary school children's literacy development.

3.2. THE NEW LITERACY STUDIES

In recent years, new interpretations of literacy have been sought, and New Literacy Studies offer a more culturally and socially relevant understanding of literacy. Pioneered by Street in the mid-1980s, New Literacy Studies advocates situating literacy in its social context, instead of viewing it simply as a cognitive, academic, skill-based process: “NLS represents a shift in perspective on the study and acquisition of literacy, from the dominant cognitive model, with its emphasis on reading, to a broader understanding of literacy practices in their social and cultural contexts...NLS approaches focus on the everyday meanings and uses of literacy in specific cultural contexts and link directly to how we understand the work of literacy in educational contexts” (Street, 2005: 417). Street's understanding of literacy as socially constructed is the primary notion which underpins this research, as the reading club is ultimately a social space and many of the literacy activities involved pair or group collaboration, or exploration of stories through songs and games. This social interaction while engaging in meaningful literacy activities is what contributes to the enjoyment learners experience while participating, and is an essential component of the reading club involved in this study.

In order to illustrate how Street's social understanding of literacy differs from the traditional viewpoint, he compares two models of literacy: The autonomous and the ideological. The 'autonomous' model of literacy comes from the assumption that literacy in itself—autonomously—will have effects on other social and cognitive practices. It is assumed that the acquisition of literacy will in itself lead to, for example, higher cognitive skills, improved economic performance, greater equality, and so on. It is in this sense that literacy is seen as having such effects autonomously, irrespective of the social conditions and cultural interpretations of literacy associated with literacy programmes and learning institutions. However, Street's 'ideological model' offers a more culturally sensitive view of literacy practices as they vary from one context to another. It posits instead that literacy is a social practice, not simply a technical and neutral skill, that it is always embedded in socially

constructed epistemological principles:

> It is about knowledge: the ways in which people address reading and writing are themselves rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity, being...the argument for social literacies suggests that engaging with literacy is always a social act, even from the outset...it is not valid to suggest that 'literacy' can be 'given' neutrally, and then its 'social' effects only experienced afterwards.
>
> (Street, 2005: 418)

It is this idea of 'literacy as a social act' which is central to this research, and an idea which is reflected in all of the prior studies which are discussed in the Literature Review. In these studies, as the researcher's descriptive narrative will show, the children participating in literacy activities do not only read and write, they speak, sing, play, and act. These are all activities which should not only develop the learners' literacy abilities, but also improve their social skills and understanding of their own identities, as well as drawing on their cultural backgrounds and prior experiences.

Similarly, Compton-Lilly points out how new approaches to literacy, such as New Literacy Studies, draws attention to the ways in which “reading is a social experience that involves culture and identity” (Compton-Lilly, 2009: 88). Later in this chapter, the issue of how literacy draws on learners' perceptions of their own and others' culture and identity in order to effect social change within the community, will be discussed. NLS helps teachers to move away from a skills-based approach to reading, and instead encourages recognition of the vast range of social and cultural experiences that contribute to literacy learning. This trend is of particular relevance when considering the issue of literacy in South Africa. According to Perry, scholars concerned with literacy in South Africa traditionally addressed structural issues such as language, text provision, and teacher preparation, but they increasingly appear to be shifting their attention to the sociocultural factors of literacy and schooling in South Africa (Perry, 2008: 62), as they realise that Western solutions to literacy issues in Africa are inadequate and irrelevant (Perry, 2008: 57). Notions of multiple literacies are important in developing countries, and Street's (1994) notion of 'local literacies' has gained currency as it recognises the multiple literacies that communities use,

which might be overlooked or deemed invalid by those in authority (Perry, 2008: 59). Perry's remarks on the shift in perspective on African literacy might suggest why more traditional literacy intervention programmes are not always successful in South Africa. Street says that the 'autonomous' model of literacy lost favour due to the frequent failure of reading programmes which use it. While Street does not specifically mention South Africa or even Africa, he does state that researchers, academics, and practitioners questioned its appropriateness as a basis for reading programmes or for fully understanding the complexities of reading and writing around the world (Street, 2005: 418). Therefore, this study will attempt to determine whether a reading programme based on Street's ideological model might be more appropriate for improving literacy in a South African school context.

Thus, what was then termed 'New Literacy Studies' emerged as a challenge to the traditional and dominant perceptions of literacy, an alternative approach to literacy, which sees it not just as the skills of reading and writing, but as something of cultural and ideological significance. For example, Rassool, Edwards and Bloch discuss the ideological impact of the Apartheid language policy, in which it was perpetuated and taught to learners in the Bantu education system that the African languages were inferior to languages of European origin (2006: 540). Even today, as mentioned by Rassool, Edwards and Bloch, English is still the preferred language in several African countries including South Africa, even amongst the African-language inhabitants, because of its association with 'being educated' and being seen as a prerequisite for upward social mobility (2006: 537). This phenomenon can be witnessed in, among other areas, the Northern Areas of Port Elizabeth, where this study took place: Afrikaans- and Xhosa-speaking parents enrol their children in the English Home Language classes at the school because they share the common belief that there are more economic opportunities for those fluent in English instead of in Afrikaans or African languages (Perry, 2008: 63). (The 'Northern Areas' of Port Elizabeth is an area inhabited by a predominantly coloured population with a smaller black population, many of whom live in low-income housing or informal shelters). In this way, languages and the literacy thereof become ideological, as one language appears dominant over the others, as society associates it with the provision of more opportunities and increased social acceptance. As the

importance of the social aspect of literacy has become more recognised in South Africa in recent years, many reading programmes are reflecting this change, such as the Nal'ibali programme, as the dominant trend in reading programmes encourages social interaction and active engagement with the text, instead of focusing on only improving individual reading skills (Perry, 2008: 67).

Another significant component of contemporary interpretations of literacy is the belief in the importance of acknowledging 'new literacies' such as cinema, music, graphic art, and even technology such as the computers, cellular phones, and the internet (Kist, 2000: 711; Leu et al, 2004: 497) because printed texts are not the only source of information, communication, and entertainment in modern society. Due to the belief that literacy practices are underlined by social practices, researchers such as Bailey (2009) believe that learners should be encouraged to become familiar with multiple forms of 'text' and technologies, particularly those used as forms of social interaction. Bailey states that the existence of new literacies requires teachers to understand new literacy practices that are relevant to 21st-century life, particularly those used by learners outside of school such as computers and mobile phones (Bailey, 2009: 208). This is possibly why the Nal'ibali campaign endeavours to use radio, the internet, and mobile phones to distribute its stories to a wider audience than simply those who read the printed supplements.

While it is a sad truth that nowadays Google has replaced rows of encyclopaedia volumes as the go-to resource for school assignments, it is unlikely that what may be termed 'traditional' literacy will ever become totally obsolete. No matter how technology advances, basic reading and writing is still a necessity; even if technology makes finding information for an assignment easier, the learner must still be able to read, understand and extract the necessary information. In agreement with this, Lehman (2009) advocates a move away from the current dichotomy between the concepts of 'literary' and 'literacy' in teaching, suggesting instead "a new theoretical perspective that literary and literacy goals and experiences are often compatible—that learning to read can (and *should*) be learned by learning to read *literarily*" (2009: 198). Although she points out that the two concepts

should also not be conflated ("*literary* has to do with literature, while *literacy* is the ability to read and write"), they often use complementary concepts. For example, the literary term 'plot' and the literacy term, 'sequence', both describe the order of events in a story (Lehman, 2009: 198). Lehman is therefore suggesting that literature should not be separated from other literacy activities but rather integrated with them. She strongly advocates "for the right of children to be taught literacy in the best possible way—by learning to read literature" (Lehman, 2009: 200). By literature, Lehman means, as it will be explained later in this chapter, stories written for the purpose of being read for enjoyment. Lehman refers to Martinez and McGee (2000) who insist that in order for children to become flexible and proficient readers, they need to experience a variety of genres as authentic literature, as opposed to the contrived, decodable texts often used for reading instruction. This point is particularly relevant to this study, as it emphasises the importance of learners experiencing meaningful interactions with authentic texts. The texts provided to learners in this study were all authentic texts, such as picture books, chapter books, and Nal'ibali supplements, written for the purpose of enjoyment, not pedagogy.

3.3 A MULTI-LITERACIES PEDAGOGY

Cleghorn and Rollnick (2002) discuss the effectiveness of strategies which teachers or facilitators can employ when working with learners in a multilingual or multicultural environment, and/or who are learning in a second language. Cleghorn and Rollnick's discussion of the role of English in promoting social and individual development is, due to its being based on an African context, particularly relevant to this study. The researchers drew on studies carried out in African classrooms where learners were being taught content-based subjects such as Science in English, the second language for most of the learners. Cleghorn and Rollnick effectively demonstrate how the use of learners' home language in such classrooms can aid with constructing and communicating meaning, ensuring access to knowledge, thereby fostering the learners' individual development. They suggest that "meaningful learning contexts are likely to increase the motivation to learn English,

ultimately fostering societal development within the larger global context" (2002: 347). While these techniques and their effectiveness are discussed in terms of a formal classroom context, they are relevant and applicable in an out-of-school context as well.

The two primary concepts addressed by Cleghorn and Rollnick are those of 'code switching' and 'border crossing'. They demonstrate how, in a classroom where the majority of learners are learning in a language which is not their home language, keeping both of these concepts in mind can prove beneficial to the teacher who is struggling to effectively communicate the necessary information to the class because of a lack of learner proficiency in the instructional language. In terms of reading clubs, such strategies can aid the development of literacy by making texts in learners' second languages more accessible, thus creating motivation to increase reading generally, improve their proficiency in the second language, as well as reinforce the importance of the learners' home language, thus promoting appreciation of their own cultural identity. Both of the pedagogical concepts discussed by Cleghorn and Rollnick are of significance to this study, as the reading club activities endeavoured to aid learners' literacy development by promoting the use of their home language, and providing stories and activities which were relevant to learners' cultures and backgrounds.

Border Crossing

Cleghorn and Rollnick assume a sociocultural stance, in which "teaching and learning are seen in terms of linking social action with cognition" (Cleghorn and Rollnick, 2002: 351). They describe teaching as a cultural transmission, and learning as a cultural acquisition, suggesting that in teaching it is not only knowledge, empirical information, which is being conveyed to the learner, but also 'culture': a system for making meaning of the world and its symbols, a way of thinking and understanding the world around us. Therefore, the language teacher is placed in the complex role of guiding learners through the variety of cultural, linguistic, and cognitive borders which they encounter at school (Cleghorn and Rollnick,

2002). Regarding African learners attending a school which uses non-African languages as the medium of instruction, the authors ask:

> In non-Western school setting in which a former colonial language is the language of instruction and the content of the curriculum is largely imported from the West, the question is, which culture's tool-kit of skills, knowledge and values is being taken over? And what is the nature of the borders that need to be crossed by an African student who has one name at school and another at home, one type of dress for school and another for home, one language for school and another for home, and for whom one type of behaviour is acceptable at school and another is acceptable at home? Such a student becomes two people. Although schooling everywhere requires a kind of border crossing (from not knowing to knowing, at least), the borders are more easily observed in non-Western school settings.
>
> (Cleghorn and Rollnick, 2002: 351)

For second-language learners and those from a culture different to that perpetuated by the school, the differences between the learner's home culture and the culture of the school create borders which the learner must negotiate. There is no easy access, no smooth transition, between home life and school life. The notion of 'border crossing' may thus be defined as “the ability to shift cognitively as well as culturally from one world view to another” (Cleghorn and Rollnick, 2002: 354), with 'world view' meaning a way of looking at and of understanding the world, usually influenced strongly by one's culture. According to Cleghorn and Rollnick, allowing learners to use their home language as well as the instructional language in the classroom can prove beneficial to both their confidence and their academic performance. They assert that operating academically in two languages, the instructional language and the home language, fosters the learners' ability to operate within two different cultural spheres and is more conducive to border crossing than forcing learners to learn only in the less familiar instructional language.

Cleghorn and Rollnick refer to a study done by Clark and Ramahlape (1999) in which learners were asked to discuss the phenomenon of lightning, in terms of both science and traditional beliefs. When learners were permitted to use their home language to voice their opinions and contributions, the classroom discussion was lively and the learners became

actively engaged. However, had they been forced to use English only, it is likely that the discussion would not have progressed beyond a few short phrases, or a single-word question-response drill so often witnessed in classrooms (Cleghorn and Rollnick, 2002: 356). The fact that this discussion also incorporated learners' traditional beliefs about lightning, instead of limiting the topic to scientific fact also encouraged border crossing, as learners were encouraged to bring their prior knowledge into the classroom, giving their culture value even in the face of Western science. In a similar way, the studies by McGinnis (2007) and Allison and Rehm (2007) examine ways in which learners' backgrounds and prior knowledge may be used to improve their access confidence and comprehension in group activities. These studies are discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

Code Switching

The use of a learner's home language in order to support their learning in an additional language is commonly referred to as 'code switching'. Unfortunately, code switching goes against many teachers' and schools' language policies, which often enforce 'English only' in the English classroom under the false assumption that if the learners are forced to speak English, they will, and thus their proficiency in the language will improve. In reality, the learner that struggles to put together a sentence in English will rather remain silent, not participating in class discussions or group work, or asking for clarity on something he or she does not understand. While code switching has endured a bad reputation up until now, it is starting to come into favour for teaching classes where the instructional language is not the learners' home language: According to Cleghorn and Rollnick,

> Although teachers often seem to hold negative attitudes towards code switching, there is considerable evidence that code switching can offer a natural, economical, and effective resource for establishing meaning in classrooms where the teacher and the students can communicate in the same home or main language
>
> (Cleghorn and Rollnick, 2002: 13).

There are several ways in which code switching can be used in the classroom. Seldom does it involve the complete verbal translation of entire speeches or texts into the learners' home

language; often the occasional word, perhaps a difficult or unfamiliar word, translated into their home language is enough to help them understand. Similarly, a learner who wishes to ask a question or participate in a discussion but who is unable to grasp the correct word in the instructional language would be permitted to use the word he or she knows in order to make their contribution, whereupon the teacher could use the opportunity to teach the whole class the translation of the unfamiliar word. Short, seemingly irrelevant phrases used for emphasis like 'you know' or 'isn't that right?' in the home language are often enough to maintain a connection with the learners and keep them focussed. Code switching can also be used to recall learners' prior knowledge in way that is easier for them to grasp (Cleghorn and Rollnick, 2002: 360). Code switching was one of the strategies used by the facilitator of the reading club at Winterson Primary in the hopes of aiding learners' comprehension of the stories, songs, and games which might not have taken place in their home language. Code switching has great potential to allow learners to forge better connections with the teacher and with their school-work, making the facilitator's use of code switching in this study of particular significance. Due to many teachers at the school enforcing 'English only' or 'No isiXhosa' rules in the classroom, it was hoped that the use of code switching during the reading club might increase learners' confidence when participating in group discussions and activities.

Code switching is gaining currency as a strategy for helping learners to make meaning of information which is presented in a language which is not their home language, and is an area of growing interest for researchers. Ernst-Slavit, Moore and Maloney suggest that using learners' home languages when teaching may make it easier for them to learn another language (2002: 118), and numerous South African studies such as Nkoco, Osman and Cockcroft (2000); Moodley (2007); and Uys and van Dulme (2011) attest to the possible benefits to learners when code switching is correctly used in the classroom. In conclusion, code switching, if used by the teacher or by the learners, “serves to clarify linguistically based confusion, render the culturally unfamiliar familiar, make the implicit explicit, provide English vocabulary needed for examination purposes provide contextualisation cues, and raise learners' metalinguistic awareness” (Cleghorn and Rollnick, 2002: 360). It

is a simple and effective technique which can be incorporated into almost any classroom with immediate effect, and will most likely show an immediate improvement in learners' comprehension and participation, as they are helped across the cultural and linguistic borders they encounter.

Cleghorn and Rollnick's work, along with studies by Bloch (n.d.) and Pretorius and Mokhwesana (2009), to be discussed later, demonstrate why it is so important that reading clubs should promote the use of the mother tongue in reading and writing due to mother-tongue reading's potential to improve learners' literacy development. Many of the stories chosen for the Nal'ibali supplements feature characters from different local cultural groups, and are usually set in contexts relevant to the majority of South African readers, or traditional Western folk tales have been rewritten to make them more applicable to local children. By making the stories contextually applicable to the reading audience, and by encouraging the use of the mother tongue as well as English, the Nal'ibali campaign embraces the concepts of border crossing and code switching.

3.4 THE COMPLEXITY AND IMPORTANCE OF CHOOSING APPROPRIATE READING MATERIAL

Having defined how this study understands the term 'literacy', it is necessary also to discuss what this study means by the term 'literature'. This study will use Serafini's succinct definition of literature: “Literature is an authentic text, written to tell a story, not to teach the 'short a' vowel sound” (2001: 15). Serafini also states that “literature is more than a resource to teach children how to read. Literature is also one of the major reasons to become literate” (2001: 15). Contrived textbook passages demonstrating punctuation rules thinly disguised as 'stories', are therefore not literature, nor are paragraphs written to serve as examples of descriptive writing, or pieces composed to test reading comprehension. 'Literature' in this sense of this study means stories, real stories, written as stories, intended to be read to or by children purely for enjoyment and entertainment, and not to teach them

phonics or grammar rules. It is this definition of 'literature' which was applied when selecting reading material for the reading club. All stories and books chosen were written for the purpose of entertainment, not as pedagogical instruments. Even the stories featured in the Nal'ibali supplements are mostly existing children's books which have been reformatted, and although they are often retellings or adaptions of existing stories, they generally retain the literary 'flavour' of the original, and importantly, serve to tell an engaging story, instead of acting purely as a teaching tool.

There are many reasons why children should be encouraged to read authentic literature, and perhaps the main reason is that 'real' stories contain a better quality of writing than those written specifically for inclusion in textbooks and phonics workbooks. Firstly, although writing from an era pre-dating our current digital age, Johnston believes schools should guide learners towards reading novels because they instil strong values in children and expose them to a high standard of literature (Johnston, 1962: 413). Importantly, particularly in the multicultural, multiracial, and multilingual schools which are fast becoming the norm in South Africa, the values and ideals present in children's books, contemporary and classic, can positively highlight our society's diversity and aid cross-cultural acceptance. Despite Johnston's writing from more than half a century earlier, the following statement by him is still relevant: "South and North, East and West, rural and urban, lower and middle-class, white or non-white, male and female, old and young can all be brought into a greater degree of harmony if they possess the same ideals. Acquiring these ideals can be aided through reading the same books" (Johnston, 1962: 413). Thus, if engaging, enriching, and thought-provoking books are made accessible to learners they could have a positive influence on children's perceptions and understanding of the world, themselves, and each other.

Another reason for encouraging the reading of children's literature is that, according to Johnston, it will "help children acquire a high standard of literary quality not only for future books they will read, but for the writing they will do" (Johnston, 1962: 413). It could be argued that any reading done by children is good, because it is preferable to them not reading at all. While this suggestion may have merit, children should be encouraged to read books

which challenge them without intimidating them. A child who is exposed to stories containing quality writing will be inclined to seek out more quality writing as he learns to appreciate it, thus continually improving vocabulary, comprehension, spelling, and other literacy skills. This child will also improve his or her own writing, due to the influence of the literature he or she reads. The current CAPS syllabus states, in seeming agreement with Johnston, that the main reason for reading literature in the classroom is to develop in learners "a sensitivity to a special use of language that is more refined, literary, figurative, symbolic and deeply meaningful than much of what else they may read" (Department of Basic Education, 2011: 10), suggesting that the ideal texts to be read in school-based reading programmes should ideally be more challenging and written in a language requiring a higher level of comprehension and interpretation than the learners would ordinarily encounter in other texts, such as textbooks. By increasing the Winterson Primary learners' exposure to literature of a good standard, it was hoped that an improvement would be noted in their own writing abilities.

Worldwide, research (for instance, Heath, 1982; Morrow, 1992; Bloch and Nkence, 2000) suggests that reading stories and books is beneficial to children's literacy, as well as other associated skills such as reasoning and critical thinking. Worth (2008) asserts that "literary narratives ask the reader to see a given state of affairs in a particular way over other, alternative ways" (2008: 51) thus broadening reader's perspectives and teaching them that there may be multiple perspectives to one situation. Worth also describes how reading, telling, and listening to narratives improves what she terms 'narrative reasoning'. This is the act of drawing conclusions from a narrative, identifying how certain events might have come about based on previous events in the narrative. Narrative reasoning is usually used in conjunction with discursive reasoning in order to make sense of the world and our experiences in it, for, as Worth states, "We explain our lived experiences in terms of plots, and, more often than not these plot structures produce the most sensible statements about and explanations of our experience and beliefs" (2008: 49). Worth also mentions an experiment which demonstrated that, contrary to the popular opinion that make-believe play and fanciful storytelling are detrimental to a child's reasoning abilities, children engaged in

make-believe activities still reasoned in a structured and epistemologically significant way (Worth, 2008: 54). According to Worth, this shows that the "narrative ability to reason is engaged, and thereby enhanced, to an even greater degree by reading, hearing, and telling well-constructed narratives" (2008: 54). Sadly, learners across South Africa, most often those who attend under-resourced schools, are not receiving enough exposure to narratives in the form of books and stories. Elley writes that "the majority of schools attended by primarily black children still have large classes, underqualified teachers, and few resources. School and classroom libraries are rare, and most children come from virtually bookless homes" (2000: 243-244). Due to overcrowded classrooms, teachers' priorities are reduced to keeping control over the learners, and trying their best to complete the syllabus with limited textbooks and teaching aids; storybooks and time to spend reading them is a luxury in these teaching environments. At home, to the parents of these learners, putting bread on the table is more important than books and bedtime stories. Without access to stories and books, and the opportunity to hear and read them, learners affected by such socio-economic conditions are at risk of being negatively affected in terms of the development of their reasoning and critical thinking abilities.

The Complexity and Importance of Choosing 'Culturally Relevant' Literature for Primary School Learners

Previously in this chapter, strategies for encouraging learner participation, interaction, and learning in multilingual and multicultural environments have been discussed. In addition to using techniques such as code switching, peer tutoring, or inquiry-based instruction, the actual texts and literacy artefacts which are being read by the learners must be considered in terms of their ability to encourage appreciation of one's own and others' cultures or backgrounds. One of the many challenges faced by the Winterson Primary reading club, as well as any other reading club facilitator or language teacher in South Africa, is the overwhelming superiority both in quality and accessibility of 'European' children's books. As a general rule, the shelves of any school library, classroom reading corner, or book shop will yield mostly books written in English, set in Europe or North America, with Caucasian

protagonists. In South Africa, although slowly becoming more accessible, books featuring diverse characters are still scarce, and books written in African languages even scarcer. Although the Nal'ibali campaign's weekly supplements are a ready source of bilingual short stories and picture books in African languages, many of which are written by local authors and are set in settings which would be familiar to many South African schoolchildren, there is a definite shortage of authentic full-length culturally relevant literature for children, particularly in the African languages. One of the reasons for this shortage of multilingual and multicultural children's literature is that South Africa has eleven official languages, and in the face of such diversity English is seen as a 'unifying' common language. However, the studies done by Bloch (n.d.) and Pretorius and Mokhwesana (2009) attest to the importance of allowing and encouraging learners to read in their home languages, particularly in the 'early childhood' phase which is crucial to literacy development. These studies are discussed at length in the following chapter. Bloch also refers to the legacy of the apartheid schooling system, which was designed to encourage and celebrate uniformity and conformity instead of diversity. The dismantling of the apartheid system has also led to many teachers and children who do not share common languages or cultural backgrounds finding themselves together in the classroom (Bloch, n.d.: 3). Learners who are not exposed to textual depiction of their own culture find it difficult to affirm their own identity through literature (Gray, 2009: 473). Instead of perpetuating a Eurocentric ideology and bolstering the notions of English's superiority above other official languages, teachers and others involved in promoting children's literacy should use culturally relevant literature to promote appreciation of our multilingual and multicultural society. In the reading club study, learners were given access to texts in three languages: most of the books were in English or Afrikaans, but there were some isiXhosa books as well, and the weekly Nal'ibali supplements appeared bilingually in English and isiXhosa. It was hoped that learners would be encouraged to read more if books were available in their home languages, and if (at least some) of these books reflected the children's own backgrounds.

Alanis defines culturally relevant texts as “texts where mention is made of events or information that is within children's experience, and which draws on their background or

culture” (Alanis, 2007: 29). Gray refers to 'culturally specific literature', using Bishop's definition of it as “literature that includes main characters with cultural details woven into the story” (Gray, 2009:472). Yoon, Simpson and Haag choose to refer to 'multicultural' texts or literature, rather than 'culturally relevant'. 'Multicultural literature' is defined by them as “books about specific cultural groups considered to be outside of the dominant socio-political culture” (Yoon, Simpson and Haag, 2010: 110). Thus, a culturally relevant or culturally specific text might not necessarily be multicultural if it is relevant only to children from the dominant cultural group. Conversely, a multicultural book depicting diverse cultures might not be culturally relevant in that it only serves to perpetuate stereotypes or racial prejudice (Alanis, 2007: 31), or it might not be culturally specific if it contains multicultural characters who are not central to the plot or who are not depicted in a culturally authentic fashion (Gray 2009: 472). Despite this discrepancy in definition, Yoon, Simpson and Haag and Alanis agree that, correctly used in education, books that appeal to a culturally diverse readership can promote cultural pluralism, as well as helping children develop a sense of cultural belonging and identity (Alanis, 2007: 30, Yoon et al, 2010: 111). Alanis states that reading such texts can also improve learners' literacy, as children tend to understand books better if they are culturally relevant. This increase in comprehension leads to increased engagement, enjoyment, and motivation in their reading (Alanis, 2007: 30). The link between culturally-relevant literature and increased engagement and enjoyment is an important one for this study, this study hoped to demonstrate how enjoyable reading experiences can lead to increased motivation in learners, thereby causing them to read more and thus improve their literacy abilities.

In Gray's study to determine what criteria fifth-grade learners used when selecting African American literature, learners gravitated most frequently to books that they felt were related to their lives, their families, and their interests. Being able to connect to the main character was the most important, as was a cover with a realistic depiction of the characters. The next most frequent selection criterion was the genre of the book: realistic fiction was favoured above books with fantasy or folkloric elements (Gray 2009: 476-7). Alanis also claims this, mentioning that learners struggle to make a personal connection to books focusing on fairy

tales or legends (Alanis 2007: 31). Many of the stories appearing in the Nal'ibali supplements are based on traditional stories and fairy tales. However, Nal'ibali adapts these stories in order to make them more appealing to South African children by making the settings and characters more recognisable to children from diverse backgrounds, often imbuing stories with a particular South African flavour. Interestingly, Gray and Alanis' statements regarding children's lack of attraction to folklore and fairy tales were not accurate for the learners in the reading club. The Winterson Primary learners seemed to enjoy fairy tales and African folk tales just as much as the more realistic stories to which they were exposed, although this might be due to the novelty of reading or hearing any story at all. Over time, they might have become more discerning regarding their favourite types of stories, and might then have favoured more realistic and relevant literature.

Yoon, Simpson and Haag stress the importance of teachers' awareness of the ideologies delivered by the books they distribute to their learners. Through a detailed analysis of twelve randomly selected picture books from the 'multicultural' section of a school library, the researchers showed that many multicultural books, despite their good intentions of promoting cultural pluralism, instead deliver messages of minority groups' assimilation into mainstream culture, forsaking their native language and cultural traditions in order to be better accepted by the mainstream. Such books, while multicultural, do not support cultural and linguistic diversity (Yoon, et al, 2010: 110). However, teachers could even use these texts' shortcomings to fuel discussion in her classrooms regarding language and diversity, giving mainstream-culture learners a new perspective on the dominant culture in society, while also affording learners from marginalised groups the chance to explore these critical discourses and become agents for change (Yoon et al, 2010: 117). In this study, the researcher was interested to see how learners in a South African context responded to culturally relevant literature.

3.5 THE CONTRIBUTION OF AFTER-SCHOOL LITERACY PROGRAMMES, WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO READING CLUBS

New Literacy Studies is characterised by focusing on multi-literacies rather than a single perception of 'literacy', and sees literacy primarily as situated within social and cultural practices. Two key concepts of New Literacy Studies are 'literacy events' and 'literacy practices'. The literacy event is described by Heath as “occasions in which written language is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretive processes and strategies” (Heath, 1982: 50). Basically, they are activities in which literacy has a role, usually involving a written text and some discussion about it (Hamilton and Barton, 2000: 8). Many literacy events are regular activities repeated as part of a routine, such as tasks at work or school, while some derive from the informal and generally more unstructured realms of home life. Often the written text is not simply print literacy—for example, using a recipe from a cookery book to create a dish requires an understanding of print literacy as well as numeracy (Hamilton and Barton, 2000: 9). This concept of literacy events serves to emphasise the social context from which literacy itself is inextricable.

Through analysis of literacy events, it is possible to learn about literacy practices, defined by Hamilton and Barton as “the general cultural ways of utilising written language which people draw upon in their lives” (2000: 7). According to Heath, when involved in a literacy event, “participants follow socially established rules for verbalizing what they know from and about the written material” (Heath, 1982: 50). Heath emphasises the significance of what she refers to as 'ways of taking', meaning the various ways in which children absorb content from their environment, including books—the way in which children make sense of texts and relate their content to what they know about the real world is something which is constructed by the culture and society which surrounds them, just like they learn games or table manners. Thus, the way in which adults model and instruct 'ways of taking' from texts will have a strong influence on how children negotiate literary events in their own lives. Examples of literacy events occurring in the home environment are: bedtime stories, reading food packaging, road signs, and television advertisements. Thus, Heath argues that how family members model and instruct a child's participation in these literary events can have a profound influence on how that child negotiates literary events at school, such as being able to answer comprehension questions based on a story. These 'socially established rules',

which govern the use, distribution and interpretation of a written text, are the key factors shaping literacy practices in a family, institution, or community, and serve to emphasise the New Literacy Studies' perception of literacy as socially constructed.

Therefore, most learners come to school with a pre-forged relationship (or lack thereof) with books and other texts, shaped by the lack of book-based literacy practices they encountered in their home environment. Heath's (1982) portrayal of three different households' literacy practices and how they (positively or negatively) affect their children's literacy abilities is a fascinating example of this, showing how the simple act of reading bedtime stories (more importantly, how they are read and discussed with the child) can develop a child's abilities to cope with school-based literacy tasks such as reading comprehension tests. Heath's work reveals the extent to which parents' words, actions and values may have a profound effect on their child's ability to cope with classroom literacy later in life. An example of this principle is found in many African cultures, where traditional etiquette dictates that children are not to question or criticise their elders or authority figures. A child who is inquisitive or critical is seen as being 'clever' and thus disrespectful. As a result, many children and young adults raised with these traditional values struggle in the Western schooling system, as they fail to ask questions in the classroom if they do not understand, and struggle to effectively analyse and critique texts (Cleghorn and Rollnick, 2002: 355). The societal norms of their upbringing have influenced how these children are able to interact with the text in the classroom environment.

Heath's work also suggests that literacy practices occurring at home are potentially different to those occurring in school. Much research has been done into why learners are often exhibit higher levels of proficiency in after-school literacy tasks than they do in the classroom. Hull and Schultz (2001) explain that in the 1960s and 1970s, researchers in non-educational fields such as anthropology and linguistics began to look beyond schools to family and community settings in order to better understand how learners from differing socio-economic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds fared in the mainstream school setting. In 1964, Hymes encouraged the study of language in context, as well as the anthropological

study of languages, thus promoting the theory of 'an ethnography of communication', which focused on the communicative patterns of a community, and a comparison of those patterns across communities (Hull and Schultz, 2001:5). Several years later in 1965, researchers from a variety of disciplines—such as anthropology, psychology, linguistics, education—were brought together to consider why schools were 'failing' learners from minority and low-income backgrounds. The conclusion reached by the panel was that these learners' difficulties in school were linked to differences in how language was being used in the children's homes versus in the school environment (Hull and Schultz, 2001: 6). They determined that learners socialised in diverse contexts come to school differentially prepared for the demands of the classroom. Hymes' (1974) notion of the communicative event, which uses concepts such as settings, participants, norms and genres in order to characterise language use, provided a helpful theoretical framework for documenting language use in school-based and out-of-school contexts. Further research by Hymes (1981) showed that schools were portrayed as cultures organised around a set of values and beliefs that frequently were not shared by the learners and by members of the surrounding community. This idea was supported by the work of Heath (1982), discussed earlier in this chapter, which calls attention to how literacy events occurring at home might not adequately prepare learners for the way in which literacy events occur at school. Gee (2000) further affirms this perspective by situating NLS as well as Hymes' ethnography of communication within a movement in which social and cultural interaction are the focus of study, instead of individuals (the definition and characteristics of ethnographic research will be more thoroughly discussed in Chapter Five). This study was performed along these guidelines, with a focus on the way in which learners react to literacy as a social event experienced as part of a community of readers. In accordance with NLS theory, literacy events with a focus on providing positive and pleasurable reading experiences may be a possible solution to the disparity which exists between home literacy and school literacy. This is because, like in the reading club, they expose learners to enjoyable literacy events, such as listening to stories and shared reading, which they might not have encountered in their home environments, thus attempting to make up for the deficit in children's literacy experience.

Hymes' conception of the ethnography of communication provides justification for teachers to notice the literacy skills and resources that learners bring with them to school from home, and to attempt to tap in to these out-of-school literacies as a means to develop learners' literacy skills within school. Teachers, schools, and other shareholders in education need to re-evaluate what counts as literacy, and broadening classroom practice to include some facets of out-of-school literacy, instead of always assuming that the learners themselves must change to suit the traditional school-based literacy curriculum (Hull and Schultz, 2001: 8). The study done by McGinnis (2007), to be discussed in the following chapter, is an example of how learners' out-of-school literacies can be incorporated into classroom literacy tasks. Perry points out that in South Africa "school literacy too often becomes the gold standard for a narrower view of 'literacy', and children who are not adept at school literacies are marked as somehow culturally deficient or linguistically incompetent" (Perry, 2008: 59). Schools and teachers should thus aspire to bring some elements of out-of-school literacy to the classroom, by incorporating learners' interests in media such as graphic novels, popular music, and social media, and allowing learners to share, discuss, and interact with these and other literacy artefacts, instead of restricting classroom literacy to textbooks and worksheets.

When considering the difference between in-school and out-of-school literacy events, it is not necessarily the geographical location of the event, the space itself, but what occurs within that space (Vasudevan and Wissman, 2011: 97). For example, the reading club sessions which took place during this study occurred in an out-of-school context, lacking the rigidity, discipline and teacher-centeredness of a typical reading lesson, yet these sessions occurred in the very same classroom in which most of the learners received their daily 50-minute English period. The contrast between typical out of-school literacies and in-school literacies is about more than geographical location. Out-of-school literacy tends to allow for experimentation, for expressions of affinity with like-minded people, as well as encouraging searches for meaning, self-authoring, and political action, whereas in-school literacy is typical of Street's (1995) 'autonomous' model of literacy in which literacy is a purely cognitive, skills-based process to be mastered, completely separate from its social context (Vasudevan and Wissman, 2011: 97). Literacy programmes which take place extra-

murally and in an out-of-school context have the potential to tap into learners' literacy abilities and interests in a way which traditional reading instruction and formalised intervention programmes may not, meaning that the reading club, as an extra-mural literacy activity, has the potential to impact profoundly on learners' development.

According to Spielberger and Halpern, the distinct benefits of after-school literacy programmes as opposed to school-based literacy intervention programmes are mostly thanks to the relaxed, nurturing, and social nature of the after-school reading programmes:

> Children typically see after-school programs as a safe context, with a relatively modest adult agenda. Unlike school, after-school programs are places designed for children to feel successful. Reading and writing efforts are not tied to tests and grades, promotion and retention, and the focus is not on errors but on individual interests, choices and accomplishments. Children not surprisingly enjoy reading and writing more when they know they will not be tested and quizzed on their efforts.
>
> (Spielberger and Halpern, 2002:88)

As an after-school reading programme, the Winterson reading club aimed to meet these ideals, by providing learners with a nurturing and safe environment, free from academic pressure and the threat of humiliation. With regards to the types of activities on offer in the reading club, Britsch, Martin, Stuczynski, Tomala and Tucci (2005) report that common classroom literacy practices such as reading aloud, dramatization and book discussion may be of even more benefit to learners within the after-school context, as long as the activities presented during the after-school programmes are engaging, expand on their learning in ways that are relevant to them, and, importantly, do not duplicate what is happening during the school day (Britsch et al, 2005: 28). This seems to suggest that the learners' perception of the literacy programme is influential, and it is vital that the learners perceive it as something enjoyable. If they feel that the after-school programme merely 'duplicates what is happening in the school day', their enjoyment and motivation will wane, whereas if the literacy programme is perceived as a pleasurable activity, learners are more likely to engage themselves in the activities more fully. In short, findings suggest that after-school literacy programmes which concentrate on providing the learners with enjoyable, relevant,

interesting, and achievable activities, without the restrictions and anxieties associated with school-based literacy tasks, are those most likely to promote development of learners' literacy development.

3.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter presented an overview of the theoretical underpinnings of this study. This chapter has examined the definitions of a multi-literacies framework for literacy development, the complexity of choosing appropriate reading material, and arguing in favour of extra-mural after-school reading programmes.

CHAPTER FOUR:

LITERATURE REVIEW

THE IMPORTANCE OF READING FOR LEISURE, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF STORIES, ON THE LITERACY DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG INTERMEDIATE-PHASE LEARNERS IN UNDER-RESOURCED SCHOOLS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided a contextual overview of some of the issues influencing literacy currently prevalent in South African schools, as well as giving a contextual description of the particular school environment where this study was conducted. An explanation of the ideas underpinning the Nal'ibali campaign was also provided. Now that some of the current concerns surrounding literacy in South Africa have been discussed, the purpose of this chapter is to examine relevant literature in order to situate this research focus within the context of the field of study. This chapter includes a critical review of several international and local studies examining the importance of reading, and the positive effect reading and stories may have on learners' literacy abilities. Studies examining techniques for using literacy to improve community relations are discussed, as well as research on strategies for helping multilingual learners in under-resourced classrooms connect more easily with academic literacy practices. Although some of these studies concentrated on the classroom environment, they have been chosen because they provide valuable examples of how particular literacy activities and approaches to reading, writing, and other tasks can promote a reading culture, provide experiences of the social aspect of literacy, with the aim of furthering personal and social development. The findings of these studies were used comparatively against the observations recorded in my auto-ethnographic narrative, in order to determine whether the Winterson Primary children showed similar enhancements in their abilities and developments in their behaviour when exposed to literacy activities similar to those used in the following studies.

4.2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON RESEARCH ON LITERACY IN SOUTH AFRICA

PRAESA's research on Literacy and Early Childhood Development

The previous chapter has provided a detailed examination of various understandings of the terms 'literacy' and 'literature' and has discussed which interpretations are of relevance to this study, as well as mentioning some of the ways in which children may benefit from exposure to literature, at home, in school, and extra-murally. The following section examines South African research on literacy development. Most of these studies focus on much younger learners, indicating the need for more studies on the literacy development of Intermediate and Senior Phase learners. Although focusing on younger children, these studies are still of relevance to this study, as many of the activities which these researchers identified as beneficial to younger learners, are equally beneficial to older learners. Also, it is important to consider what the older learners might have experienced in their early years of schooling in order to understand why their levels of literacy development are below what they should be for their age.

These studies also researched literacy development of learners who are learning in their second language, which is of significance to this study. South Africa, with its diversity of cultures and languages, its vast gap between rich and poor, and its history of colonisation and apartheid, provides a unique educational context for research, particularly where language is concerned, which is not completely comparable to the settings in which the above-mentioned international studies take place. Hibbert and Crous draw attention to this discrepancy, saying that

> South African multilingual society does not seem to lend itself to the easy option open to translators in straight-forward, economically large middle-class countries such as Belgium or Canada, where the socio-economic status of the language users is fairly similar; where the languages have equal official status; and both language communities are literate, as well as predominantly economically secure.
>
> (Hibbert and Crous, 2011:100)

The following section provides an overview of research done in South African settings on the benefits of increasing learners' exposure to enjoyable encounters with literacy, particularly in their home language. The section includes a discussion of some of the research conducted by Carole Bloch of PRAESA, the organisation responsible for the Nal'ibali campaign, in order to provide evidence in favour of reading-for-enjoyment as a means to improve learners' literacy. Bloch's research is particularly relevant to this research as her conclusions underpin the principles of the Nal'ibali campaign, which aims to promote reading for enjoyment amongst South Africa's school children, as well as promoting mother-tongue literacy.

Director of PRAESA and leader of the Nal'ibali campaign Carole Bloch has done much research into literacy and bi-literacy learning, particularly in multilingual settings. The following observations made by Bloch during her research are, naturally, not true of every school in the country, but Bloch's descriptions of what she saw happening in multilingual South African Grade R and Grade One classrooms may be seen as “the general picture”. Her research on teaching and learning in multilingual Early Childhood Development classrooms (Bloch, n.d.) explores how in South African classrooms, literacy is generally taught through abstract, isolated teacher-centred activities emphasising skills such as phonics and sight words, unrelated to how reading and writing are experienced in children's everyday life. Although Bloch's study focuses on much younger children than those currently participating in the Winterson Primary reading club, I believe that the link between literacy development and exposure to stories and reading for pleasure remains a significant one, regardless of the age of the learner.

Bloch provides transcripts of teacher-learner dialogues as examples of what frequently happens in a Grade One classroom in South Africa during a reading or writing lesson: learners are given very exact instructions as to how to do the activity, even down to what colours they must use to colour in the pictures. They are forced to copy the teacher precisely as she completes the activity. Any attempt by a learner to work independently or offer insight is quickly quashed and the learner reprimanded. According to Bloch, this is valued

as 'learning', but in fact it shows “the tight control many teachers feel is appropriate...the focus is on a very particular form of collaboration between teacher and pupils with little or no opportunities for conversational-type interchanges or initiative from the children” (Bloch, n.d.: 13). Another frequent occurrence is 'chanting', where teacher-learner interaction is limited to the whole class chanting the rehearsed response elicited by the teacher. Bloch witnessed similar occurrences during Grade R writing lessons, where the pre-school teachers shared the opinion that pre-school learners are 'not supposed to' write; they must merely be familiar with the letters. What this means is that Grade R learners practise repetitive handwriting patterns, and copying and tracing letters, but are not encouraged to or even allowed to attempt to string the letters together into words or phrases. Bloch claims that it is only through purposeful encounters with reading and writing that a child's grasp of literacy will develop, as young children need to actively construct the written language system for themselves in the same way that they develop their speech (Bloch, n.d.: 14). Denying Grade R learners the freedom to experiment with writing prevents them from exploring written text in creative and meaningful ways.

Having taught at Winterson Primary for several years, one of my observations regarding the children is that they struggle with activities requiring creativity or independent thought (Observation, July 2015), making the context described by Bloch very similar to what many of the Winterson learners experienced in their early schooling. When asked to write something, such as a story or letter, many of the Winterson learners struggle to write anything involving imagination, figurative language, or description (Observation, July 2015), suggesting that these learners might have experienced a similar restriction of their writing abilities early on in their schooling.

Another observation made by Bloch during her research is the startling lack of printed material visible in the classroom that was in the learners' own home languages, or was culturally relevant. This sends powerful messages to both children and adults about the apparent hierarchy of the various languages, as well as which cultures are awarded more social status. Bloch describes predominantly Afrikaans-speaking classrooms where almost

every poster or wall chart is in English and didactic in nature (showing the alphabet, phonics, days of the week, etc.), storybooks and graded readers that are predominantly English, monocultural, and Eurocentric, as well as labelled pictures bearing potentially influential stereotypes such as ‘boys are naughty' and 'girls have dolls'. Bloch quotes Street (1995: 121) who points out why it is so important that the classroom environment reflects multiculturalism and multilingualism: “the organisation of the visual environment itself helps to construct and provide a model of the child's relationship to language and to the written word. The walls of the classroom become the walls of the world”. The clear message visible on the walls of the classrooms observed by Bloch is that the world is white, Eurocentric, and English, and that written language concerns letters and sounds and isolated words, instead of being used for real reasons. While the walls of Winterson Primary's classrooms are reasonably full of posters, most of them are as Bloch describes: didactic charts and vocabulary lists, with almost none of the writing done by the learners, or for real reasons. The exception is the classroom where the reading club takes place, which features learners' written work on the noticeboards (Observation, July 2015).

Bloch claims that the phenomenon of learners being able to read but not understand the words they are reading is directly related to an overemphasis on phonics instruction (Bloch, n.d.: 25), particularly for those learners who are learning in a language that is not their home language. Learners whose mother tongue is an African language often struggle with English phonics because of their pronunciation. Typically, with an African accent, 'apple' is pronounced 'epple', and is thus written as 'epple', which leads to struggling learners and frustrated teachers. However, Bloch's research shows that when teachers were encouraged to use stories to teach areas of literacy, such as phonics or grammar, the teaching became more effective, particularly when the stories used were relevant and culturally appropriate (Bloch, n.d.: 28). In relation to this study, Bloch's research suggests that a possible contribution to Winterson school's low literacy level might be due to Foundation Phase teachers focusing too much on phonics, and not allowing learners enough time to read and listen to stories.

More research by Bloch and Nkence (2000) suggests that encouraging 'emergent' reading and writing in Foundation Phase classrooms gives learners the confidence, freedom and creativity to express themselves and use their initiative where literacy is concerned. Bloch and Nkence noticed that in many Foundation Phase classrooms in South Africa, reading and writing were seen as skills, and learners had to first master sets of approved 'pre-reading' and 'pre-writing' skills before being seen as ready to move forward. Teachers believed in teaching 'the basics', that is, phonics and correct letter formation before exposing learners to more complex aspects of literacy (Bloch and Nkence, 2000: 3). Bloch and Nkence claim that when a child's early encounters with literacy are rigidly restricted to repetition of patterns and controlled copying of words and sentences, they are being limited to the role of imitator (Bloch and Nkence, 2000: 6). Later, when they are expected to create their own pieces of writing, they are unpractised at using their imaginations and writing something creative or original. It has already been mentioned that the Winterson children share the same hesitance to write independently. Bloch and Nkence exposed a Foundation Phase class of mostly Afrikaans/English learners to a year of bi-literacy activities in English and Xhosa, such as telling and reading stories, playing games and singing songs and learning rhymes, allowing children time to look at and read books, and encouraging learners to write for real reasons (that is, writing letters or instructions or stories that are relevant and purposeful, not simply copying off the board). The researchers state that although in the beginning learners were reluctant to write themselves, and were initially very concerned with 'how to write' this word or that word, eventually they began to gain confidence in writing 'for themselves', without the fear of doing it wrong (Bloch and Nkence, 2000: 6). Bloch and Nkence's findings indicate that increased exposure to meaningful literacy activities can build learners' confidence in writing.

It is significant that these strategies used by Bloch and Nkence in the classroom are all strategies which form an important part of Nal'ibali reading club activities. Thus, the activities which reading club facilitators are encouraged to do with their clubs (story- telling and reading, free reading time, songs and games, writing for real reasons without correcting spelling and grammar, and do on) have all demonstrated their efficacy in real classroom

environments. This suggests that in the classroom or in a more relaxed setting such as a reading club, making literacy relevant and meaningful, instead of a series of disconnected irrelevant skills, results in more effective literacy learning, particularly in multilingual environments.

The Impact of Storybooks on Emergent Literacy

Pretorius and Machet (2008) researched the effects of storybook reading in isiZulu on the emergent literacy of a group of Grade R children in rural, impoverished areas of Kwa-Zulu Natal. Pretorius and Mokhwesana (2009) also conducted a similar study investigating the effects of a four-year reading intervention programme on the Northern Sotho literacy skills of a group of Grade One learners at a poorly-performing township school. The outcome of both studies suggests that building a reading culture at school by increasing learners' exposure to and interaction with books and stories can make a difference to the literacy competence and development of Grade R and Grade One learners, particularly in their home (that is, African) languages (Pretorius and Machet, 2008: 281; Pretorius and Mokhwesana, 2009: 11). As with studies done by Bloch, Pretorius and Machet's research, as well as that of Pretorius and Mokhwesana, concentrates on Grade R and Grade One learners, yet this does not diminish the significance of their findings regarding the correlation between storybooks and literacy development. The school and community context of Pretorius's studies is also similar to the context of this study (in that the schools are in impoverished areas where there is little presence of a culture of reading amongst either children or adults).

Pretorius and Machet believe strongly that literacy is embedded in the sociocultural context as an aspect of human activity, instead of as a set of isolated skills. Like Bloch, they point out the discrepancy between this understanding of literacy and how literacy is being taught in classrooms across the country. Teaching learners the alphabet and how to count are the most favoured activities in Grade R classrooms, but they are usually carried out in a formal, sequenced, and rote choral manner (Pretorius and Machet, 2008: 266), meaning that when

these learners proceed to Grade One, they have had no exposure to a print-rich environment, literary practices and language experiences which are common in more privileged environments. In an attempt to improve learners' exposure to literacy, the Family Literacy Project in south-western Kwa-Zulu Natal trained literacy facilitators to promote literacy activities in the community. Storybook reading was an important aspect of the project, and Grade R practitioners were given a small collection of storybooks and were encouraged to read these stories in isiZulu to the learners in their classes. They also attended workshops and classes in storybook reading and its importance. Over a period of two years, Pretorius and other researchers for the Family Literacy Project worked closely with the practitioners, training them in emergent literacy assessment.

The results which will be discussed here focus specifically on the effects of storybook reading on the learners' emergent literacy development. The learners were a group of 26 Zulu children, between the ages of five and seven, from three different preschools. When the storybook project started in these schools, the descriptions of the environment and teaching methods sound very similar to those described by Bloch: classrooms with hardly any printed material on the walls, a lack of accessible reading books, classroom activities which involve chanting the alphabet, numbers, and learned responses, learners who are unfamiliar with books, not knowing how to handle them, and who struggle to retell a story or put a series of pictures into the correct sequence. Most learners, when asked to 'write' a letter (as an attempt to assess their concept of the written word), were unfamiliar with 'pretend writing' and the idea of writing for a reason, such as writing a letter to a friend or family member.

After the next eight months, the Family Literacy Project assisted Grade R practitioners in improving their classroom environments, increasing the amount of meaningful reading and writing activities in which they children were engaged, and encouraging them to read stories to their classes on a regular basis. By the end of the year, when the children were assessed for the post-test, the classrooms in two of the three schools had undergone a transformation—they now had bookshelves filled with children’s books within easy reach

of the learners, including titles in isiZulu. There were posters on the walls, also at children's eye level, and children's work and drawings on the walls. Learners were involved in more literacy-centred activities, such as finding particular letters in magazines, pretending to read to each other, and talking about the pictures in books with each other, or paging through books by themselves or in pairs. They were familiar with 'story time' procedures, such as sitting in a circle on the mat, and were able to retell the story with greater ease. Their drawing skills and understanding of writing letters had improved greatly. These two school showed the greatest improvement in the all literacy components of the post-test, compared to the pre-test in April (Pretorius and Machet, 2008: 281).

However, the third school did not appear to fully embrace the new ideas presented by the Family Literacy Project. Chanting the alphabet and numbers remained a priority activity in this classroom, while the donated books lay, many unopened, out of reach of the children for fear they would be damaged. The books were put on display to parents and visitors, but were barely used by the learners. Story reading in this classroom was not as frequent as at the other schools: learners only heard a story once or twice a week, compared to once or twice a day at the other schools involved in the project. Despite this, however, even at this school, learners showed improvement in their literacy abilities at the end of the project. This suggests that when children are given opportunities to engage with books in meaningful ways, even if only once or twice a week (such as in the reading club) and not every day, literacy values and behaviours can still be learned and developed.

The data collected from the pre-tests and post-tests showed an improvement in the Grade R learners across seven of the eight tested literacy components after the eight-month period. The only area which showed a decrease in ability rather than an improvement was sequencing, where learners were asked to put pictures telling a simple story in the correct order. Clearly the learners still struggled to notice the visual clues offered by the pictures, perhaps indicating that this is an area on which the teachers need to spend more time.

The Grade One learners who served as controls for the research were assessed in the same way as the Grade R learners, and in each of the eight literacy areas the Grade One learners

were outperformed by the Grade R learners who were part of the storybook programme. According to Pretorius and Machet, "it is noteworthy that the Grade Rs showed superior skills on those measures that are most directly influenced by exposure to storybook reading namely story recalls and book behaviour" (Pretorius and Machet, 2008: 281), suggesting that giving learners from poor areas access to books and involving them in meaningful book-related activities most certainly nurtures their literacy development. Similarly, in Pretorius and Mokhwesana's research, Grade One learners exposed to a literacy programme encouraging the use of their Home Language, Northern Sotho, showed a steady increase over four years in the areas of letter knowledge, auditory discrimination, phonological awareness, word knowledge, story recall, vocabulary, and book behaviour (Pretorius and Mokhwesana, 2009: 11-13).

While Bloch, Bloch and Nkence, and Pretorius and Machet all describe their experiences of what contributes to ineffective literacy teaching in South African schools, Sailors, Hoffman and Matthee (2007) researched what aspects contribute to effective literacy teaching. Sailors, Hoffman and Matthee (2007) investigated many schools serving low-income areas and predominantly black or coloured learner populations in order to determine the common characteristics of such schools which are succeeding in improving literacy development among their learners. As well as more general attributes such as strong leadership and a safe teaching environment, the schools which emerged most effective in promoting literacy were characterised by classrooms which were print-rich environments, with reading books easily accessible to learners, posters in a variety of languages on the walls, and learners' own work on display (Sailors et al, 2007: 379). In terms of teaching, the authors observed that in the most effective schools, literacy lessons involved teachers engaging learners actively in storytelling or reading activities. Teachers also implemented rich discussions around the texts, and used skilful questioning techniques to draw on learners' past experiences and extend their vocabularies (Sailors et al, 2007: 379) such as the questioning techniques discussed in Guccione's (2011) study on inquiry-based education (to be discussed later in this chapter). Significantly, as demonstrated by Cleghorn and Rollnick's (2002) work on code-switching (also to be discussed later in this chapter), these class discussions used both

English and the learners' mother tongue to support the learners' understanding of the texts and involve them in the discussions. According to Sailors, Hoffman and Matthee, theirs was the first study to investigate the link between features of schools and learners' literacy achievement in South Africa. Their findings, which correlate with the work of Bloch, Bloch and Nkence, and Pretorius and Machet, demonstrate that even with the issues of language, lack of resources, and overcrowded classrooms, simple changes in teacher-learner interaction and the learning environment can have a sizeable positive impact on the learners' acquisition of literacy skills. Examples of effective literacy strategies which could prove effective when implemented in both in-school and out-of-school literacy programmes are discussed below.

4.3 THE IMPORTANCE OF READING FOR LEISURE, AND STORIES, FOR LITERACY DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG READERS

The previous section examined prior research in literacy development, with specific reference to South African schools. In this section, several local and international studies demonstrating the positive effect which reading and stories may have on children's literacy skills will be examined.

Cohen's (1968) research on how listening to stories can improve children's literacy development was useful to this study as it demonstrated how simply hearing stories on a regular basis can aid learners' vocabulary and reading abilities. Cohen researched the effect of literature on vocabulary and reading achievement by exposing a group of second-grade learners in New York City, USA to daily story readings, while another group at a different school (serving as the control group) only experienced stories as an occasional treat. After a year of listening to one story read aloud daily, the experimental group showed a significant increase in vocabulary, word knowledge, comprehension, and quality of vocabulary, over the control group, who experienced stories only occasionally (Cohen, 1968: 212-13).

Although Cohen’s study was done almost fifty years ago, I believe her findings are

important and relevant enough to mention here. Cohen's study is of interest to this research because, like Winterson Primary, the schools used in Cohen's research were situated in low socio-economic areas and performed poorly academically. According to Cohen, most reading retardation stems from a lack of readiness and weakness of motivation in learners, and seems unresponsive to alternative methods of teaching reading (1968: 209). Cohen attributes these weaknesses to “(1) lack of experience with books as a source of pleasure, and (2) inadequacy of language as a consequence of limitations in variety of experience in a milieu that offers restricted language models” (Cohen, 1968: 209). Thus, the reading of stories aloud was chosen so that it might “stimulate children's desire to achieve competency in reading while strengthening their ability to do so” (Cohen, 1968: 209). It was hoped that the learners in this study would demonstrate a similarly positive response to the frequent hearing and reading of stories.

Perhaps one of the limitations of Cohen's study is that, due to the era in which it took place, the literacy skills under scrutiny are predominantly to do with listening to texts read aloud, and the assessment tools used require learners to read and write their answers in traditional test fashion. Thus, Cohen's study does not embrace more modern interpretations of literacy as a social construct, involving communication, interpretation, and context. Despite this, however, there are still several relevant and valuable conclusions to be drawn from Cohen's study, namely, that reading to children is of vital importance, especially in the case of socially-disadvantaged children who do not have access to books in their homes, and that regular listening to stories appears to aid listening, attention span, narrative sense, and the recognition of newly-learned words (Cohen, 1968: 213).

In a similar, yet more recent study, and one of local significance, Donald, Condy and Forrester describe the outcomes of a pilot project which ran over seven years in seven schools in the Western Cape region of South Africa. This local study was relevant to this study, as it demonstrated how a learner-centred approach to literacy activities can yield positive results in South African classrooms. This Concentrated Language Encounter (CLE) Programme is a structured and systematic approach to literacy development in developing

social contexts, and is designed particularly to aid learners whose LoLT is not their home language (Donald, Condy and Forrester, 2003: 484). The CLE Programme exposed learners to language activities involving listening, speaking, reading and writing simultaneously, and consists of a particular structure of learning stages, teaching processes, and expected outcomes (Donald et al, 2003: 484). A CLE approach to a lesson based on a literary text involves five phases, in which learners interact with a text through listening, discussing, role-playing, writing, retelling the story, and participating in language games and activities. (Donald et al, 2003: 485-486). At the end of the pilot project, testing of a Grade Three group, who had participated in the programme for three years, results of testing provided a positive indication that the CLE-exposed learners had benefited in terms of their written language skills (Donald, et al, 2003: 490). Like Cohen's study, the outcomes of this pilot project suggest that a child-centred approach to teaching, which encourages active participation, group co-operation, and high levels of learner engagement and interaction can result in more noticeable improvements in learners' literacy development than teacher-centred, traditional classroom methods. While the CLE method is obviously intended as a strategy for in-school literacy, its activities and procedure are well-suited for application in out-of-school literacy contexts. The success of the CLE programme suggests that the learners in this study, after engaging in similar enjoyable and interactive literacy activities, albeit in an extramural context instead of in the classroom, would also demonstrate an improvement in their language and literacy skills.

The idea that children should be encouraged to enjoy reading, above all, is the rationale behind many reading programmes, most notably for this study the PRAESA initiative Nal'ibali, which encourages school and individuals to start reading clubs in order to promote reading writing, and story-telling for enjoyment, not for academic purposes. The reading club at Winterson Primary was based on the Nal'ibali model of a reading club, which is why reading for enjoyment formed the focus of the reading club. The basic concept behind Nal'ibali and most other such 'reading for enjoyment' programmes is that children who have positive experiences with books will be likely to start reading more, which will in turn improve their literacy through increased exposure to books and stories. While the Nal'ibali

reading clubs are intended as extra-curricular, a USA-based study by Morrow (1992) used the 'reading for enjoyment' method in a classroom, investigating the effect of pleasurable reading experiences on children's reading achievement and attitudes to reading.

Morrow's study focused on learners from diverse backgrounds whose cultural upbringing may have limited their exposure to the literature traditions from either their own cultures or Western (in this case, American) culture, just as many of the Winterson learners were unfamiliar with traditional academic literacy practices due to their diverse backgrounds. Morrow emphasised the importance of exposing children to a wide range of literary cultures, so that the learners' unique cultural identities may be built up and encouraged, but also to ensure that they are familiar with the literary culture in which they are living, so that they may be empowered to experience more than their own immediate world (1992: 252). Similarly, it was hoped that the reading club would encourage learners to embrace their cultural heritage by encouraging reading in their mother tongue, yet also development the literacy skills necessary for learners to succeed at school. The purpose of Morrow's year-long study was to determine if the literacy achievement, use of literacy and attitudes toward reading of children from diverse backgrounds could be positively affected by a literacy programme that emphasised enjoyable skill-orientated experiences with books and reading (Morrow, 1992: 252). In a study similar to Donald et al's South Africa-based research, Morrow used a variety of techniques to expose learners to literacy, such as teacher-guided activities relating to story-reading and -telling, independent reading and writing sessions, the establishment of a 'literacy centre' in the classroom, and a reading-at-home programme.

Approximately a quarter of the participating learners were classed as 'at risk' (low achievers in reading and language) and as coming from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. Morrow's study was selected for this literature review because of the involvement of multicultural groups of learners, as well as the significant presence of learners who were struggling with reading and from disadvantaged backgrounds (Morrow, 1992: 254). Morrow's subject group is thus similar in demographic to the Winterson Primary learner population, due to the multiculturalism, low competence in reading, and low socio-

economic status. However, one major difference between the participants in Morrow's study and the learners participating in this study is the languages that they speak: While Morrow's learners come from a variety of cultural backgrounds, it is not mentioned how many (if any) of these learners have a language other than English as their mother tongue. The learners at Winterson Primary, however, are mostly second-language English speakers, coming from homes where isiXhosa and Afrikaans are more frequently spoken, making the Winterson Primary group multilingual as well as multicultural, causing a significant difference in learner dynamics from Morrow's study.

The procedure for Morrow's study involved an E1 Experimental group, receiving school-based intervention and a reading-at-home programme; an E2 Experimental group, receiving school-based intervention only; and a Control group who received reading instruction as it had been carried out prior to the study. In the Control classrooms, reading consisted mostly of learners reading from graded readers in ability groups with the teacher, and completing workbook activities, with stories on as occasional treats. In the experimental classrooms, comfortable and inviting literacy centres were set up, consisting of shelves with a variety of children’s books, enough for five to eight books per child, felt boards, puppets, headsets and stories on cassette tapes, as well as pillows, rugs, stuffed animals, comfortable chairs, and writing materials. The literacy centres demonstrated the importance of literacy by affording it its own special place in the classroom, and also made literature accessible to the learners by providing them with a range of active, social and literary activities in which to participate (Morrow, 1992). Over the course of the year, teachers in the experimental classes carried out three literature activities a week with the class from a prescribed handbook, and read to the children on a daily basis. Learners were also given freedom of the literacy centre for 30 minutes, three to five times a week, in which they could choose from a variety of activities, such as reading alone or with others, listening to a taped story, writing a story, etc. (Morrow, 1992).

At the beginning and end of the research period, learners' abilities were measured using a variety of assessment tools which measured learners' basic skills, comprehension, and story

retelling and rewriting abilities. Children were also interviewed regarding their attitudes to reading and the literature programme. Most children who had participated in the program reported that reading was 'fun':

> Reading and writing were 'fun' when you could choose what you wanted to read and write, whether to work alone or with others, and whether to use literature manipulatives such as puppets, roll movies, and feltboards. Reading and writing were 'fun' because of comfortable surroundings in the literacy centre, in the author's spot, on a rug, in a rocking chair, in a quiet corner, or at your desk. Reading and writing were 'fun' because in this atmosphere children taught each other, and teachers interacted in positive ways with children, working along with them.
>
> (Morrow, 1992: 272-273).

Most learners also reported that they felt they learned to read better because during the study the amount of reading they did increased. Their favourite aspects of the reading programme were that they 'get to read a lot', and that the Book Nook (literacy centre) is a special, cosy place; reading there made them feel relaxed and happy. According to the test results, the two experimental groups performed better in almost all categories than the control group. Thus, Morrow's study strengthens the claim for more literature and literature-based activities to be included in reading instruction programmes, as a combination of traditional reading instruction and more enjoyment-orientated literature-based instruction is more powerful than traditional instruction on its own (Morrow, 1992: 273).

Another project which provided significant evidence in favour of reading for pleasure is the 'Book Flood' project which was initiated by Elley in several third-world countries, including South Africa, often in partnership with local reading-promotion organisations. A 'Book Flood' is, quite simply, 'flooding' classrooms with books, and this project consisted of providing 120 attractive and appropriate English reading books to classrooms in predominantly black-populated schools in South Africa (known as the 'Sunshine in South Africa' project). Teachers at these schools are also trained to read stories, conduct guided reading lessons, and promote the reading habit by using motivational devices such as book festivals, drama productions, and concerts (Elley, 2000: 13). After nine months' frequent

exposure to the variety of books and the shared reading activities, the learners at the participating schools achieved significantly higher results in a series of English tests than a control group who learned English only through their prescribed textbooks (Elley, 2000: 14). According to Elley, the difference between the results of the experimental group and the control group was equivalent to at least six months' growth in the learners' literacy abilities. Elley notes that even a class of 'slow' learners, who had all repeated grades at least once, showed noticeable gains (Elley, 2000: 14). The effectiveness of the Book Flood programme is attributed to the increased time that learners spend on reading self-selected books (Elley, 2000: 14) as well as to the abundance of relevant and attractive books, which fuelled learners' motivation to read (Elley, 2000: 5).

These studies by Cohen, Morrow, Donald et al, and Elley all provide evidence that frequent and continued exposure to interesting stories and reading materials often results in increased literacy capabilities in school-children, and often proves more effective than traditional classroom instruction. Similarly, Krashen (1989) provides a strong argument for the theory that comprehensible input (in the form of reading) is the major source of vocabulary and competence in spelling. Although written almost thirty years ago, I believe that it is particularly relevant to this study, as Krashen offers a review of further evidence that vocabulary and spelling are acquired by absorbing and understanding messages through reading (known as the Input Hypothesis) and not by rote learning of drills and rules (Skill-building Hypothesis) or by producing language (Output Hypothesis) (1989: 440). In other words, according to Krashen's theory, learners may benefit more from participating in meaningful, pleasurable literacy activities than by practising classroom-type skills- and repetition- based approaches.

Krashen supports the findings of the three above-mentioned studies by means of the Input Hypothesis. Krashen believes that “language is self-consciously acquired—while you are acquiring, you don't know you are acquiring; your conscious focus is on the message, not form” (Krashen, 1989: 440). Therefore, children can 'pick up' words and grammatical structure from reading without making a conscious effort to do so; they acquire language

while simply following the story, as seen in Cohen's above-mentioned study. Similarly, Krashen refers to Chomsky (1972), who determined that children who grow up in print-rich environments are more grammatically competent, while other studies (Greaney and Hegarty, 1987) found a correlation between the amount of reading for leisure done by children, and their achievement in vocabulary tests.

Krashen examines numerous prior studies in the fields of spelling and vocabulary acquisition in order to provide evidence for the Input Hypothesis. Among the many discussed by Krashen are several early studies (such as Kyte, 1948) which demonstrated how learners' spelling continued to improve even when all formal spelling instruction ceased, as long as they were reading stories and books. Without specialised spelling instruction taking place in the classroom, the majority of learners continued to improve in spelling at the same rate as the groups of previous years, who had received formal spelling instruction in class. These above-mentioned studies testify to the effectiveness of reading for pleasure in improving literacy in terms of comprehension, spelling, and vocabulary. In conclusion, Krashen asserts:

> If these conclusions are correct, the pedagogical implications are obvious: we are teaching vocabulary and spelling, as well as the rest of language, the hard way. (Even if it were shown that conscious learning is as good as acquisition, or even twice as efficient, I would still prefer comprehensible input: an hour of pleasure reading is far preferable to thirty minutes of drill.) The easy way is to encourage a lot of reading, especially free voluntary reading.
>
> (Krashen, 1989: 454).

Thus, the results of these studies suggests that if similar reading conditions are implemented in this research, namely that learners are provided with a comfortable area, a variety of interesting and appealing reading materials, and regular engagement in meaningful literacy activities, similar improvements in learners' comprehension, retelling abilities, and attitudes to reading could be observed.

4.4 COMMUNITY-BUILDING THROUGH READING

The previous section of this chapter discussed prior studies which effectively demonstrate that pleasurable interactions with books and stories can and do contribute significantly to improvement of learners' literacy abilities. This section of this chapter will examine the potential of reading to contribute to learners' personal and social development, in order to show how reading clubs do not simply improve learners' academic abilities, but can also aid the holistic development of the learners.

Reading is typically considered a solitary act: a person seen reading is usually silent, engrossed, disconnected from the reality which surrounds them, if only temporarily. However, with the recent recognition of reading as a socially-constructed activity, campaigns such as Nal'ibali, and various other school-based reading programmes are promoting reading as a social activity, to be done in pairs or groups. Reading is being portrayed as an enjoyable activity to be shared and enjoyed with one's friends or family, and so Nal'ibali encourages parents to read aloud to their children, and for groups of children to read together, but is it possible that reading can function as a means to strengthen ties and heighten awareness between community members, whether that community be a family, a reading club, a school, or a residential area? Research seems to suggest that it can.

Kotze, van Duuren, Afrika, Rakiep and Abdulrahman (2009) describe how a group of teachers at a high school in Mitchell's Plain, just outside Cape Town, where drugs, crime and gang violence are rife, used literacy to help teachers transform their classrooms into communities filled with hope in the face of the despair so prevalent in the wider community (2009: 113). These teachers used narrative therapy practices to both enhance literacy acquisition and build a community of care and acknowledgement among their learners (Kotze et al, 2009: 114). By assisting learners to create transformative, narrative texts of their own lives and identities, providing a platform for discussion and healing, as through narrative therapy, learners literally 'rewrote' their life stories to highlight the positives and in their experiences and include a sense of hope for their futures (2009: 119). According to the authors, the learners' process of articulating their thoughts, beliefs, and understandings, and being forced to consider their perspectives showed that “to talk about our worlds in such

a way as to claim preferred identities for ourselves generates meaning and hopeful classroom practices" (Kotze et al, 2009: 124) and the teachers reported learners becoming more open, honest, trusting, and loving themselves and others for who they are during the narrative therapy process (Kotze et al, 2009: 124).

The power of literacy to effect social change within a community is also being considered in with regards to South Africa's HIV/AIDS epidemic. The youth of the nation feel desensitised to the threat of HIV/AIDS, due to an over-saturation of facts and warnings, usually spread through compulsory lectures at school (Mitchell and Smith, 2003: 514). Mitchell and Smith (2003) state that government departments increasingly acknowledge that social change cannot be effected only through the dissemination of facts, thus creating a space for literacy texts which combine factual information (such as, facts about HIV/AIDS prevention) with compelling story-lines (Mitchell and Smith, 2003: 518). In order to target the youth with information about HIV/AIDS in more engaging ways, organisations are employing the concept of 'new literacies' such as graffiti, hip-hop and rap music, and television to spread messages about HIV prevention to the youth (Mitchell and Smith, 2003: 519).

The creation of a more literate community, as well as benefiting individuals, is also associated with increased opportunities and fewer social problems within the community itself, ultimately improving the economy of the country itself. Kanyane (2004) explains that parents who are illiterate are unable to support their children's early literacy development, meaning that parents "pass on their low literacy to their children, creating an ongoing cycle of illiteracy, poverty, and under-achievement with a devastating impact on the economic development of the country" (Kanyane, 2004: 42). Kanyane claims that the family is an essential element in the economic and social development of a progressive and compassionate society, and argues that improving literacy at a family level, such as through family literacy programmes, the cycle of illiteracy and poverty can be broken, leading to better economic conditions for the family, the community, and ultimately the country (Kanyane, 2004: 42, 44).

According to Kanyane, family literacy programmes encompass a broad spectrum of approaches which all recognise the importance of the family on literacy development (Kanyane, 2004: 49). These generally provide interactive literacy activities for parents and children, train parents to help their children with literacy and other school work, train parents towards their own economic self-sufficiency, and prepare children for success in school and life experiences (Kanyane, 2004: 46). The success of these programmes is due to the community empowerment they create. Parents who improve their own literacy are better equipped to find employment, and with the support of their parents, the children become better prepared for the demands of school, increasing their chances of success later in life. As children develop a love for reading and learning, this attitude will be passed on to their children. Through family literacy programmes, families grow together through sharing literacy experiences, which results in an enormous impact on the community, with the potential to give rise to community empowerment, support and hope (Kanyane, 2004: 55-56).

An international example of how literacy can build community spirit is seen in Wilson, Jewett and Vanderburg's description of a whole-school 'read' (2008) project at a USA middle school which involved every learner in the school as well as the teachers, parents, and administrative staff, reading the same novel. They were inspired by similar projects which saw entire cities such as Chicago and Seattle, promoting a city-wide 'read', in which one text was chosen for the whole city to read and community members were invited to participate in events where the issues raised by the texts could be discussed. (Wilson, Jewett and Vanderburg, 2008: 4).

In such programmes, the texts were carefully chosen to explore social issues relevant to the particular community which was participating in the programme in order to allow members of the community to share a common experience that would promote literacy, while also building a sense of community by exploring pertinent issues and providing common talking-points (Wilson et al, 2008: 5). The whole-school 'read' was not limited to the school community reading the chosen novel: A resource guide was compiled for staff, which

included a list of books with related themes, as well as reading strategies and questions to be used in class discussions. The novel was also integrated into practically every subject in the syllabus. As the novel dealt primarily with notions of race, ethnicity, and class, it served as a springboard for the school to explore issues of prejudice, stereotypes, and misconceptions regarding different cultures and communities, meaning that

> as the students explored community, both as readers and as participants in their school, they gained new insight into what it means to be a member of a dynamic and diverse community...through the whole-school read, this middle school was able to experience a transformative process to grow into a community of learners
>
> (Wilson et al, 2008: 6).

The whole-school read appeared to foster feelings of acceptance among the learners, as many mentioned how they learned to value multiple perspectives and appreciate cultural diversity. The teachers were learning more about the lives and experiences of the children in their class, as the project "opened spaces for dialogue that created bridges between what students were reading and their own lives" (Wilson et al, 2008: 4, 8). Similar to the study by Kotze et al, the project successfully demonstrated how a school community—learners, parents, and teachers—may be brought together through meaningful dialogue, through a common literacy experience which allowed for and encouraged the sharing of experiences and opinions. Through the novel and the related activities, students were immersed in the idea of community, and their own understandings of diversity and culture extended through the use of multiple literacies (Wilson et al, 2008: 8). In a similar vein, although a reading club incorporates only a small percentage of the learner body, the shared experience derived from enjoying a meaningful story together, sharing opinions and interpretations, and relating it to real life, could have a profound effect on the community feelings of the small reading club population, which could potentially spread to their classrooms, homes, and other facets of the community.

4.5 BORDER-CROSSING PEDAGOGY FOR MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS IN

UNDER-RESOURCED SCHOOLS

Having established through a discussion of both local and international studies in the field of 'reading for enjoyment' that increased exposure to pleasurable literacy activities can have a positive effect on learners' literacy skills, this chapter will now examine studies which focus on teaching in multicultural and multilingual classrooms. This sections aims to identify approaches to teaching and communication strategies which could be applied to the facilitation of the Winterson Primary reading club in order to encourage appreciation of one's own culture and mother tongue, while also providing learners with the confidence to participate and share their ideas, even when learning in a language that is not their home language.

As already mentioned, Winterson Primary, like many other schools in South Africa, is a school with a diverse population of learners, both ethnically and linguistically. These children speak English, Afrikaans, Xhosa, or a mixture of all these languages. Even the black children are not a homogeneous ethnic group—most are Xhosa, but there are also some Zulus, Zimbabweans, and Nigerians amongst them, resulting in a rich variety of cultures and languages present in the school's learner population. Language is not a significant issue in Winterson's Afrikaans-medium classes, in which the learner population is almost entirely coloured Afrikaans-speaking, but in the English-medium classes, as in many English-medium classes across the country, most of the learners are not truly English Home Language speakers, and the diversity of races, cultures, and home languages present in the classroom, combined with the expected variance in learner abilities, is liable to complicate teaching for the educator, as learners who struggle to understand the work linguistically or culturally may slip even further behind academically.

It is not only in South Africa that multicultural and multilingual classrooms have become an area of academic interest. Much research is being done in the United States of America, where large and diverse immigrant communities are enriching the multicultural status of American classrooms. Ernst-Slavit, Moore and Maloney point out how a learner's home language plays an essential role in the acquisition of their second language (2002: 118), and

Allison and Rehm (2007) assert the importance of teachers adapting their methods to better aid multilingual learners. Although Allison and Rehm's (2007) study focuses on techniques for in the classroom, their identified strategies for encouraging learning in multilingual classrooms serve as helpful suggestions for facilitators of reading clubs and other extra-mural activities. Although reading clubs strive to be more social than academic environments, the suggestions highlighted by Allison and Rehm can be used by facilitators to help learners understand the texts, stories, songs and games introduced in reading club sessions.

In Allison and Rehm's study, the four most effective strategies for teaching multicultural and multilingual learners were found to be visuals, peer tutoring, co-operative learning, and alternative forms of assessment. Visual aids were found to be the most effective technique for teaching multicultural and multilingual classes, particularly for teaching learners whose home language is not English (Allison and Rehm, 2007: 14). This is because pictures display visual stimuli which can be understood by any learner, regardless of their language ability.

Peer tutoring was rated by the participating teachers as the next most effective strategy for helping multicultural and multilingual learners. Peer tutoring (typically pairing two learners of differing abilities and backgrounds) allows the learners "to become teachers and resources for each other, often relating better to each other than they would to a teacher" (Allison and Rehm, 2007: 15). Peer tutoring is said to promote communication, motivate learners, help learners achieve more academically, and develop friendships between learners from different backgrounds. Learners also find it easier to ask for help from a peer than from the teacher (2007: 15). Co-operative learning follows the same basic principle as per tutoring, except using small groups of learners instead of pairs. Like peer tutoring, this creates opportunities for constructive and collaborative social interactions and communications through real dialogue, which in turn leads to positive learning interaction and mutual understanding (Allison and Rehm, 2007: 16). Freebody, Luke, and Gilbert reiterate this, advocating teaching models which have learners asking questions of texts and

each other, instead of the teacher questioning the learners (Freebody, Luke, and Gilbert, 1991: 451). Having students question and answer each other is a technique observed by Adler, as discussed later in this chapter.

Alternative modes of assessment are also effective when working with multilingual classes. Using a variety of methods to assess learners' achievement and progress “enable[s] students to demonstrate their understanding of information in multiple ways while providing them with a variety of opportunities for success” (Allison and Rehm, 2007: 16). Traditional pen-and-paper tests do not take into account the learners' heritage, language, and experiences. Alternative methods of assessment are preferable because “they provide a means for English language learners to demonstrate cognitive understanding without relying heavily on language” (Allison and Rehm, 2007: 16).

Using Inquiry-Based Instruction for Multilingual Groups of Learners

Inquiry-based instruction is a teaching strategy which may also prove beneficial when dealing with multilingual learners or those learning in their second language. There are many possible literacy-improvement programmes which aim to improve the literacy skills of the learners, but too often these programmes, intended for remedial purposes, focus on repetition and drills in order to build the learners' proficiency in spelling, phonics, and reading fluency (Guccione, 2011: 568). The emphasis placed by these reading programmes on de-contextualized literacy skills instead on meaningful literacy practices is perhaps why learners often do not respond as well to these programmes as it is hoped. In the following section, an overview of inquiry-based instruction is provided in order to illustrate how using this technique in the classroom or reading club environment may provide learners with meaningful and enjoyable interactions with literature.

Learners who are affected by poverty, and those who are not fluent English speakers attending an English school, often struggle with reading comprehension because they have a limited background knowledge and English vocabulary. According to Guccione, learners,

particularly those who are not home language English speakers, "benefit from meaning-rich activities that embrace their cultural and linguistic resources, enhance oral language development, and facilitate opportunities to interact with print in meaningful ways" (Guccione, 2011: 568). Inquiry-based learning has also been shown to enhance learners' content knowledge, and improve their comprehension, motivation, and attitudes towards learning. Inquiry-based instruction may be understood as a learner-centred approach to teaching and learning, in which the educator guides learners through group and individual investigations of topics in which the learners are interested.

Learners need to interact with texts in meaningful ways, and also by interacting with each other in meaningful ways—that is, to construct knowledge through co-operative inquiry. This is similar to the results of Allison and Rehm's (2007) study, in which it was found that co-operative learning (peer tutoring and group work) were some of the most effective strategies for aiding multilingual learners. Inquiry-based learning is another effective strategy which can be used to great benefit in the classroom. Guccione observed one teacher's highly successful implementation of inquiry-based learning in his second-grade classroom, which resulted in learners whose home language was not English being able to express themselves articulately, and engaging themselves in complicated texts (2011: 567). Guccione, having observed this teacher and his class for one year, provided the following suggestions for successfully implementing literary practices in an inquiry-based learning environment, based on the literacy practices observed most often over the course of the year.

Guccione discusses the five literacy practices used most frequently by these second-grade learners in order to construct meaning from expository text. These five practices are:

- Viewing to assist in the construction of meaning
- Using the prompts 'I wonder…' and 'I learned' to encourage learners to read for a purpose
- Interaction between learners in relation to each other's work, ideas, and opinions

- Using the prompt 'I think' to encourage learners' use of their schema or prior knowledge
- Making connections between a text and oneself, a text and another text, or a text and the environment or society

(Guccione, 2011: 569)

These literacy practices were very much a part of classroom practice, as the learners were familiar with them and used them to interact with each other within the classroom community. These same literacy practices were encouraged in the Winterson reading club: Learners were encouraged to ask each other questions, and to share insights regarding books and stories with each other and the group as a whole, and when reading stories together, learners examined the illustrations first and mentioned what they thought the story would be about. Importantly, all five of these literacy practices were frequently modelled by the teacher Brian, who would ask learners to 'notice what he is doing', and also demonstrate his use of the literacy practices through what Guccione terms a 'think-aloud' – talking the learners through his thought processes and influences as he made a choice or came to a conclusion (Guccione, 2011: 570). For example, the teacher would 'model' choosing a book to read, using a think-aloud to show the class how his personal interests guide his decision of which book to read. A similar technique was used in the reading club, in order to show learners how to choose books for free reading, or how to use a book's contents page and index to find specific information.

The advanced abilities of Brian's class to use texts to construct meaning from literary texts is a testament to the effectiveness of these five inquiry-based literacy practices frequently used in his classroom. As explained in the analysis, the reading club learners were initially hesitant to share ideas, but soon grew in confidence. A study by McGinnis (2007) attests to the important role inquiry-based literacy activities can play in developing learners' confidence in the classroom environment when using what may be their second language. McGinnis observed how a group of second-language English learners worked together to

create informative posters about a topic of their choice. The study was situated in a dilapidated school in an urban area of the North-Eastern United States. The participating learners ranged from Grade Six to Eight, and were children of migratory agricultural workers, mostly Asian, but some were Mexican, Somalian, or Albanian. McGinnis points out that in multilingual English classes, the focus of the curriculum is primarily on the acquisition of the language and the development of learners' abilities to understand meanings and textual references that are based on the dominant culture without acknowledging the social and cultural basis of these textual practices (McGinnis, 2007: 570). The typical curriculum for English as an additional language fails to recognise literacy as something which is socially constructed. According to McGinnis, “school literacy practices solidify cultural boundaries because they do not often reflect or respond to the many ways in which youth use reading, writing, and language” (McGinnis, 2007: 570). However, McGinnis's research suggests that by incorporating inquiry-based projects (that is, projects which are based on the interests of the learners) into the curriculum will “open up the monolingual and monocultural nature of [the] curriculum by drawing on the multilingual and multi-modal nature of the students' literacy and language practices” (McGinnis, 2007: 571), as each student's project comes to represent his or her unique multilingual, multicultural, multi-modal nature of their social world. Similarly, Freebody, Luke, and Gilbert claim that reading and literature is how teachers can most effectively make explicit the social and intertextual character of everyday oral and written language, (1991: 454).

The benefit of these projects stems from the way in which it provides the learners with choices. In most schools, traditional written forms of expression (reading and writing) are favoured, but, as McGinnis says, “language...is only one of many avenues through which messages are conveyed, meaning making is made, and representations are presented” (McGinnis, 2007: 572). Multi-modal tasks or texts, which combine various modes and forms of representation and meaning, provide learners with more varied ways of expressing themselves, their knowledge, and their understanding of the work. For example, one of the groups observed by McGinnis chose to do their project on the *Dragonball Z* franchise, for which they referred to *Dragonball Z* comic books, movies, video games, and internet sites,

creating a multi-modal project which reflects the multitude of ways in which *Dragonball Z* features in their lives.

McGinnis suggests that in order to create a caring a supportive environment, teachers should be sure to value all learners' experiences with language and culture. By making space in the classroom and curriculum for learners' language and literacy practices, by creating space for their own voices to be heard, a culturally sensitive community of learning can be created (McGinnis, 2007: 572). Like Allison and Rehm and Guccione, McGinnis also points out the value of learners working in collaborative groups, which she allows them to form themselves. In the reading club, learners were always allowed to choose their own groups, in order to make them feel more comfortable when sharing ideas, and to enable second-language English speakers to discuss with their peers in their home language. According to McGinnis, allowing the groups to communicate in their own languages as they shared their ideas for their projects created a space for learners to communicate in a deeper and more advanced way than if they had been forced to conduct their discussion in an unfamiliar language such as English (McGinnis, 2007: 573).

One aspect of McGinnis's research which is of particular interest to this study, because of the lack of resources at Winterson Primary, is how her learners managed to complete their projects using only the basic resources. Guccione's study of the teacher Brian and his class showed what can be accomplished in a well-resourced classroom, with a wide variety of resources and an extensive supply of books for the learners to consult. McGinnis's migrant education programme took place under vastly different circumstances, where resources such were scarce. There were hardly any resources in English or the children's home languages, and the children did not have access to a variety of resources, such as the Internet, at home. However, the lack of resources was ultimately beneficial to the learners, as they had to exercise creativity in seeking their information, instead of relying on traditional research tools such as Internet or reference books.

Like the learners in Guccione's study who drew on their schema to express their reasoning using the phrase “I think...”, McGinnis's learners relied on what they already knew about

their topic (such as the group who used what they had learned from watching a film to write about the superheroes *X-Men,* or the group of girls who did their project on Vietnamese fruits, relying on their own cultural experiences). They also used the resources readily available to them, such as cartoons, comic books, and trading cards already in their possession, while some questioned older members of their community (McGinnis, 2007: 574), thus increasing their knowledge and appreciation of their own cultures. As the Winterson learners also came from under-resourced homes and classrooms, their growing realisation that their own experiences and ideas are a wealth of information gave them the confidence to invent their own stories. McGinnis sums up the benefits of this process by saying,

> Through this inquiry, they interacted around multiple genres and modes. In constructing their knowledge they used technologies, movies, magazines, and other sources they considered to be most relevant to their task. The students were learning language by using language the way they would naturally in their own lives...in addition, the students' own knowledge and the members of their communities became valuable resources during their investigations
> (McGinnis, 2007: 574).

Once the learners had collected their information, they discussed their project in their home languages, and put their knowledge together in the form of posters, combining texts with their own words, as well as pictures, and drawings. These texts that the learners created many of them inspired by literature the learners themselves were interested in, were texts that expressed an intended meaning, and most importantly, were socially, culturally, historically, and globally situated (McGinnis, 2007: 576).

To conclude, McGinnis stresses the importance of creating classrooms which are supportive of learners' multilingual and multi-modal literacy practices. Forcing learners to work only in English limits their expression of their knowledge to one mode of language only, silencing their voices and affording their teacher only a limited view of their abilities (McGinnis, 2007: 574). By incorporating learners' own social and cultural literacy practices into the curriculum, they are able to connect more easily to the language, and thus live up to their abilities and talents. By allowing learners to incorporate their own interests into

their school work, such as by using inquiry-based projects, the divide—or, as Cleghorn and Rollnick refer to it, the border—between the sociocultural aspects of learners' home lives and those of school can be bridged, making the cultural shift between one language and another between one culture and another, easier to cope with for the learners.

Research has also been done locally on the effectiveness of inquiry-based instruction. For example, Adler (1997) observed a Standard 6 (Grade 8) Mathematics teacher at a Johannesburg school putting inquiry-based instruction into practice in her classroom on a daily basis, by using a predominantly participatory-inquiry approach in her daily lessons. This teacher's lessons were characterised by frequent questioning of the learners, asking them to explain why or how they know something, and by fostering pupil-pupil interaction in which pupils are expected to verbally explain their thinking to each other (Adler, 1997: 10), which are similar techniques used by the teacher observed in Guccione's study. Similarly, while McGinnis advocates inquiry-based instruction as a means to encourage and facilitate learners' deeper interaction with the curriculum and thus increase each learner's access to the available body of knowledge, Adler lists the two primary goals of such instruction to be, firstly, to move away from the authoritative and teacher-centred approach to education, and secondly to improve socially unequal distribution to access and success rates (Adler, 1997: 2). The learners observed in Adler's study were mostly black South African, came from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds, and were not English Home Language speakers, although their learning took place in English (Adler, 1997: 9). By being asked to verbalise their Mathematical thinking to each other in pairs and later the class, these learners are encouraged to deepen their understanding of the mathematical concepts in question as well as developing their abilities to communicate in the LoLT. This practice is far preferable to the more traditional approach to teaching Mathematics, whereby the teacher provides most of the explanations and the learners are simply expected to provide answers, in the typical 'initiation-response-feedback' model of instruction (Adler, 1997: 10). These studies mentioned above demonstrate the importance of encouraging learners to interact critically with texts and with each other, such as when discussing stories, in order to increase engagement with the text and reader comprehension.

4.6 CONCLUSION

A literature review of existing knowledge in the field of reading for enjoyment and the positive effects of reading on children's literacy abilities was presented, in which several local and international studies in these fields and their findings were discussed. The issue of using literacy to aid community-building was also discussed, as were strategies for helping learners to bridge the language gap at school when learning in a language that is not their home language. The following chapter presents the method of research used for this study.

CHAPTER FIVE:

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents an overview of the research procedure that was followed for this study. The design of the research is outlined, and the research site and participants are described. The method of data collection and the type of data are described, and a brief explanation of ethnographic research is provided. The method of data collection is briefly explained, as well as the analysis of the data. Finally, the limitations of this study are discussed, as well as the ethical considerations that are relevant to this study.

Researcher's Positionality Statement

This statement serves to offer suggestions of how my background has influenced my perceptions of education and literacy, as well as how these perceptions have influenced my teaching and my attitude to literacy. Books and reading have always been a central part of my life. Similar to how Harper Lee described herself in her letter to Oprah (referred to in Chapter One), I cannot remember having to learn to read, and I do not remember anyone teaching me to read. My parents loved reading and so books were ubiquitous in my early years—I remember full bookshelves in my bedroom, books as birthday presents, and lots of bedtime stories. It seems that I learned to read by following the printed text closely when my parents read to me and putting the spoken words and printed ones together. Eventually, I started reading on my own. My parents often relate the anecdote of how they discovered I was able to read independently at age four: According to them, one of my favourite pastimes was sitting on the sofa paging through my father's collection of *National Geographic* magazines, and one of my favourite issues featured a long article about whales. My parents thought that I was just looking at the photographs, until one day when I stated some fact about whales which my father recognised as having come straight from the *National Geographic*.

Thus, when I began my formal schooling career at Herbert Hurd Primary School (an 'ex-Model C' school, with mostly White learners, although there was a small percentage of Indian, Asian, Coloured and Black children by the time I started there in 1994) I was allowed to read *Black Beauty* or books by C.S. Lewis while the other children were grouped on the mat reading monosyllables. I read voraciously, almost anything that I could lay my hands on, and favourite books were read not only once but many times. *Anne of Green Gables* is a book which I remember reading for the first time in Sub A, and is still one that I enjoy reading today. In Sub B (Grade 2) it seems my teacher was not as impressed with me as others had been; initially, my parents were chided for 'forcing' me to learn to read so soon, and the teacher even summoned my parents to school to express her displeasure at how I had pointed out that she had spelled 'Tyrannosaurus Rex' incorrectly. I was 'disrespectful'

and 'showing off'. To this day, while teaching, I have never reprimanded learners for questioning me or for pointing out an error I may have made. In fact, I thank them for letting me know and praise them for being so observant. I remember the confusion and injustice I felt when I found out that I should not have corrected the teacher although she was wrong, and do not want to inflict such feelings on any child that I teach.

I progressed easily through primary school, revelling in anything literacy-related. I loved writing as well as reading, and would turn any short writing assignment into a novella of several pages long, complete with illustrations. I loved my high school years as well, particularly the English syllabus, as I was thrilled to be studying Shakespeare and famous poets. I attended Collegiate Girls' High School, where I had friends who also enjoyed reading, and we often lent and recommended books to each other. Our standard meeting place at second break was the well-stocked school library. I admired my Grade 10 to 12 English teacher, and she gave me so much encouragement in my work, particularly in creative writing. Ultimately, it was this teacher who inspired me to pursue my studies in English after Matric, and to eventually become a teacher.

I did not originally plan to become a teacher. I knew I loved literature and wanted to study English, but did not put much thought into a career path until I had completed both my BA General degree and my Honours degree in English, and decided to do a one-year PGCE (Post-Graduate Certificate in Education). I completed my practical training at my old high school, Collegiate Girls' High, where I felt completely in my element, as I taught Shakespeare, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Dylan Thomas to classes of enthusiastic and interested girls who participated eagerly in lessons and asked thoughtful questions. However, I was thrown out of my comfort zone after graduating, when I was placed (as part of the Department of Education's Funza Lushaka bursary scheme) at Winterson Primary School. After the high standards and well-resourced environment of Collegiate, Winterson Primary, with its lack of facilities and low levels of achievement came as shock to me.

In the beginning of my teaching career, I felt that perhaps I was not a very good English teacher, because all of what I am expected to teach my learners came so easily and so naturally to me. I often felt frustrated at having to teach them how to write descriptively, use commas, or spell basic words, because I never struggled with such things even when I was much younger than them, and could not understand why they would find it difficult. However, as my understanding of my learners' sociocultural backgrounds increased, I began to comprehend how vastly different their experience with literacy had been compared to mine, and just how much this had influenced their literacy abilities. Upon visiting some of the learners' homes for parent consultations, I realised that some of them lived in one-room shacks with no electricity and hardly any furniture, let alone books. I struggled to decipher handwritten notes from parents in which almost every word was spelled incorrectly and battled through consultations with parents of 'English' learners who spoke no English themselves. Naively, I asked my class how many of them had read the *Harry Potter* books, and was met with blank stares. While teaching Creative Arts I found out that they did not understand what fairy tales were. I asked my Grade 7s to write a descriptive paragraph about an imaginary creature, and discovered that they did not know the meaning of 'descriptive', 'paragraph', 'imaginary' or 'creature'. After these and any more unpleasant epiphanies, I began to understand just how deprived these children's lives were of meaningful experiences with books and reading, and how this had negatively impacted on their abilities to perform classroom literacy tasks.

Having made this realisation, I was able to be more patient in my teaching, and strove to find teaching methods which would make school-related literacy more accessible for my learners—for example, my fluency in Afrikaans increased dramatically as I made a concerted effort to employ code-switching in my English classes, and I encourage them to use their favourite television programmes and celebrities as inspiration for their writing and orals. I started a Spelling Bee competition for Grade 7 to encourage the learners to improve their spelling, and I compiled a quarterly school newsletter featuring short articles and pieces of writing done by learners across the school. After attending a Nal'ibali workshop,

I was inspired to start the reading club in order to provide learners with the opportunity to experience reading for pleasure and have access to suitable reading material. My experience at Winterson Primary has been so valuable to me, both as a person and as a teacher. I learned how fortunate I was to have supportive, educated, and interested parents who valued books and education, and just how much my childhood experiences with books helped to prepare me for literacy tasks from Sub A to university. As a teacher, I learned how important meaningful social experiences with literacy are in a child's literacy development, and how crucial it is that I recognise this in my teaching. My motivation for doing this research on the reading club at Winterson Primary is to determine to what extent the reading club is having a positive impact on the literacy development of my learners, and to see how what I am currently doing can be improved upon in order to make even more of a difference in the learners' perceptions of reading and their literacy capabilities. Of course, I am aware that my personal investment in the reading club, coupled with my subjective favourable experience with literature in my own life, could present an element of bias to this research and therefore act as limitations of the study.

Research Questions

For the purpose of understanding the methodology, the research questions for this study are restated as follows:

The primary research question was: How do reading clubs contribute to the holistic development of learners?

The related sub-questions were:

- How does the reading club itself, its principles, its way of operating, and its values, contribute to the development of a stronger community identity amongst the learners, encouraging appreciation of both their own and others' culture?
- How can reading for enjoyment contribute to the development of learners' literacy

skills?

Research Design

In this study, qualitative research methods were used. According to Struwig and Stead (2001), qualitative research generally attempts to:

- Understand the relevant issues from the viewpoints of the participants, although the researcher and the participants are involved in interpreting the data;
- Describe the social setting of the participants so that the data gathered is not isolated from the participants' contexts;
- Understand the participants' thoughts, feelings and behaviours, meaning that data is therefore not presented in a static, reductionist, de-contextualised manner;
- Conduct research in a relatively unstructured manner.

(Struwig and Stead, 2001: 56).

This description of what constitutes qualitative research has particular relevance to this study, as this study aimed to focus on the aspects of research mentioned above, namely, understanding the participants' behaviour from their own perspective and situating it within their social and academic context. This research also falls into the category of qualitative because it was descriptive in nature, and because no attempt to evaluate the learners or measure any empirical improvement or decline in their abilities through testing or recording was made. By reflecting on the reading club sessions and the learners' behaviour as it was observed during these sessions, particular patterns of cultural experience were witnessed. These patterns were then described so as to collate a meaningful description of both the personal and cultural experience from the participants' framing point of view (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011).

The learners' engagement with reading club activities and each other was observed, and any

particular behavioural patterns which suggested development of their literacy skills and appreciation of books were noted during the reading club sessions, and later rewritten into field notes, forming the initial observations into a descriptive and personal narrative from the researcher's point of view. The researcher's reflexive narrative was then analysed for evidence of repetitions or changes in learners' behaviour, in order to form a subjective yet still analytical interpretation.

5.2 ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

Defining the Approach

This study was conducted primarily on an ethnographic basis, using narrative analysis. Ethnography may be defined as "an approach to social research based on the first-hand experience of social action within a discrete location, in which the objective is to collect data which will convey the subject reality of the lived experience of those who inhabit that location" (Pole and Morrison, 2003: 16). This research attempted to conform as much as possible to a specific type of ethnography known as auto-ethnography. Auto-ethnography is defined and explained by Ellis, Adams and Bochner as

> an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze [graphy] personal experience [auto] in order to understand cultural experience [ethno]...As a method, auto-ethnography combines characteristics of autobiography and ethnography. When writing an autobiography, an author retroactively and selectively writes about past experiences. Usually, the author does not live through these experiences solely to make them part of a published document; rather, these experiences are assembled using hindsight...When researchers do auto-ethnography, they retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity.
>
> (Ellis et al, 2011).

Therefore, my participation in the reading club as a facilitator, as well as my role as the researcher, should not be seen as a drawback but rather as an essential component of

reflexive practice, as it provides the 'personal experience' necessary for autoethnography. It is ultimately impossible to do auto-ethnography and remain neutral and detached from the cultural experience which you are observing. By becoming part of the culture of the reading club by acting as a facilitator, and by observing the learners' behaviour as the reading club progresses, I will be better placed to observe and analyse any changes in learners' cultural identities that occur. It is also physiologically and psychologically impossible to observe everything that is going on in the classroom, as classroom observation can never result in exhaustive reportage (McNamara, 1980: 114), and so what it noticed and recorded tends to be a subjective and selective account of what was observed. However, the subjectivity of this analysis is an essential aspect of auto-ethnography, as this particular research method embraces the retrospective nature of auto-ethnography, which acknowledges that, like an autobiography, it is impossible to include every detail of an experience.

The ethnographic observation was focused primarily on what was observed during the weekly reading club sessions held at the school, and the primary data took the form of a descriptive narrative which was then analysed and linked to the literature review in order to identify any evidence of the development of improved literacy skills, as well as enhanced personal and social development, amongst the participating learners. In addition, it was of paramount importance to record my observations, as I have been trying to enhance and refine my facilitation process, due to the increasing constraints of the context and the learners' circumstances. This will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Reflexivity and the Researcher as Participant-Observer

Van Maanen refers to ethnography itself as 'participant observation', explaining that it allows a researcher “to use the culture of the setting (the socially acquired and shared knowledge available to the participants or members of the setting) to account for the observed patterns of human activity” (2002: 102).

Ethnography is ultimately a reflexive process. A significant aspect of ethnography is the

researcher's participation in the setting or event being observed, which implies that the researcher's written account includes autobiographical elements, in which researchers are the main research instrument (Pole and Morrison, 2003: 20). Pole and Morrison quote Altheide and Johnson's (1998) claim that the task of ethnography in educational settings is to engage in reflexivity in order to substantiate interpretations and findings with a reflexive account of themselves and the processes of their research. Salzman defines reflexivity as "the constant awareness, assessment, and reassessment by the researcher of the researcher's own contribution /influence/shaping of intersubjective research and the consequent research findings" (Salzman, 2002: 806).

This reflexivity implies that it is impossible for ethnographers to achieve an entirely objective position in relation to their research because researchers are part of the social and educational worlds they are studying (Pole and Morrison, 2003: 103). Thus, the data obtained in this study often contains commentary on the researcher's own behaviour, perceptions, and assumptions, in order to take into account the researcher's position as both facilitator and researcher. The reading club has already been in operation at the school since before this research began. This year however, I decided to self-reflect on my role as facilitator and what I put into practice during the reading club, in order to ascertain the effectiveness of the activities and practices I employ. This was done with the intention of improving my practice and thus increasing the effectiveness of the reading club in the future. Therefore, while comments on the subjects (the participating learners) form the bulk of the observational data, they are only one of the elements on which I will be reflecting.

Research Site and Participants

This study was conducted at Winterson Primary School, which is situated in Bethelsdorp Extension 31, Port Elizabeth, in the Eastern Cape. This study focused particularly on the reading club which met once a week after school for one and a half to two hours per session. The learners who attended these sessions were in Grades Five to Seven at the school, and

they attended the reading club voluntarily. The reading club sessions were facilitated by the researcher, currently employed as a teacher at the school. The reading club was run according to the principles of the Nal'ibali campaign. These principles as advocated by Nal'ibali ensured that learners were never forced to attend sessions or participate in any activities against their will, and that the development of a secure and nurturing environment was encouraged at all times.

The classroom in which the sessions took place is the classroom in which the researcher teaches on a daily basis. In an attempt to create what the Nal'ibali campaign refers to as a 'print-rich environment', the classroom was recently painted, and the walls and noticeboards were decorated with various posters and wall charts, including a birthday calendar, Mathematics wall charts (times tables, fractions, 3D and 2D shapes), English wall charts (Communication, Parts of Speech, Punctuation, Using the Library, How Books are Made), posters reminding learners of school and classroom rules ("Rule #1: Have Good Manners"), a poster of South Africa's official languages, subject timetables, and some of the Grade Seven learners' English work (poems, essays, and poster designs). There were three rows of eight two-seater wooden school desks, facing the blackboard and teacher's table and a cupboard in the corner of the classroom where the reading club's small collection of books was kept.

The participants of this study were learners at Winterson Primary School who voluntarily attended the reading club sessions held once a week after school. Because the reading club sessions were not compulsory, a variety of learners attended each week, meaning that exact statistics regarding the participants cannot be provided. The participants were predominantly in Grade Six and Grade Seven, although there was also a small number of Grade Five learners in attendance. The learners who attended the reading club were mostly girls, and average attendance per session was approximately 25 learners. Throughout the observation period, there were never more than three boys in attendance at one session. In the latter half of the observation period there was only one boy who attended reading club regularly. The learners were mostly Afrikaans-speaking; even those that were in the English

Home Language classes spoke Afrikaans to each other. There was a small number of isiXhosa-speaking learners who also attended.

Data Collection Procedure

The primary data used in this study was the researcher's written observations of the reading club sessions. The secondary data used for this study came from various written sources, including books, articles, and case studies, from South Africa and elsewhere. Prior studies in the field of 'reading for enjoyment' were examined and compared in order to see what methods have proven successful when introduced to real-life groups of learners, either in classrooms or in similar reading club groups, in particular those studies which occurred in a context similar to that of this study.

With regards to the primary data, van Maanen (1988) explains that the researcher's recordings of concepts arising from the observed talk and action of participants in the observed scene are what primarily make up the field data of an ethnographic study (cited in Pole and Morrison, 2002: 106). The data can also be classed as non-overt because it was gathered through observation and not by the researcher personally asking the participants questions (Struwig and Stead, 2001: 40).

A significant aspect of data collection when doing ethnography is Geertz's notion of 'thick description'. According to Geertz, the goal of ethnography and anthropology is to describe and explain cultures using 'thick description' as opposed to 'thin description'. Thin description may be defined as a factual account without any interpretation, which Geertz sees as an insufficient and misleading portrayal of a culture. Thick description is far preferable, as it specifies many details, conceptual structures, and meanings. According to Geertz, thick description is composed of commentary and interpretations as well as facts, and it is this interpretation which is so significant to ethnography: “A good interpretation of anything—a poem, a person, a history, an institution, a society—takes us into the heart of that of which it is the interpretation” (Geertz, 1973: 317). Thus, it is important that in this

study, thick description is used in order to provide a detailed analysis and interpretation of what is observed, instead of merely providing a factual report-back.

During the reading club sessions, the participating learners were observed, but they were not questioned directly for their opinions. While basing this study purely on data obtained through observation may suggest a narrow data set lacking in evidence, the decision was taken at the beginning of the research process not to approach the learners directly for data, for instance, by asking them to complete surveys or participate in interviews. Before settling on the observational method of data collection, the researcher did ask learners to complete a short multiple-choice questionnaire containing questions such as:

- Do you enjoy reading?
- Do you have books in your home for you to read? How many?
- How often do you read for pleasure in your free time?
- Do you go to the library to get books to read for fun or to research your projects?
- Do you remember having a family member read or tell stories to you (now or when you were younger)?

However, the results of this informal questionnaire demonstrated that using methods such as interviews, surveys or questionnaires in order to obtain data from the learners for this research would result in inaccurate data, as the learners themselves are unreliable sources. This is due to the learners' vulnerability and lack of conviction in their own opinions. They tend to provide the response that they think is expected of them; they want to give the 'right' answer, not necessarily the truthful answer. Although learners were assured that their responses would be anonymous and that the researcher wanted them to be honest, the majority of the learners chose the answers that they seemed to think were the 'right' ones. For example, the informal questionnaire resulted in almost all of the learners selecting 'every day' as their answer to the question 'How often do you read for pleasure in your free time?' while the researcher's prior knowledge of each learner's reading ability and past

consultations with learners' parents suggested that this was not in fact the case.

Thus, the decision was made to use only the facilitator's observations as the primary source of data. The primary data was collected using the observational method in order to create a narrative in the form of field notes. When the observation method of data collection is used, data are collected by recognising and recording people's behaviour. According to Struwig and Stead (2001: 96) the advantage of observation is not having to rely on the willingness and ability of participants to report data accurately and honestly. However, the observational method has the following limitations:

- It is difficult to observe participants' attitudes, motivating factors, and intentions.
- The knowledge that they are being observed can lead to people modifying their behaviour.
- Observation can prove to be time consuming.
- Observation can be perceived by some as invasion of privacy. Special care should be taken not to infringe of individuals' right to personal privacy.

(Struwig and Stead, 2001: 96)

All of this, in summary, contributed the aim of reflecting critically on the facilitation process as carried out by myself from year to year. With regard to the last point, it was ensured that none of the participants' personal details and identifications were revealed. Where necessary, false names were used in order to protect the learners' privacy. Learners were reminded that all participation in the reading club and thus in this study was purely voluntary. The school's privacy was also ensured by not using the school's real name.

The observation portion of this study took place over five months (approximately two school terms), observing the reading club session once a week. Data was collected through the researcher acting as a participant-observer, by serving as the facilitator of the reading club sessions, and observing what happened during the sessions, learners' preferences for certain activities, the interaction between learners during the session, and any visible improvement

or development in learners' literacy competencies. Observation was used during the reading club sessions as a means of gathering data in the form of a journal, by noting in writing the learners' behaviour and responses to the reading club activities and each other. Drafts of field notes were recorded during or immediately after each reading club session, and were written out in full in the evening following the reading club session in order to create a descriptive narrative account of each week's session. It is this narrative that formed the majority of the data. This narrative is presented in full in the following chapter.

For the purposes of this study, the following were the focus of the observation:

- Any discernible improvement in the group's quality of performance while performing literacy-related tasks
- Any discernible improvement in the group's abilities to perform literacy-related tasks
- The group's response to the various activities they participate in (games, songs, storytelling, etc.)
- Any evidence of the development of a multilingual community within the group
- Any evidence of enhanced personal development, such as self-confidence, leadership, and critical thinking.

Importantly, some aspects of the researcher's personal experiences and opinions as a facilitator of the reading club were also noted. The observation was unstructured, and disguised, as the learners were accustomed to the researcher facilitating the reading club sessions and did not think it unusual. Observations were recorded by subtle note-taking during the sessions, and were expanded into notes immediately after the session, which did not alert learners to the fact that they were being observed and thus ensured that they behaved in their 'natural manner'. This observation can also be classed as 'natural' instead of contrived, because the sessions were observed in their usual setting, and as they took place. In accordance with Struwig and Stead, the researcher-as- observer made an attempt

to look for “larger trends or patterns of behaviour pertinent to the study rather than looking for minute aspects of behaviour, as is often the case with the quantitative researcher. The observer [was] not bound by predetermined measuring instruments but search[ed] for concepts and categories as they unfold[ed] in the setting” (2001: 100).

Because of the emphasis placed on the social context of literacy events by the theories underpinning this study, it was important that the observation was not limited to learners' literacy development only in terms of the development of their reading and writing skills, but also paid attention to the social happenings of the reading club as well, such as the learners' interactions with each other and with the facilitator, their preferences and tendencies, what language they choose to speak in, and their responses to texts and activities. All of these responses and behaviours were carefully observed and noted.

In order to avoid misinterpretation due to the passing of time, the field notes collected through observation of reading club sessions were translated into a narrative as soon as possible after each session, on the day of the session. However, as learners' development over the observation period is of significance, the data as a whole was analysed after the completion of the observation period in order to assess learners' general development in various fields over the course of the five months' observation. It is difficult to define exactly how ethnographic data should be analysed; Pole and Morrison offer a definition of analysis as “the researcher's equivalent of alchemy—the elusive process by which you hope you can turn your raw data into nuggets of pure gold. And like alchemy, such magic calls for science and art in equal measures” (2003: 73). Pole and Morrison go on to point out that the technical challenge of analysing ethnographic data is the sheer volume of data, mostly textual, that is collected. The epistemological challenge is the range of possible approaches to representing meanings and interpretations (2003: 73). Therefore, the analysis of data collected through ethnographic observation may appear disordered; however, Pole and Morrison stress that a non-linear approach to analysis does not mean it is non-systematic (Pole and Morrison, 2003: 82).

Fundamentally, however, the key task of an ethnographic researcher is to describe and

explain that which has been observed in the field (Pole and Morrison, 2003: 89). The narrative based on what was observed during the reading club sessions, and serves to explain what was observed in the field, and appears in full as an appendix. In Chapter Six, this description is analysed in order to provide an explanation of what was observed. These explanations of the deeper significance of what is being described were derived from the researcher's own conclusions and interpretations of what was observed and recorded. In particular, similar or different patterns in the data, such as differences or similarities in the learners' engagement with a particular activity on different dates were looked for, as well as patterns or connections within the data, particularly those that suggested improvements in learners' competence in a variety of aspects. Thus, through the identification of noticeable patterns, differences, and similarities in learners' behaviour, thematic issues were identified which formed the basis of this analysis. For example, learners' general attitude and handling of books at the beginning of the observation period were compared to how they handled and interacted with books at the end of the period in order to determine if there had been any change.

The findings regarding the value of the various reading club activities and the learners' development over the course of the observation period were linked to the review of theoretical framework and prior studies in similar areas. The fact that the literature review was drafted prior to starting the observation of the reading club session was beneficial in that guidelines as to the potential themes and patterns that could prove significant were established. Any benefits of the reading club which were noticed in the participants of this study were noted and compared to the findings of previous studies discussed in the literature review in order to perform a comparative study between what other researchers have found to be effective in using reading for enjoyment to improve literacy, and what was observed first-hand during the observation of the reading club. Any similar evidence of enhanced literacy, personal, and social development demonstrated by the participants under similar conditions to the participants of prior studies was taken as evidence that the learners experienced holistic development due to their participation in the reading-for-enjoyment programme.

5.3 CONCLUSION

This chapter has restated the research questions, and provided a description of the research design, as well as a description of the site where the research was conducted, and a description of the participants. This chapter also described the type of data collection, and provided a brief explanation of ethnographic research. It also provided an explanation of the method of data collection and how the data was analysed. The following chapter provides the analysis of the data. The primary data of this study, in the form of the descriptive narrative which was compiled in order to describe what was observed during the reading club sessions at Winterson Primary, appears as an appendix.

CHAPTER SIX:

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The following chapter presents a discussion of the narrative description of what was observed during the reading club sessions over the observation period in order to ascertain the extent to which the reading club programme was successful in contributing to learners' holistic development. This chapter will provide a detailed, extensive summary of reflections on all aspects of the learning situation, i.e. the context of the reading club, the process, and possible variables and impacts.

As already mentioned, the reading club project has been in operation at the school for several years, albeit on a smaller scale. Having completed the reflective narrative process, I have gained insights into my own practice and how to improve on it, should I facilitate the reading club in the future. Reflective narrative was chosen as the primary data collection method for this study instead of more traditional participant-centred methods such as interviews, focus groups, or questionnaires. Due to the learners' eagerness to provide the

answer that they think is expected of them, not necessarily the honest answer, it was expected that data obtained through such methods might be inaccurate. Reflection on an autobiographic narrative was thus selected as a valid discourse for the analysis of the data. Pavlenko asserts the validity and importance of autobiographic narrative by explaining that narrative is the central means by which people impose meaning on their lives and their experiences, making it a legitimate means of research (2007: 164, 168).

During each weekly reading club session which was observed, rough notes were made which were rewritten into an auto-ethnographic narrative later that same day. At the end of the observation period, consisting of twelve observed reading club sessions, the auto-ethnographic reflective narrative was analysed. Analysis involved the identification of patterns and changes in learners' competencies, attitudes, and behaviour, which suggested that the reading club sessions had brought about changes in the learners' development in two main spheres—literacy, and personal and social development. The full narrative description of the reading club sessions as observed by the researcher appears as an appendix.

The following were identified as areas in which learners demonstrated evidence of accelerated literacy development:

- Improved listening skills
- Enhanced appreciation of books and experience in handling books
- Enhanced competence in choosing books
- Enhanced comprehension and understanding of narrative structures and sequencing
- Enhanced narrative recall abilities
- Improved confidence in reading texts
- Enhanced ability to dramatize stories and construct own narratives
- Development in confidence and competence in writing

- Widened exposure to culturally diverse literature
- Improved motivation to attempt mother-tongue reading
- Increased competence in reading and motivation to read
- Improved ability to infer meaning from pictures

The following were identified as areas in which learners demonstrated evidence of growth in personal and social development:

- Enhanced recognition of reading as a social activity
- Enhanced self-esteem and self-confidence
- Enhanced group cooperation and collaboration
- Growth of confidence in voicing opinions and making informed decisions
- Increased awareness of and sensitivity to diversity, otherness, and different competence levels
- Development and internalisation of a reading culture
- Benefiting from participation in an extramural activity

The following discussion of the results refers to the narrative compiled from the original field notes, presented in the previous chapter, and presents links between what was observed over the course of the observation period and similar observations made by prior researchers. The prior studies which are referred to here took place both in South Africa and internationally, and focused on groups of learners from similar socio-economic conditions, albeit generally from younger age groups than is the focus of this study.

The research questions for this study are repeated here:

The primary research question was: How do reading clubs contribute to the holistic development of learners?

The related sub-questions were:

- How does the reading club itself, its principles, its way of operating, and its values, contribute to the development of a stronger community identity amongst the learners, encouraging appreciation of both their own and others' culture?
- How can reading for enjoyment contribute to the development of learners' literacy skills?

6.2 EVIDENCE OF LEARNERS' ENHANCED LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

Improved Listening Skills

In the first reading club session, it seemed as though many of the learners had not had much experience with literacy practices such as listening to a story or reading together. For example, the reflective narrative states that when the facilitator announced that a story would be read to them,

> the learners seemed genuinely excited at the prospect and it took a while before they were all sitting in their desks. [The facilitator] had to encourage them to move closer to [her] and to gather round so that they would be able to hear and see properly.

This shows that the learners were so excited at hearing a story that it took a long time for them to assemble around the facilitator and quieten down enough for the story to be read to them. Even the Grade Seven learners were very excited, almost over-excited, at the prospect of listening to a story, as though it were a real novelty for them, and interestingly, they did not seem to mind that the book was “a typical picture book, with only a sentence or two on each page, the text aimed more likely at Foundation Phase learners”. Hearing a story was such an unusual experience for these learners that they did not take offence to being read what other Grade 6 and 7 learners might think of as a 'babyish' story. Nor did the learners

conceal their enjoyment of the story: While showing the learners the accompanying illustrations, the facilitator heard

> gasps and exclamations of admiration at a particularly beautiful scene of weaver birds flying towards a tree, and the entire class laughed openly at the illustration of Lion stuck in a hollow tree stump with only his head and tail sticking out at either end...They applauded after the reading.

The learners' reaction to the story—their vocalised expressions of admiration and enjoyment, and their applause at the end of the story—suggests that although they were not used to hearing stories, they were aware that storytelling or -reading is a performance put on for an audience to enjoy and appreciate. This indicates an inherent awareness of social conventions associated with literacy events such as listening to a story, which Heath describes as "follow[ing] socially established rules for verbalizing what they know from and about the written material" (Heath, 1982: 50).

By the later sessions in the second term, the learners were more accustomed to story-time, as seen during the seventh session, when it was observed that "[t]he children are well rehearsed at story-time by now—they gathered almost instantly around [the facilitator], waiting expectantly", just as Pretorius and Machet (2008) reported an increase in their subjects' familiarity with story-time procedures after extended exposure to stories. Over a few weeks, the children absorbed the 'socially established rules' for the literacy event that is storytelling. They have learned to move closer to the storyteller, give their full attention, and sit quietly. Although it was previously unfamiliar to them, later they were accustomed to the literacy event that is story-time. They knew what to expect, and they knew what was expected from them in terms of behaviour and involvement. Heath (as mentioned in Chapter Three) would describe this as a change in learners' 'ways of taking', as this socially learned behaviour of how to react to the prospect of a story has been assimilated by the learners from the reading club environment. However, although story-time became familiar to the learners, their enthusiastic appreciation of the stories did not diminish as the weeks progressed. By the seventh session, the learners still responded verbally to the story, as seen with the story of 'The Stolen Smells', where

> learners responded audibly, with *Mmmms* of pleasure, some even closing their eyes, savouring the thought of freshly baked cakes and doughnuts. They got quite involved in the story, making gasps of disbelief when the baker had a man arrested for 'stealing' the smells of his baked goods, and even stronger reactions when the man was unjustly found guilty, and they applauded with glee at the story's happy ending.

Considering that most of the learners were adolescents (Grade Six and Seven learners are generally between the ages of 11 and 13), I was surprised to observe their willingness to participate in what some children of similar ages might consider to be 'childish' or 'babyish' activities, such as making animal noises and listening to fairy tales. Clearly, the joy of immersion into a story was not a novelty that wore worn off in a few weeks but rather left a lasting impact on the learners and their appreciation for books and stories. Story-time to them became a familiar literacy event which has permeated their perceptions of books and reading, just as Pretorius and Mokhwesana report an improvement in their subjects' 'book behaviour', (2009: 63) the term used by the authors to describe a child's ability to choose and handle a book, and understanding of how to behave while reading or listening to a story.

Learners were also exposed to storytelling though different media, such as stories read aloud from books or supplements, stories told orally from memory, stories acted out as simple dramas, and even listening to stories being played on a CD, much like the varied forms of literacy employed in the studies by Donald et al (2003), Morrow (1992), and Elley (2000). Listening to stories on CD seemed particularly exciting to the learners, as the audio versions of the stories made use of different voices, sound effects, and background music to make the stories vivid and engaging. These were well received, as seen in this observation from the fourth session:

> The children seemed engrossed from the moment the storyteller on the CD began. Because most of them were familiar with the story of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, they started joining in with certain phrases which were repeated throughout the story. They enjoyed the different voices put on by the narrator, especially the squeaky voice of the baby bear.

The learners were amused by the voices and sound effects and were able to participate in the story by chiming in with the voices of the characters and saying the lines along with

them. They appreciated that the story was a performance, but they were not simply passive observers. They interacted with the story and almost became part of the story themselves. According to Sailors et al (2007), schools which proved most effective in improving literacy development among their learners were those where learners were actively engaged in storytelling activities, just as the Winterson children were. Lamme (1976) researched which characteristics of a storyteller or -reader are the most influential to children's enjoyment and appreciation of the story. Although this study is not recent, its findings are of relevance, as they are reflected to a significant degree in what was observed during the reading club sessions. After videotaping several teachers reading storybooks to their class and analysing the children's reactions, Lamme concluded that child involvement in the story, through repeating refrains or predicting the outcome, was the most influential factor in children's appreciation of the story (1976: 887 – 88). The third most influential characteristic (after eye contact between the reader and the audience) was vocal expression, and related to it, variety in pitch and volume (1976: 888). Lamme's findings suggest that the learners showed such appreciation for the stories because they were able to participate in the storytelling process, and because the readers of the stories tended to alter their voices and use expression to make the stories more exciting.

Through listening to stories, the learners have learned that books and stories are enjoyable to listen to, especially as a group when they can enjoy the story together. This kind of literacy event was popular in the reading club because the learners were able to participate without themselves being required to read, aloud or otherwise, which helped to increase their enthusiasm for books and stories without putting them at risk of feeling inadequate or humiliated in front of their peers, as they might be if made to read aloud, like in a formal literacy lesson. This finding correlates with Britsch, Martin et al's (2005) conclusion that learners derive the most benefit from literacy programmes and activities which do not duplicate how literacy occurs during the regular school day. This enthusiasm for listening to stories that developed early on in the observation period may be seen as the initial steps in the journey that will hopefully lead to these learners developing a love for reading.

Enhanced Appreciation of Books and Experience in Handling Books

By the later sessions, learners also demonstrated an improved understanding of books as literacy artefacts and sources of pleasure, and were more adept at handling them. Initially, the facilitator was worried that the learners would treat the books roughly, saying: “having seen how carelessly the learners treat their school textbooks, part of me was a little reluctant to 'turn them loose' on these pristine story and picture books for fear they would be damaged”. By the eighth session, however, there was a noticeable improvement, as the learners had become more familiar with handling books. The facilitator observed that the learners were being careful with the books: “a few girls took charge, collecting the books from the other learners and stacking them in neat piles according to size, before bringing them to me to be packed into the cupboard”. The facilitator's remark shows how the learners became more familiar with handling books, turning the pages carefully and being sure to pack them the right way up on the shelves, even sorting the books according to their size. Learners were also able to suggest how books should be treated, “such as not bending covers back or breaking the spine, ensuring one has clean hands, not eating and drinking while reading”. This shows an improvement in what Pretorius and Mokhwesana (2009), who observed significant improvements in their subjects' familiarity with books, refer to as 'book behaviour'. By handling the books with care, learners demonstrated respect for the books, treating them as valued and appreciated artefacts, behaviour which again typifies Heath's research (described in Chapter Three) regarding how learners' attitudes towards books may be influenced by what they see being modelled in their surrounding environment. These learners have gained respect for books and how to handle them from their own observations of the facilitator's treatment of books.

Judging from their response to questions and participation in discussions, the learners also improved their knowledge of book-related vocabulary, such as 'author', 'title', 'cover' and 'illustrations'. After several sessions, they were easily able to identify the title, author, and illustrator of a book when the cover was shown to them, just as Pretorius and Mokhwesana's

subjects rapidly learned about concepts such as covers and page numbers due to their frequent exposure to books and stories. This Learners also developed an understanding of how books are written and created by regular people just like them. The learners also started to understand that stories come from the imagination and are expressions of someone's creativity, yet everyone has the ability to tell a story. An example of this is seen in Session Nine, when the group of Grade 4 girls claim that "they [don't] know how to make up a story". After the facilitator encouraged them by asking questions about the plot and characters, the girls "were surprised and proud of themselves when at the end [the facilitator] said to them, 'There you go girls, that was a perfect story!'" These girls initially doubted their ability to tell a story, but soon realised it was not that difficult, and a few weeks later, the facilitator observed that "this time, there were no groups that said they didn't know what to do". This is similarly to the participatory-inquiry strategy of teaching which Adler (1997) observed in a Mathematics classroom: the learners' confidence in their own abilities increased as they became accustomed to explaining their thinking to their peers. The learners' realisation that they have the ability to tell a story made books more accessible to the learners and less intimidating, as they realised that writing books and stories is something that they are able to do, and in turn encouraged learners to explore their own imaginations through writing and storytelling with their peers.

Enhanced Competence in Choosing Books

Near the end of the observation period, learners seemed adept at choosing books by examining the cover and the blurb, or by paging through the books and reading a few excerpts, as opposed to the start of the sessions, when the facilitator observed that many learners chose books "seemingly at random". Later, they were able to formulate their own opinions about the books they had read and recommend books that they had enjoyed to other learners, showing that they had grown in confidence in their own opinions and were also developing their own personal taste in books. These learners might be said to be developing their own 'reading personality' due to being given the freedom to choose what they wanted

to read, as they learned what they liked and what they disliked about certain genres or types of books. The reflective narrative from the seventh and eighth sessions observe, “some [learners] took longer [to choose a book], flipping through a few of them, before eventually settling on one”, “others spent some time paging through them and picking up a few different [books] before they were satisfied” and the facilitator “saw two Grade Six girls at the book table discussing the different books quite intently and reading extracts from them to see if they were interested in them or not.” By the eighth session, learners were also starting to share their reading experiences with the other learners in the reading club: “At the table where the books were laid out, I heard some learners recommending books they have read to each other”. This is similar to how the learners in Guccione's (2011) study demonstrated their ability to choose books of personal interest to themselves, based on knowledge of their own interests and opinions shared with other learners.

Learners were also influenced by their own past experience of certain books, as well as the recommendations of others, such as when two girls were overheard remarking, “This was a nice book. Let's read this again” and “Chante said this one's nice. Let's read this one”. It is important to note that as learners became more experienced in choosing books for themselves, their motivation to read appeared to increase, just as according to Elley (2000), the learners in the Book Flood reading programmes were more motivated to read because they read relevant and interesting books which they selected themselves. This corresponds with Nal'ibali's principles of allowing children to choose their own books, even if they have already read them several times, because enjoyment and interest lead to an increase in reading motivation. Therefore, the learners' improved competence in making informed decisions and choosing texts which are appealing to them personally, mean that they are inclined to read more as the subject matter or story lines are of personal interest to them.

Enhanced Comprehension, and Understanding of Narrative Structures, and Sequencing

Learners also showed an improvement in their knowledge of narrative sequencing, as seen in their increasing ability to predict or suggest what might happen next in the story. In the first session, learners were observed as being "unwilling to participate" when asked to suggest what might happen next in the *Lazy Lion* story. However, just one week later, learners were voluntarily sharing their prior knowledge of the story and their own ideas with each other as seen during the second session's reading of 'Hansie en Grietjie' ('Hansel and Gretel') when the learners were heard whispering to each other "Hy sal die klippies gebruik om terug huis toe te gaan" ("He's going to use the pebbles to get back home") and "Ek dink daai ou vrou is die heks!" ("I think that old woman is the witch!"). By the sixth session, learners were able to "give more detailed suggestions" of what they thought a book would be about, based on the cover and a few illustrations, and even "impressed [the facilitator] with their creativity" when asked for suggestions as to how the plot would continue. This might have been due to their confidence developing as they became more used to the activities and those around them, but this could also be seen to indicate how, as their confidence in their own knowledge grew, so did their readiness to think a little more critically about the stories they heard. Learners became more comfortable with offering their own suggestions, as they were assured that they would not be criticised for any 'wrong' answers as they would have been in the classroom. This reflects Guccione's (2011) findings, which claim that learners who are encouraged to draw on their prior knowledge during reading activities are better able to construct meaning from the literary texts.

Learners also demonstrated their prior knowledge of the fairy tale genre by responding positively when asked if they knew how fairy tales generally begin: "the group confidently shouted out 'once upon a time' and 'lank, lank, gelede'." According to Bloch, children who hear stories regularly become familiar with this 'special language' of books, and their knowledge of forms and structures of written language and genres improves (Bloch, n.d.: 29). However, it is interesting to note that this particular story, although it is considered to be one of the classic fairy tales, was relatively unknown to the learners. It was observed that "[b]y a show of hands, only about ten of them were familiar with the story (possibly because it's one of the few that has not yet been made into a Disney movie?)". The

facilitator's remark indicates just how limited some of the learners' prior exposure to fairy tales and bedtime stories is. The folk tales that are known to them are known to them because of television and films, not because of books and reading. However, even the learners who did know the story were still interested in listening to it. And were keen to show that they were familiar with the plot. Their enthusiasm to share their knowledge and ideas in this story may be attributed to an increase in the learners' self-confidence, and also to their realisation that the reading club environment is not school as they know it. Therefore, they are more at ease with offering their suggestions because there is no fear of the teacher saying they are wrong, or the rest of the class laughing at them, as suggested by Britsch, Martin et al (2005).

Their comprehension and summarising skills seemed to improve in the same way, both when listening to verbal stories and when reading printed texts, with learners being reluctant to offer their ideas initially, and ending with the entire class joining in to summarise a story or answer questions about what happened or why a character did a certain thing. In the ninth session, when asked about a story they had just read, “learners were quick to call out the answers”. This result is similar to those obtained in studies by Cohen (1968), Donald et al (2003), Morrow (1992), Pretorius and Machet (2008) and Pretorius and Mokhwesana (2009), in which researchers reported children's enhanced abilities of comprehension following a period of prolonged exposure to books and stories.

By the eleventh session, learners are even familiar with the idea of stories having a theme or moral: “Afterwards I asked them to talk about the moral of the story, and they were quick to offer suggestions...I did not even need to explain the word 'moral' to them because it had come up several times in previous sessions”. This suggests that through the reading club's informal discussions about the stories they have read and listened to, learners have learned new words without purposefully being taught vocabulary. This incidental improvement in their vocabulary may be linked to the conclusion of Krashen's (1989) comprehensive review on studies researching the effect of leisure reading on learners' spelling skills and vocabulary (discussed in Chapter Three), which claims that incidental learning of new words can and

does occur more often when reading for pleasure than with specialised instruction in these fields.

Enhanced Narrative Recall Abilities

The learners' story recall abilities also showed a noticeable improvement, as learners quickly became used to recapping stories they had read or heard the previous week. For instance, in the third session,

> [the facilitator] asked them to remind [her] what [they] had read the previous week, and was almost bombarded by the shouts as they jubilantly remembered all the funny things that happened when Sibu sneezed.

The development of this skill was particularly aided by the Nal'ibali reading supplements, whose weekly stories usually appear in two parts, spread out over two supplements. The serial nature of the stories means that learners became used to reading half the story one week, and having to continue to the next week. They were increasingly quick to recall what had been read the previous week and often remembered the stories in surprising detail. By demonstrating their ability to retell stories in their own words, the learners showed that they understood the original story, replicating the way in which the subjects of Donald's (2003) study demonstrated their understanding by being able to retell the story accurately. Similarly, the Grade R subjects of Pretorius and Machet's (2008) research demonstrated improved abilities to recall and retell a story that was read to them following a period of frequent reading and hearing stories.

The learners in the reading club grew increasingly adept at recalling stories from the previous week. The details that learners remembered when discussing the stories, such as in the story of the boy Sibu who can't stop sneezing, are vivid and humorous, whereas what they are expected to remember in the formal classroom may be confusing, abstract, and not of personal interest to them, making it less memorable. Importantly, the voluntary nature of the reading club means that unlike in the regular classroom, the learners choose to be there of their own free will. This genuine interest in the stories and activities the learners

experience at the reading club is a possible reason for the enhancement of their recall abilities during reading club sessions, because, as claimed by Britsch, Martin, et al (2005), the key to creating a sense of enjoyment and motivation amongst the learners is making sure that the activities do not duplicate those of a regular school day.

Improved Confidence in Reading Texts

Over the course of the observation period, learners appeared to gain the confidence to read book which were longer and of a higher level than they initially seemed comfortable with. Initially, learners seemed unwilling to commit to reading a chapter book (a full-length novel, normally with few illustrations, unlike the full colour, large-print picture books with only a sentence or two on each page). In the early sessions, the facilitator reports that

> the picture books were the most popular. Most of the chapter books were left on the desks, as most learners went for the books with fewer words and full-colour illustrations. Some of the older learners chose chapter books initially, but returned them to the table after a few minutes, unread.

This shows that even the more accomplished readers lacked confidence in their own reading abilities. They took books in which they were interested, but returned them after only a few minutes, as they believed that the book was too long or too difficult for them. Another possible reason for why most learners preferred the shorter picture books in the earlier sessions is because they felt they might not be able to finish the longer chapter books before the end of the reading club session.

It took several weeks, but eventually the more confident readers in the reading club began to try their hand at reading longer books, in which they could mark their place with a bookmark and continue reading the same books the following week. In the early sessions, the chapter books were the ones left on the table while even the Grade Seven learners opted to read picture books. However, by the eleventh and twelfth session, some of the older learners had developed sufficient confidence to try the longer books: The facilitator noted that in the eleventh session, she "encouraged some of the stronger readers to try the slightly

longer books with chapters instead of always taking the picture books, and many of them marked their place in these books with a piece of paper", and in the twelfth session, "Tamryn took a book from the Thoroughbred series—fairly long, with no pictures at all, and seemed to get stuck in straight away. Mickayla started an Enid Blyton chapter book, and Bradley was soon engrossed in the adventures of a naughty cat in *Sinbad the Runaway".* This increase in learners' confidence and motivation to try more difficult books may be attributed to the 'Matthew Effect', by which it is understood that there is a reciprocal relationship between development of literacy ability and motivation to read (Stanovich, 2008: 36). To put Stanovich's claim simply, the more a child reads, the more their vocabulary and comprehension improves, making reading easier and more enjoyable. This motivates the child to read more, causing a further improvement in their abilities. However, the Matthew Effect can also occur negatively: "Children with inadequate vocabularies—who read slowly and without enjoyment—read less, and as a result have slower development of vocabulary knowledge, which inhibits further growth in reading ability" (Stanovich, 2008: 37). According to Stanovich, persistence is key to reading development, as a child who gives up easily in the face of a difficult task (such as reading a more complex text) may never persist long enough to discover that they do in fact have the ability to succeed (Stanovich, 2008: 42), whereas learners who are motivated to accomplish more difficult tasks grow in their own confidence and thus in their own abilities, such as the children who began to attempt reading more complex texts.

Having the learners make and decorate their own personalised bookmarks especially for this purpose aided their understanding of not finishing a book right away as a common literacy practice, and they enjoyed using their bookmarks to 'reserve' books that they were busy reading in order to continue with them the following week. Learners also began to see the reading club cupboard as a sort of library, with a few learners asking to borrow books to take home. This was observed during the eleventh session when "a small group of girls came up to [the facilitator] and asked to borrow a book each and return it to [her] the next day". Thus, the more learners were free to choose books and read, coupled with the understanding that reading does not have to be self-contained within a single time period,

the more they grew in confidence to attempt longer and more complex texts.

Enhanced Ability to Dramatize Stories and Construct Own Narratives

Learners also enjoyed dramatizing the stories they read. Whether this was done as a class, or in pairs or small groups during 'free reading', learners seemed naturally inclined to act out funny sounds or animal noises. On one occasion, they did this so enthusiastically the facilitator misinterpreted the noise: “I heard raised voices and movement and thought there was an argument brewing, but when I went over there I saw that Carly was only being a trumpeting elephant, while Chelsey was playing the part of grumpy rhinoceros.” Impromptu drama performances were enjoyed by all as the whole class came together to act out and participate in the story, such as in the following observation from the third session:

> ...generally the actors did very well, occasionally losing their place but managing to read their parts successfully. Some even put in some great moments of expression or humour, which the rest of the class enjoyed. I involved the rest of the class by making them participate whenever the story read “everybody smiled” or “everybody laughed”...The class applauded the actors and themselves enthusiastically afterwards.

The fact that the learners enjoyed the mini-dramatizations so much was not surprising, as acting out role plays or dialogues for marks is one of the few formal assessments that the learners show enthusiasm for in the English classroom. Because many of the learners in the school experience difficulty reading and writing, drama affords them the opportunity to express themselves freely without the pressure of having to read aloud or write an essay. In the reading club, dramatizing the stories they read allowed the learners to become part of the story through acting, and bring the characters to life. Similar enthusiasm for drama activities was shared by the learners participating in studies by Donald et al (2003), and Elley (2000), and in these studies it was found that such activities contributed significantly to learners' literacy development. Britsch et al (2005) also claim that dramatization activities as part of literacy programmes are of great benefit to learners.

Learners also demonstrated an improvement in their ability to tell their own stories, as

witnessed during activities where learners took turns to invent their own sections of narrative, building on from each other's contributions to the group's story, and later constructing a story inspired by a picture. Initially, learners said they 'couldn't tell stories' or 'didn't know what to say' and needed a bit of encouragement to put together their own narratives. Only a few weeks later, however, when repeating a similar exercise, learners' abilities to construct a narrative had developed noticeably, as

> this time, there were no groups that said they didn't know what to do. As [the facilitator] walked around [she] heard brilliant and imaginative stories coming from the learners, and lots of laughter at each other's suggestions. [The facilitator] asked for some groups to share their stories with the whole group and noticed that this time around, most of the stories had a clear beginning, middle, and ending.

This demonstrates how, by the end of the observation period, learners who initially struggled to construct a basic story were now able to tell simple stories to their peers with more confidence and more narrative flair. This shows that in only a few weeks, learners gained an enhanced understanding of narrative conventions, such as having a clear introduction and ending, just as Cohen (1968) concluded that regular listening of stories aids areas such as listening, attention span, and narrative sense. The learners' storytelling abilities improved, as learners gained confidence to delve into their own imaginations in order to construct narratives with the help of others in their groups.

Development in Confidence and Competence in Writing

The few instances in which writing activities were part of the reading club sessions also proved beneficial to learners. In such a short period of time it is difficult to pinpoint exactly to what degree learners' writing skills increased, but the main benefit that was observed during the writing activities was the learners' gradual realisation that writing is a form of expression, and that they need not be scared of writing the 'wrong' thing, nor do they need to ask permission to write what they feel like writing. For instance, when making Mothers' Day cards, several learners were unsure of what to do:

> Some of the younger learners seemed to be quite concerned about whether their work was right or wrong, asking if they were 'allowed' to write certain things or draw certain pictures in their cards.

The facilitator offered a possible explanation for the learners' insecurity about their work, wondering "Perhaps this comes from teachers being overly prescriptive in the lower grades and giving strict instructions that do not allow the learners much creativity or originality?" This observation is based on the facilitator's prior experience at the school, where she has observed how, especially in lower grades, tasks such as essay writing are often reduced to a sort of worksheet, with the teacher giving very strict instructions, such as 'Here, write two sentences about your family. Underneath that, write two sentences about your house.' Learners are therefore more concerned with following instructions and doing the 'right thing' than with writing creatively and finding original ways to express themselves.

However, one particular learner is observed working independently and creatively:

> Kaylie in Grade Six noticed some Grade Seven work on the classroom walls—acrostic poems written by the 7A class on subjects such as 'friends', 'soccer', 'school' and 'family'. She called [the facilitator] over and asked if she could do one as her card... As [the facilitator] walked around a little later, [she] saw that Kaylie had written a beautiful acrostic poem with the title 'Mother'. Not once did she asked for help as to how to do it or to check if what she was doing was 'right' – confidently and quietly she managed to follow the examples on the wall and create her own original piece.

Other learners, (significantly, ones who attended reading club the previous year and so have plenty of exposure to this kind of activity) were similarly confident and

> were able to do a card without any assistance. They managed to put together cards with pictures on the front (mostly hearts), a generic 'Happy Mothers' Day' message on the front and something more personal inside. It seemed to be the younger ones, Grade Four and Five, who didn't seem to have much experience with making cards.

The fact that the newer members of the reading club struggled a little to write and draw freely whilst the experienced members demonstrated more confidence in their own abilities, shows how engagement in creative activities like these has the potential to develop learners' writing, not so much through formal instruction, but rather through allowing them freedom

to write and express themselves in meaningful ways, unhampered by the restrictive limits of 'right' and 'wrong'

By the last session, when learners were decorating bookmarks, the younger learners had gained more confidence in their own writing abilities. The facilitator observed that “some even added their own phrases and sentences without any prompting from me...This time around, no one was asking me for 'permission' to write or draw something”. These opportunities for creative engagement, even a simple activity such as making cards, all contributed to learners' growth in areas such as creativity, imagination, self-expression, as well as their writing abilities, such as spelling and sentence construction. According to Bloch, being given the chance to experiment with and actively construct writing allows learners to explore written text in creative and meaningful ways (Bloch, n.d.: 14). Bloch and Nkence witnessed a similar improvement in their subjects, when learners who were initially reluctant to write independently began to gain confidence after being encouraged to write freely and creatively, and soon began to write 'for themselves', without the fear of 'doing it wrong'. (Bloch and Nkence, 2000: 6).

Widened Exposure to Culturally Diverse Literature

Learners were also exposed to a variety of familiar stories as well as some which were new to them. Some of their favourites were stories set in familiar (that is, South African) contexts, and rewritten versions of European folk tales (such as 'The Gingerbread Man' becoming 'The Boerewors Man'). Because of the universal themes found in folk tales such as these, as well as their multidimensional and multi-layered characteristics, Hibbert and Crous (2011: 107) assert that they can be read and enjoyed across age and cultural groups. Readers were not deprived in any way of the joys of the story by reading *The Boerewors Man* instead of the original version of the story. In fact, they benefit more by reading a story with mention of familiar settings and cultural artefacts such as food than when reading stories which appear alien and unrelatable. The setting of unfamiliar stories in a familiar

context may be seen as an example of 'border crossing', which is advocated by Cleghorn and Rollnick (2002) as an effective technique to aid learners' ability to relate to what they are reading and thus read with more comprehension and engagement. Border crossing, discussed in more detail in Chapter Three, allows culturally diverse groups of learners "to shift cognitively as well as culturally from one world view to another" (Cleghorn and Rollnick, 2002: 354). The fact that learners responded more openly and were more engaged in stories set in familiar contexts demonstrates how culturally relevant aspects of a narrative can enhance learners' appreciation of the story, making reading more worthwhile and enjoyable in the eyes of the learners.

The issue of exposing learners to culturally relevant literature is a particularly pertinent one, because for children to want to read they must be captivated by what they are reading, and able to relate to it. Hibbert and Crous (2011) state that when choosing literature for beginning readers in linguistically and culturally diverse educational spaces, "the aim is to instil a sense of personal agency amongst beginner readers, which may lay the foundation for lifelong reading" (Hibbert and Crous, 2011: 99). This is why the illustrations present in the stories and mini-books in the Nal'ibali supplements are well chosen to reflect the social contexts most likely to be familiar to most South African learners, usually featuring children and families from a variety of cultures, and living in recognisably South African environments. For example, the illustration accompanying one of the Nal'ibali stories "showed houses which look just like the RDP houses in the community in which most of the learners live". This means that learners are able to connect with the story more easily, because it features children like them who live in houses like they do. Learners were also encouraged to share their own cultural backgrounds by discussing their own beliefs and experiences related to the stories they heard and read. After listening to a spooky ghost story,

> [t]here was a very excited discussion afterwards when learners were asked to share any ghost stories that they had heard within the community. [The facilitator] was told a chilling (and apparently true) story about a learner at the school who died a few years ago after breaking into the school's roof and falling through the ceiling, and who apparently haunts the school, and strange tales of

> the 'Bubbaloon Vrou', a witch-type figure who is supposed to carry off children who go outside after dark in the Northern Areas.

By asking learners to share their own ghost stories, they learned that their knowledge, their culture, and their community, are of value and of interest. Cleghorn and Rollnick (2002: 356) also attest to the value of incorporating learners' own cultural traditions and beliefs, and inviting them to relate them to texts. The tales and superstitions of their community are not dismissed, but are instead afforded as much significance as those featured in the stories they read. This is also a form of 'border crossing', allowing learners to bring their prior knowledge and cultural lore into the classroom, which is also encouraged by McGinnis (2007: 574), who explains that asking learners to relate their own stories in relation to texts helps learners to create a personal connection to the text, as well as affirming the value and importance of their own culture.

Improved Motivation to Attempt Mother-tongue Reading

Xhosa Children Reading in isiXhosa

In the very first session, the facilitator described the following interaction with a group of isiXhosa-speaking girls during some free time to read the Nal'ibali supplements: “I was interested to see that they were reading the English text, even though the story appeared in isiXhosa as well. I pointed out to them that they are allowed to read the isiXhosa one and that they shouldn't feel like they must only read in English. Surprisingly, they said that they 'can't read isiXhosa', and that it is too difficult. 'English is easier to read, teacher' they said, 'we can speak isiXhosa but we don't know how to read it'”. These words from the mouths of these learners are indications of the worrying decline in mother-tongue literacy. To the majority of isiXhosa speakers in the Eastern Cape and South Africa at large, isiXhosa is predominantly an oral language, as it has been historically, with its folk tales and legends being passed down through the generations orally instead of being written down. Seldom do these learners experience their language being used in authentic and meaningful ways in print, and they most likely never experience exciting, culturally relevant, age-appropriate

picture books in their home language (refer to Chapter Three's mention of Pretorius and Machet [2008] and Pretorius and Mokhwesana's [2009] research into mother-tongue emergent literacy). IsiXhosa books, children's or otherwise, are not easily obtainable, which is why many isiXhosa speakers are more competent in reading English than their mother tongue. This might explain why this group of girls in the reading club was able to read in English but not isiXhosa.

However, in the second term, these same girls were observed reading a book of short stories in isiXhosa. Of course, it cannot be determined by how much these learners' understanding of the printed text of their mother tongue improved, if at all, but the fact that they showed interest in engaging with isiXhosa texts is a promising sign. Bloch states the importance of learners having access to reading materials in their own languages (Bloch, n.d.: 21), and Pretorius and Mokhwesana claim that if children get off to a bad start in reading their home language, they often struggle to recover as their schooling progresses (2009: 70). McGinnis claims that allowing and even encouraging learners to communicate, read, and write in their mother tongue is extremely important for learners' confidence, comprehension, and sense of pride and appreciation of their own culture. According to McGinnis, whose research is examined in Chapter Three, creating opportunities in the classroom for learners' mother tongue language and literacy practices allows for the creation of a culturally sensitive community of learning (McGinnis, 2007: 572).

McGinnis also states that allowing learners to communicate in their own languages, especially when collaborating on group tasks or projects, affords them the chance to communicate in a deeper and more advanced way than if they had been forced to only use English (McGinnis, 2007: 573). The stories and books from the Nal'ibali supplements are all published in English and isiXhosa, and it appears that having been exposed to their language in its printed form over the past two terms has encouraged these learners to try to improve their reading in their mother tongue.

Afrikaans Children Reading in Afrikaans

In the beginning, several learners, whose home language was Afrikaans, asked the facilitator whether the reading club would only be open to 'the English children', by which they meant the learners in the English Home Language class of each grade. Through informal conversations with staff and learners, it was revealed that although the school is predominantly Afrikaans, the thirty to forty learners in the 'English' class of each grade are often perceived by the teachers and other learners as being 'better' than the Afrikaans learners. By 'better', the teachers mean that the English Home Language learners are generally better behaved and perform better academically. To the Afrikaans learners, the 'English' learners are arrogant (or, as the children expressed it, “they keep themselves big”, a literal translation of the Afrikaans expression 'om jouself groot te hou') even though most of the learners in the English Home Language class are not truly English mother-tongue speakers. The coloured children in the class usually speak Afrikaans to their friends and family, and the black children communicate amongst themselves and their families predominantly in isiXhosa. However, it does appear that a distinction is made between the English and Afrikaans classes in the school: A higher proportion of prefects is chosen from the English class in Grade Seven, and the English classes in the respective grades are often chosen for special excursions or treats more often than the other classes. Therefore, it seems justified that the Afrikaans learners might think that the reading club is reserved for the 'English' learners due to their apparent superiority, based solely on the fact that they are classed as 'English' and not Afrikaans. Thus, although Afrikaans is the predominant language at the school, there is a sense amongst the learners particularly, that Afrikaans is something of an inferior language to English (Rassool, Edwards and Bloch's (2006) discussion of this perception of English as a 'superior' language is also mentioned in Chapter Three).

This perception of Afrikaans as lower down than English in the hierarchy of language was discernible in the learners' interactions with the facilitator. In the beginning, most questions

or requests directed at the facilitator were in English (I suspect this is also due to previous English teachers, who themselves speak Afrikaans as a home language, at the school enforcing 'English only' rules in their classroom and reprimanding learners who speak to them in Afrikaans). Throughout the reading club sessions, learners were encouraged to communicate in the language in which they felt most comfortable, in order to promote the use of their mother tongue, instead of perpetuating the idea that English in is some way 'better' than other languages:

> While talking to them, [the facilitator] constantly switched between English and Afrikaans, most often saying something first in one language and then repeating it in the other language. [She] explained to them that the reading club recognises all languages, and encouraged learners to speak, read and write in their mother tongue or in whichever language they felt most comfortable.

While reading and telling stories to the learners, the facilitator made an effort to read stories and alternate between English and Afrikaans when speaking to the learners: “I started reading in Afrikaans, stopping every few lines to offer a summary in English, mostly for the benefit of the African language speakers, whose Afrikaans might not be so good”. When playing games like 'Broken Telephone', the facilitator “encouraged them to try passing some messages in English and some in Afrikaans, to keep things interesting.” After two months of communicating bilingually to the learners and exposing them to written and spoken stories in Afrikaans, learners were using Afrikaans more often to participate in group discussions about the stories and books that were read, and communicating more readily with the facilitator in Afrikaans. This may be interpreted as a decline in their perception of Afrikaans as somehow inferior or less permissible than English. This is similar to what was observed by McGinnis in her study, in which she noted that when allowed to speak in their home languages, all students were able to participate in the group discussions, and opportunities were created for more advanced communication amongst the learners, in turn raising their confidence in their abilities to complete the task at hand (McGinnis, 2007: 573).

In terms of reading material, although the Nal'ibali supplements are printed in English and

isiXhosa, many of the reading books are Afrikaans, which gave the learners the opportunity to read more Afrikaans stories for enjoyment, instead of only what they encountered in their school work.

By increased exposure to reading and other literacy activities in Afrikaans, learners had the opportunity to experience their home language in interesting and engaging ways, as well as exposing them to a type of Afrikaans higher in literary quality than they would ordinarily use and hear when talking to their friends and families, allowing them to experience new vocabulary and expressions. Hearing an 'English' teacher make the effort to use Afrikaans to communicate with the learners and read stories to them showed the learners that their home language is just as worthwhile as English. According to McGinnis, second-language learners who are limited to 'English only' in the classroom are often judged unfairly, as the teacher's perception of their abilities is based on their ability in English (2007: 578), and these learners are often made to feel inferior because their knowledge of English is inferior. In the Winterson reading club, learners demonstrated that being permitted and even encouraged to use their home language results in greater communication between learners, and between learners and teachers. This increased sense of pride in one's language and thus in one's culture led the learners to explore more of their language and culture through the medium of literacy.

Increased Competence in Reading and Motivation to Read

While it is difficult to say exactly how much the Reading Club sessions improved learners' reading abilities, based on what was observed during the sessions, most of the learners did show at least some improvement over the course of the observation period. In those learners who frequently volunteered to read aloud to the group, an improvement in their fluency was noticed, and many of these learners (although already fairly confident readers) started reading with much more expression in their voices, which may possibly be influenced by hearing the facilitator modelling reading aloud by using a variety of tone, volume, and

expression when reading to them. For instance, in the fourth session, the it is noted that a Grade 7 girl, Ameera, “read very well, really accentuating the emotion in the excited shouts and screams of the characters”.

Motivation to read may also be used as an indicator of increased reading competence, and in this aspect the learners' improvement was noticeable. Initially, learners would wait to be told to start reading, whereas after several sessions, they would begin to read almost immediately upon receiving their books or supplements. In the seventh session, learners clearly demonstrated their enthusiasm for reading: “Some finished their first book quickly and immediately were back looking for another one...[the facilitator] noticed that Carly in Grade Seven finished a book and then straight away turned back to the beginning and started reading it again”. By the eleventh session, learners were even showing their enthusiasm for reading aloud. When the facilitator began reading a story, and then asked for volunteers to each read a paragraph, “the learners were eager to be chosen to read, with about six learners taking turns to read a paragraph or two each. They read confidently, loudly and well”. As the observation period progressed, learners were also reported asking to read books during class time and asking to borrow books to take home, suggesting a changing perception of reading as something enjoyable to be done in one's spare time, not simply a school-related activity.

These findings echo those of Morrow (1992: 271) in her study to determine whether a reading-for-enjoyment programme contributed to positive change in learners' literacy achievement, use of literacy, and attitudes to reading. Morrow’s study (as described in more detail in Chapter Three) provided selected classrooms with 'literacy centres', from which children could choose a variety of literacy activities, including storytelling, reading and writing. Such as with the reading club at Winterson Primary, the emphasis of the activities available in these 'literacy centres' was on enjoyable experiences with books and reading in a relaxed, non-school environment. After a year's exposure frequent exposure to the literacy centres, the learners in Morrow's study demonstrated an improvement in their basic literacy skills, comprehension, and story retelling and rewriting abilities. Significantly, learners

reported that they felt that their reading had improved because they spent more time reading, and the main reason that they spent more time reading was because it was 'fun'. They appreciated being able to choose their activities, and do them alone or with friends as they pleased. Learners reported that their favourite aspect of the programme was 'getting to read a lot', and the fact that the literacy centre was a 'special place' (Morrow, 1992), meaning that it was a comfortable and enjoyable part of the classroom to be in. Thus, just as Morrow's findings suggest that enjoyable reading activities lead to increased motivation and therefore increased reading competence, the learners at Winterson Primary benefited similarly from more frequent exposure to enjoyable literary activities in a relaxed, social environment, which in turn increased their motivation to read.

Improved Ability to Infer Meaning from Pictures

By paying close attention to the illustrations in the books and stories, learners also showed an improvement in their ability to construct meaning from pictures, by looking at the book's cover and illustrations within the story. Several times during free reading, learners were observed sitting together, not so much reading as just looking at pictures, but all the time sharing a commentary on what they saw happening in the illustrations. For example,

> two Grade Five girls sitting together were not reading much but were looking closely at the illustrations in a picture book about a duckling called *Ruby Flew Too*. They were discussing the pictures as they turned the pages: 'Kyk, daar is die mamma eend', 'Nou is daar vyf baba eendjies', 'Die eende swem met die paddas'

Although this might be dismissed as 'not reading', this is a valuable skill to develop in the learners, as visual literacy is an important part of social literacy practice. Heath states that in literacy events such as this, "participants follow socially established rules for verbalizing what they know from and about the written material" (1982: 50). Thus, 'reading' by examining pictures instead of text is an important pre-reading activity, and an integral aspect of emergent literacy. As seen in Chapter Three's discussion of their research into emergent literacy, Bloch and Nkence advocate strongly for the encouragement of such pre-reading

activities, particularly when what seems to be happening in Grade R and Grade One classrooms is reducing learners' early experiences with text to the limitations of merely copying words and phrases, or reading exactly what is on the page. Learners who create their own sentences and narratives based on what they observe in illustrations are actively involved in constructing language for themselves, and Bloch insists that it is only through purposeful encounters with reading and writing that a child's grasp of literacy will develop (Bloch, n.d.: 14). Although already in Grade Five, these learners who were 'reading' by constructing their own story to accompany the pictures are still involved in a valuable literary practice.

Additional Evidence of Learners' Improved Literacy Performance

Learner's Name	*Grade*	*LoLT*	*Term 1*	*Term 2*	*Term 3*
Tamryn	7	English	66	69	78
Mickayla	6	English	67	76	77
Bradley	7	Afrikaans	61	74	81
Kaylie	6	English	55	70	74

Table 6.1: LEARNERS' MARKS FOR ENGLISH DURING THE OBSERVATION PERIOD

This table lists the percentages these four learners attained in English as a school subject over the course of the first three terms of the year in which this research took place. Of the four learners, three are girls (Tamryn, Mickayla, and Kaylie) and one is a boy (Bradley). Two of them are in Grade Seven, and two are in Grade Six. Bradley is the only learner whose LoLT is Afrikaans; the three girls are in classes where the LoLT is English. However, even the 'English' learners are essentially Afrikaans Home Language speakers, as they speak

Afrikaans to their friends and at home. The performance of these four learners was selected for analysis because Tamryn, Mickayla, Bradley and Kaylie were amongst the most regular attendees of the reading club sessions, and contributed the most to the sessions in terms of participation in discussion and activities. Mickayla and Kaylie were also the most frequent 'borrowers' of books from the reading club cupboard, asking several times a week to take books home to read, meaning that they were frequently engaged in reading for enjoyment outside of reading club sessions. Bradley preferred to borrow books from the cupboard to read during class time once he had finished his work. Prior to participation in the reading club, the three female learners could all be described as 'above average' in terms of their performance in English compared to their classmates. All three of these girls were chatty and confident when speaking English (albeit with several Afrikaans-influenced errors) but their written work and reading comprehension abilities were below what would ordinarily be expected for Grade 7 Home Language. The Afrikaans boy Bradley was studious and hard-working, and achieved reasonably good marks, but he had very little confidence in English, particularly when speaking in front of the rest of the class.

This mark for English is based on learners' achievements in up to eight formal assessment tasks over the course of the term, including oral assessments (usually prepared or unprepared reading, an individual speech, a group dialogue, or a listening test), writing assignments (transactional writing, such as a letter, and creative writing, such as a narrative or descriptive essay), reading comprehension tests, and language tests. As the table shows, all four learners show noticeable progress in their marks for English over the three terms. From Term One to Term Three, Tamryn's English mark improved by 12 percent, and Mickayla's by 10 percent. Bradley and Kaylie showed an even greater improvement from Term One to Term Three, with Kaylie's mark improving by 19 percent, and Bradley's by 20 percent. Bradley and Tamryn also showed the most noticeable development in their self-confidence and leadership qualities, as they became more outspoken and comfortable at suggesting and even organising activities for the other learners to participate in.

In contrast to the steadily improving marks of these four learners, a sample of the marks of

learners who did not participate in the reading club suggest that this improvement in learners' marks did not occur across the board. Based on the English results of learners who did not participate in the reading club, randomly selected from the same mark sheets as those on which the marks of these four sampled learners appear, the general trend is for learners' marks to decrease as the year progresses; eight out of ten randomly selected learners show a lower mark in Term Two than in Term One, and seven out of these ten show a lower result in Term Three than in Term Two (Observation, February 2016).

While it cannot be ascertained whether this improvement in the four reading club learners is due to the influence of the reading club, the consistent progress demonstrated by these four learners from different grades and classes and with difference home languages strongly suggests that the reading club had a significant part to play in the improvement of these learners' ability to perform curriculum-specified literacy tasks in the formal classroom environment. This noticeable improvement in these four learners' capacity to read, write, speak, and comprehend English may be due—in part at least—to their frequent and regular exposure to hearing and reading stories and books during the reading club sessions.

6.3 EVIDENCE OF LEARNERS' ENHANCED PERSONAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Enhanced Recognition of Reading as a Social Activity

Throughout the observation period, learners demonstrated increasing awareness of the social aspect of the reading club sessions. In the beginning, learners saw the reading club as an extension of school, and the facilitator was simply a teacher. However, as the sessions progressed, learners relaxed and began to see the reading club as more of a social event, and witnessed the facilitator taking part in games with them as an equal and not as a figure of authority. Although they remained well-mannered, they interacted with the facilitator more freely and were more natural and expressive in their behaviour, showing that they were not thinking of the facilitator just as a teacher but rather as another participant in the activities

who was there to enjoy the sessions with them, not threaten and reprimand. For example, while playing a game, the boy Bradley spontaneously called for the facilitator to take part. The facilitator observed,

> Bradley called out, 'Nou is dit Juffrou se beurt!' ('Now it's Teacher's turn!') and I agreed laughingly. Sportingly, the kids said I can have five chances if I want, but I stick with three, jokingly accusing the kids of feeling sorry for me by giving me extra turns. Sure enough, I failed to guess correctly, much to the children's delight.

The learners, particularly Bradley, felt familiar enough with the facilitator to suggest she also take a turn, and the learners react with glee when the facilitator gets it wrong, indicating that they are now seeing the facilitator almost as one of them, who is willing to play games and make mistakes in front of them. Similarly, in later sessions, the facilitator and the assistant Miss Petersen run around with the children during an outdoor game, which the learners enjoy seeing. These examples suggest that the relaxed 'after-school' environment of the reading club helped to set the learners at ease, and allow them to escape from the strict rigidity of the classroom, where making a teacher participate in a game would be unthinkable. This observation links to Spielberger and Halpern's (2002) claim that the value of extramural literacy programmes lies in their being more relaxed than regular classroom environments (2002: 88).

As much of the reading club time was devoted to 'free' reading (when learners had the chance to read as they liked: alone, in pairs, or in groups) learners began to see reading not solely as an individual activity, but something that could be done together, with friends or family. In the free reading segment of the seventh session, "[s]everal chose to sit and read on their own, but most sat in pairs or threes and read together". Most of the time, learners chose to read with at least one other person; even the very confident readers only chose to read alone occasionally. Smaller groups were even eschewed by the learners in favour of reading as one large group, suggesting an appreciation of the shared experience they enjoyed when listening to the facilitator reading and telling stories to them: On one occasion at the end of the observation period, when offered the choice between reading in small groups or

as a large group, “they unanimously voted to read it all together”. The group's tendency to enjoy the group literacy activities may be seen as similar to Wilson, Jewett and Vanderburg's findings regarding the power of the 'shared experience' of literacy, which is discussed in Chapter Three.

Even when reading together in groups or pairs, the learners demonstrated an understanding of the roles associated with reading, as those who were not reading would listen attentively to those who were. Watching learners read together in groups provided the opportunity to observe the sociocultural aspect of literacy in action, as, in accordance with Heath's (1982) notion of 'ways of taking', learners began to echo the reading practices they had previously experienced. As the groups read together, various group dynamics were noticeable, and the way in which the groups chose to read together offered some interesting insights into how reading has been perceived in their lives so far, which is predominantly a school activity, implemented by a teacher.

For example, in one session the facilitator observed,

> In a group of Grade Six girls, two girls in the group, Mickayla and Kaylie, took turns reading out loud to the others. They emulated typical 'teacher' style story-reading, holding the book in front of them and reading, and then showing the pictures to the rest of the group. The other three girls listened intently with big smiles. I notice that this group takes quite a long time to finish their book – they were reading slowly and precisely, and spending time looking at the pictures.

The way in which Mickayla and Kaylie read 'teacher-style' to the other girls in the group, reading a page and then turning the book to show the pictures, is the way in which the facilitator normally reads stories to the reading club, and has probably been learned by the girls as they themselves have sat and listened to stories being read. This suggests that to this group, reading a story involves someone—the reader—in a position of authority; they hold the words in front of them, meaning that they are there to read, and the others are there to listen. The pictures are shown afterwards, only after the words have been read, again, controlling what the audience sees until the reader allows them to see it. However, the girls doing the reading are careful to ensure their audience gets the full experience of the book,

because they read "slowly and precisely" and allow the audience ample time to look at the illustrations, rather like a teacher would.

In another group, learners chose to make reading a team effort: "In a mostly Grade Seven Afrikaans learner group, the book was placed in the middle of the group, and they each took turns to read a few lines, allowing all of the group members could see the text at the same time while one of the others was reading." To these learners, reading is best performed as a collaborative social activity, with each group member getting equal opportunity to read, and everyone being able to follow the printed words as the other group members read. They were eager to help each other, as seen in how the group prompted a reader who struggled with the pronunciation of a word. It was observed that these girls "turned the pages quickly and did not spend much time looking at the pictures".

The above suggests that this group of fairly strong readers gained most of their meaning from the text, and did not need to resort to looking too closely at the illustrations because their decoding and comprehension skills were good. If one learner hesitated at a word, the others were quick to help. This team collaborative effort proved productive as it allowed this group of confident readers to progress quickly through their book, showing that to these learners, reading is something to be done individually but with others to listen and help if needed, allowing all members of the group to contribute to the reading of the story.

A different scenario is witnessed when watching the only two boys in the reading club who were frequent attendees reading together. These boys both read at the same time, but silently, as observed by the facilitator:

> [Bradley and Caleb] read [a book] together, but silently, waiting until they were both done with the page before turning to the next one...The boys called me and asked me how to pronounce the name of the alien Flerg in their book – one claimed it is "flurg" while the other gave it a more Afrikaans pronunciation of "vlerg" (almost like the Afrikaans word "vlerk")

These boys are enjoying the shared experience of reading the same book and seeing the same illustrations, but the act of reading itself remains an individual one until a problem is encountered, such as the pronunciation of the alien's name, which leads to a discussion about

the text. The boys enlisted the help of the facilitator to settle their differences of opinion, who “pointed out that seeing the alien was from another planet, none of us knew how his name was pronounced so [she] would say both pronunciations were correct.” This brief and ostensibly unremarkable moment is in fact a significant one. The two boys involved learned about negotiation and compromise, as they 'agreed to disagree' on the subject of the alien's name. However, the actual benefit of this conversation with the facilitator is the boys' realisation that reading involves the imagination, and in a fantastical story such as the one which they were reading, the story does not have to be limited by what is realistic, possible, or correct. According to Worth, as mentioned in Chapter Three, “the narrative ability to reason is engaged, and thereby enhanced, to an even greater degree by reading, hearing, and telling well-constructed narratives” (2008: 54). Worth claims that this is especially true for fanciful or 'make-believe' stories, for he claims that encouraging an imaginative attitude in children helps to engage their analytic stance (2008: 53). The two boys demonstrated this engagement of their analytic and reasoning abilities, as the fanciful nature of the alien's name sparked a discussion about which pronunciation would be correct.

Another type of group-reading that was observed was a group of younger girls reading together, but instead of taking turns to read some lines or a paragraph one by one, the whole group read aloud together, line by line. At the time, the facilitator commented on the way in which reading is often practised in the classroom, saying that “especially in the younger grades, much of the reading work done in the classroom is done this way at the school—loud, chanting, sing-song style reading, with forty learners reading all together. I wonder if this is why these girls are reading like that, because it is what they have experienced as reading in the classroom?”.

As mentioned in the observations, this 'chanting' style of letting learners practise their reading is favoured by the teachers of the lower grades at Winterson Primary (Observation, February 2015). Classes of forty to fifty learners are often heard chanting their way through entire stories or textbook chapters in this fashion. While in some teachers' eyes, this might be a way of ensuring that all the children get to practise their reading at once, it does not

encourage true comprehension, confidence, or expression in learners. Reading aloud as a large group means that everyone reads at the same pace, which usually manifests as a mindless chanting, devoid of individual expression or emotion in the reading, as individual reading enjoyment and ability is suppressed in favour of the group identity. As learners drone their way through the text the emphasis is on 'keeping up' with the rest of the group simply by saying the words, instead of taking time to absorb them. This pressure to maintain communal pace at the cost of comprehension causes much of the text's meaning to be lost. While the teacher thinks that all learners are reading, many who cannot read or cannot keep up with the rest of the class simply give up as they get left behind in the text after one or two hesitations. On the other hand, reading in such a large group may also have an adverse effect on confident readers, who might feel 'held back' by the rest of the class's slow pace. These learners may find their expression and comprehension hampered by having to conform to the repetitive chanting of the rest of the class.

The group of grade five girls who chose to read in this fashion are a symptom of the inadequate way in which reading is usually taught in schools like Winterson. During their first visit to reading club, when told they can read any way they want to, they opted for what was most familiar to them, giving an interesting insight into the style of reading with which they immediately and instinctively identified themselves. As inexperienced members of the reading club, these learners have probably not yet realised that this method of reading is probably less enjoyable and less beneficial than the other methods of group reading employed by the older learners who have had more exposure to the reading club's literacy activities.

How the learners chose to read when given the opportunity to read in a group is related to Heath's (1982: 50) concept of ‘ways of taking'. The method which these learners chose for their group reading is a socially learned method, most probably absorbed by these learners from the literacy events they witness in the school environment. The majority of these literacy practices have been learned through what has been modelled and instructed in the learner's surrounding environment (1982: 50). For this group of learners, it seems that

literacy practices which occur at home are either not frequent or not significant enough to have made an impact on what 'reading means to these learners' instead, they turn to and replicate the literacy practices they have experienced, namely, teachers reading aloud and simultaneous group reading.

Enhanced Self-esteem and Self-Confidence

Throughout the sessions, the facilitator endeavoured to cultivate a nurturing atmosphere, both in her interactions with the learners and in their interactions with each other, and in turn, learners were encouraged to help each other, motivate each other, reach out to learners in different grades or from different friendship groups, and refrain from hurting each other's feelings. They seemed to be concerned about whether they were 'good enough' to join the reading club. This is observed before the first session of the year when "Some learners came to [the facilitator] earlier in the day and asked whether they 'would be allowed to join' the reading club, because they do not read very well…. [they asked] whether it was only for the children who 'are good at reading'". Thus, many learners came to reading club with low self-esteem in terms of their reading competence. However, the nurturing and encouraging atmosphere of the reading club led to learners feeling at ease and more confident about their own abilities. Reading for pleasure has been linked to a rise in learners' self-esteem: According to Hisken (2011:20), learners who make their own reading choices show a greater improvement in their reading abilities, because reading success is more meaningful to these learners when they chose the book. This increase in reading confidence can lead to an increase in general self-esteem (2011: 20). Therefore, the periods of free reading and reading choices that the learners made might have been responsible for the increase in both their reading confidence and in their self-esteem.

When doing creative activities such as making cards, many of the learners were initially worried about making sure their work was 'right' or if they were 'allowed' to write or draw something specific. The facilitator remarked that "Some of the other learners seemed to be

quite concerned about whether their work is right or wrong, asking if they are 'allowed' to write certain things or draw certain pictures in their cards." Thus, many learners were initially limited in their creativity, as they needed some encouragement to enjoy the activity and express themselves without the fear of being told their work is 'wrong'. Bloch and Nkence witnessed a similar reluctance in the Grade 1 participants of their study. They say, "We discovered that getting children to take risks with writing was not a quick and easy process. It quickly became apparent that they came to school with a strong perception that they needed to have the teachers show them what to do, and that they should only copy, and not try to spell for themselves. They had a fear that they would 'do it wrong'" (Bloch and Nkence, 2000: 6).

Not all of the learners demonstrated this initial lack of confidence though. Kaylie is an example of a learner who showed great initiative in her creative work. It has already been mentioned how Kaylie worked independently to copy the format of the acrostic poems she noticed on the classroom wall in order to produce her own poem for her mother. Without once asking for help or checking if what she was doing was right, Kaylie was able to use her initiative to create her own original poem, demonstrating the confidence she had in herself and her own abilities.

By the last sessions, when the learners made bookmarks, the facilitator observed that "They really seemed to enjoy writing "[their name] is reading this book!' and some even added their own phrases and sentences without any prompting from me...This time around, no one was asking me for 'permission' to write or draw something." By the end of the observation period, learners have developed a greater awareness of their own creativity, and their confidence in their own abilities had improved, whilst diminishing the fear of making mistakes. Bloch and Nkence report similar improvements in their participants, who also lost their initial fear of making mistakes: "They [kept] on asking how to write this and that. They [didn't] want to write for themselves. But then we did manage to get them to write and the results were amazing." (Bloch and Nkence, 2000: 6).

Making things and inventing stories was another activity which gave the learners a sense of

achievement, judging by how they proudly showed their work off to each other and shared their stories, and were quick to compliment each other on their creations. Spielberger and Halpern (2002) point out how such activities can be beneficial, stating that "The goals and uses of reading and writing in after-school programs...appear to be strongly motivating for children...Children's motivation to write is fuelled when they feel they've written something that gets a positive response from important adults". This suggests that learners' confidence in their own abilities grew as they received recognition and praise for what they had achieved. The learners' enhanced confidence in their own abilities which developed over the course of the observation period demonstrates how the nurturing, informal environment of the reading club has the potential to increase learners' self-esteem and self-confidence through voluntary, confidence-building activities.

The two learners whose development of self-confidence was especially noticeable were Bradley and Tamryn, both in Grade Seven. They took active roles in the reading club of their own accord, making suggestions and leading the rest of the group through games and activities. Both learners are fairly quiet in the classroom, but seemed to become quite outspoken in the reading club as they made decisions about the games to play, gave the others instructions, and took control effectively without being overbearing towards the others. Bradley and Tamryn are two learners whose development in their self-confidence was very noticeable. Although both are quiet and introverted during school time, at reading club they quickly stood out as some of the most active and enthusiastic members. After a few sessions, they had the confidence to suggest to the facilitator which games they would like to play. As the facilitator remarked, "I had another game in mind, but Bradley and Tamryn (two Grade Sevens who were regular attendees last year) asked if we could play 'Doggie Doggie, Where's Your Bone?' so I agreed." Similarly, in another session, "Bradley asked if [they] could play 'Broken Telephones' and [the facilitator] willingly agreed. He had been asking to play this game for the last week, so [she] was happy to oblige".

By the ninth session, Bradley and Tamryn have become so comfortable at the reading club that they take charge of the game: "[They] asked to play 'Doggie Doggie Where's Your

Bone?' and Miss Petersen agreed, letting Bradley and Tamryn run the game as they explain the rules to newcomers and get the game started". When Bradley and Tamryn chose to take control of the activities, the rest of the learners listened to them willingly, respecting them as peers and taking their instructions without resentment or rebellion. Although Bradley and Tamryn were not outspoken during ordinary lessons in the classroom, they clearly felt at ease during the reading club sessions, and quickly became comfortable with making suggestions and requests regarding activities for the group to participate in. By the end of the observation period, they were showing real leadership qualities, being able to lead the group in playing games without being domineering, showing how the reading club atmosphere led to these two learners growing in self-confidence and exhibiting leadership qualities which had not previously come to light in the traditional classroom setting.

Enhanced Group Co-operation and Collaboration

Initially, some learners were hesitant to participate in group discussions or read aloud, probably because they feared being embarrassed in front of the other learners. Due to the encouraging atmosphere that was created in the reading club, by the end of the observation period our group discussions about books and stories had become much more lively, and less 'forced', with learners contributing willingly, even enthusiastically, as they had no reason to fear being teased for making mistakes. Even some of the less confident readers volunteered to read parts of the story aloud. Learners became more adept at finding links between the stories they read in the reading club and real-life situations, easily identifying the moral of the story or applying it to their own lives.

When playing games and doing activities, values such as honesty and good sportsmanship were encouraged in favour of tattling on each other. After the first few sessions, learners hardly ever told the facilitator what they saw others doing or not doing, and during the games learners were quick to admit themselves when it was their turn to be in the middle or leave the game because they hadn't got it right, such as when playing a version of 'Simon Says',

the facilitator observed that "most were good sports and sat down of their own accord when they realised they had held up the wrong number of fingers". During another game in a later session, "The learners were quick to accept when they got it wrong—there were no arguments or disagreements about whether someone was in the middle or not—they laughed at themselves, accepted that they were wrong, and went into the middle".

Listening to stories being read and told also seemed to encourage a social appreciation of stories, as learners enjoyed the shared emotional experience of hearing and reacting to a story together, and knowing that the individual emotions that one is feeling as one experiences the books, are also being experienced by one's peers. This is similar, although on a much smaller scale, to what Wilson, Jewett and Vanderburg witnessed occurring during the school-wide 'read' they observed, when one book was chosen for all staff, learners, and parents to read and engage with through a variety of activities (see Chapter Three). According to Wilson et al, the benefit of allowing a group, whether an entire college campus or the attendees of a reading club, to engage with the same text, results in the community sharing a common experience which develops literacy, strengthens ties within the community, and provides all community members with common talking points with which to engage (Wilson et al, 2008: 5).

An example of this is when the learners were observed as becoming very involved in a story as a group, responding verbally to exciting parts of the story. When reading the story of *The Boerewors Man*, the class sang the Boerewors Man's song together: "When it was time for the Boerewors Man to sing his song, the whole class spontaneously joined in to chant his lines together". Hearing and reading the same stories gave learners a common experience that they could share and discuss, comparing viewpoints and interpretations. Watching and participating in the dramatization of these stories had a similar effect on the learners, as those acting seemed proud of their group achievement as they came together to present something to the others, and even those in the audience played a role by participating as a group, and sharing opinions and ideas afterwards. Storytelling became an active, collaborative activity instead of learners sitting listening passively, without becoming

involved.

Although the shortage of resources at the school and in the reading club might have initially been viewed as a disadvantage, it had the unforeseen benefit of forcing learners to share art materials, supplements, and books. Initially, this caused some problems, such as in the second session when the group was very large and resources were limited; the facilitator remarked that there were "a few instances of having to warn learners about their behaviour (someone hitting someone else, someone didn't want to share their supplement)". However, in the reflective narrative for the eleventh session, the facilitator remarked on the improved group dynamics: "They really are a nice group to work with, and its moments like this when I can see how they are starting to feel much closer to each other and treat each other with more respect; it's been a long time since I had to talk to anyone for being aggressive or mean to others, and even the learners in the different grades mix well with each other."

By the twelfth session, sharing and helping seemed to occur more naturally to the learners; whilst making Mothers' Day cards, "they enjoyed cutting and pasting, and even though we had limited numbers of glue and scissors, the kids shared well, passing around willingly and some even asking, 'Who needs the scissors next? Who needs glue?'" By the end of the observation period, learners were actively helping each other to follow the instructions to make the mini-books from the supplements, and even when doing creative activities individually (such as making cards or bookmarks) they were doing them in a group, sharing ideas and suggestions, appreciating each other's talents and abilities, and building each other's self-esteem with compliments.

This demonstrates how exposure to group literacy activities can create a stronger sense of community within a school or even a smaller group such as a grade or class. According to Spielberger and Halpern, "after-school [literacy] programs are particularly well suited to fostering the social dimensions of literacy, with children sharing ideas, collaborating, helping each other, responding to and critiquing each other, and solving reading and writing problems together" (2002: xii). Based on the better group relations that developed amongst the learners over the observation period, the learners did indeed benefit from experiencing

literacy in a social context: Playing games encouraged good sportsmanship, and listening to and telling stories as a group created a bond between learners based on the common emotions they experienced together. The spirit of collaboration and cooperation which arose from these group activities resulted in the learners behaving with a greater sense of kindness, tolerance, and fairness towards each other.

Growth of Confidence in Voicing Opinions and Making Informed Decisions

As the learners became familiar with the idea that in the reading club their ideas and opinions are valued and encouraged, the learners became very confident at expressing their opinions and making suggestions, such as when asked which story they would like to hear or which book they would like to read. Such activities also introduced the idea of democracy, and compromise: “A quick vote among the learners saw them choosing 'Gouelokkies' ('Goldilocks') as the first story, but some were very keen on the less familiar tale 'Die Heks van Hexrivier' ('The Witch of Hex River') and were disappointed when 'Gouelokkies' received the most votes. [The facilitator] offered a compromise and suggested that they could listen to both seeing as they were so popular.” According to Spielberger and Halpern, respecting children's choice of reading material and the connections children make in their reading is a good way of nurturing children's commitment to literacy (2002: xi).

Even when choosing books individually or in groups, their choices became more informed. The first few times that the learners were given the opportunity to do free reading, they seemed to take almost the first book they saw and sit down with it. Near the end of the observation period, however, learners were discussing books with each other, paging through them, and reading the blurb on the back cover before making a decision, whether individually or as a group. The facilitator observed in the eighth session, “At the table where the books are laid out, I heard some learners recommending books they have read to each other. I notice that the books which I have read aloud to them are particularly popular.”. This shows that several learners frequently chose the books they had already heard being

read aloud, possibly indicating the association of these previously-encountered books with prior pleasant experiences at the reading club. According to Guccione (2011: 568), whose research into inquiry-based instruction is outlined in Chapter Four, creating a collaborative community allows learners to learn with and from each other more easily than in the traditional teacher-directed classroom environment. Learners became more thoughtful when making decisions, and learned to discuss issues with each other and to respect the opinions of their peers, such as when choosing books based on each other's recommendations. According to McGinnis, allowing learners to make group decisions, usually based on mutual interests, promotes interest in the task at hand while also creating a space for learners to share ideas and make shared decisions (2007: 572). Thus, the multiple opportunities created for group and individual decision-making gave learners experience in making decisions, teaching them to appreciate others' points of view, listen to each other's opinions, and compromise if necessary.

Increasing Awareness of and Sensitivity to Diversity, Otherness, and Different Competence Levels

By playing games and taking part in activities with each other, the reading club provided the opportunity for learners from different grades to get to know each other and build ties across the class and grade divisions. When playing games and doing activities, many learners seemed to make an effort to involve those other than their close friends, and made sure that everyone was given a turn. During one outdoor activity, the facilitator noticed that "learners did not only choose to point at their friends when they were in the circle, but were readily choosing learners from other grades and friendship groups," and when learners were asked to divide themselves into groups, the facilitator observed, "three girls remained sitting in the middle of the classroom; they have not yet moved to join a group. I suspected they felt a bit shy about simply joining an established group uninvited so I spotted a group that

was a few members short and suggested that the three girls join them. I was pleased to see the others gladly make space for them and accept them into the group”.

A similar development was observed by Wilson, Jewett and Vanderburg during their observation of the whole-school 'read', mentioned in Chapter Three as well as earlier in this chapter. Prior to the 'read' programme, learners did not often interact across grade divisions, but the variety of reading programme activities on offer, as well as the fact that all learners were engaging with the same book, enabled them to come together a discuss their experiences of reading the same novel, both within and outside the classroom. (Wilson, Jewett and Vanderburg, 2008: 8), thus improving inter-grade relations at the school.

The learners' acceptance of the boy Joshua is another example of their increased tolerance towards each other. Joshua is a boy with severe learning disabilities, who also struggles to cope socially: The facilitator described him as being aggressive, and normally on his own in the classroom or at break time. Regarding Joshua's acceptance by the reading club participants, the facilitator commented

> in class he has been very sensitive about people laughing at him and has been quick to strike out physically, but in reading club he seemed more relaxed and at ease. Perhaps it is because for once he felt part of something—there were learners holding his hand to stand in a circle, playing games with him, laughing with him. The rest of the learners seemed to really enjoy it as well. Yes, they laughed when he got it wrong, just like they laughed at everyone's silly mistakes, and it did not appear to be malicious laughter. They also clapped and cheered encouragingly when he got it right.

During free reading, one of the learners willingly paired up to read with Joshua: “He looked at the pictures while she read. When it was his turn he managed to spell out a few words instead of reading them, and read the easy words like 'the ', 'and'; and 'far'. I saw his partner helping him, pointing out some letters to him, correcting his pronunciation”. This did not only happen with Joshua, but with other learners as well, as the learners helped each other when reading, and learners from different friendship groups and grades were often observed mingling with each other. The learners' acceptance and friendliness towards Joshua is unlike how he was usually treated by the learners during school time. According to Kotze

et al, narratives used in literacy development have the power to build mutual respect between learners (2009: 125). Through all the group activities, playing games, and reading stories together, the learners have grown in tolerance and acceptance of each other, even those who are usually rejected for being slightly different.

Development and Internalisation of a Reading Culture

The Nal'ibali supplements played an important role in the development of the learners' perceptions of reading as a social activity, as well as the development of a reading culture in the learners' homes. This discussion has already referred to Heath (1982: 50), who attests that in order for children to perform well academically, their home environment and the adults who inhabit it should reflect and model school-orientated ways of interacting with literacy artefacts in daily life. Activities such as parents reading bedtime stories to their children or siblings playing 'school-school' all help prepare the child for how they will be expected to respond to texts in the classroom. Similarly, the family environment may be considered the start of the cycle of learning, as the attitudes of parents about learning become the educational values of children (Kanyane, 2004: 41).

The facilitator noted that before the reading club commenced, “many parents as well as some of the learners seemed to think that the reading club consisted more of reading lessons or extra classes”. This suggests that both parents and learners think of literacy in terms of school literacy only—as Perry puts it, school literacy is the “gold standard” (2008: 59). These parents and the learners themselves are not familiar with the notion that reading can be enjoyable and can be done for pleasure, and thus they assume that a programme to improve children's reading will consist of formal instruction. Initially, learners also seemed to view the reading club as something elitist, such as the learners who “asked whether they 'would be allowed to join' the reading club” because they felt they were not accomplished readers, and those who thought it was “just for 'the English children'”. While it was not possible to ascertain how the parents' perceptions of literacy might have changed due to

their children's involvement in the reading club, the fact that many learners attended regularly and enthusiastically hints at a change in their perceptions of literacy from something that is done purely for academic reasons to a more enjoyable and social activity.

When numbers permitted, learners were able to take supplements and mini-books home and were encouraged to share the stories and books with their siblings or their parents in an attempt to develop a reading culture in the learners' homes. Learners seemed genuinely excited to have something to take home to read, as most of them have barely any books in their houses. Even in the first session, learners were observed “proudly carrying the books they have made” on their way out of the classroom. Sending learners home with copies of the supplements soon became a regular activity, and something which the learners eagerly anticipated. In the third session, “before dismissing the group, [the facilitator] distributed old copies of the supplement to the learners to take and read at home”. By having reading material to take home and enjoy at leisure, or share by reading to younger siblings, or have older siblings or parents read with them, the gap between school and home began to be bridged, as reading was seen as not just something done at school, but at home and with family and friends as well. Kanyane views family literacy programmes, which involve parents in their child's literacy development, as a way to break the ongoing cycle of illiteracy, poverty, and underachievement (2004: 41). Although not strictly a 'family' literacy programme, by encouraging learners to share their reading materials with their family, the reading club encourages learners to make literacy a family event in their households.

Later in the observation period, the facilitator reported that some of the learners were not content with merely attending reading club once a week; some of them approached the facilitator with the request to take books home: “At the end of the session, a small group of girls came up to me and asked to borrow a book each and return it to me tomorrow. I agreed and they quickly chose a book each from the cupboard.” This shows that these learners were starting to think of reading and books as something to be enjoyed during their leisure hours as well, as not just at school or after school during reading club. The development of this new behaviour amongst these learners demonstrates how, according to Elley, if books

are made available to learners and they are encouraged to read them, the learners will soon become enthusiastic about the books and will want to read them more frequently (Elley, 2000: 250). The fact that these girls want to take books home indicates a positive change in their perception of reading, and suggest the further development of their reading culture, which was brought about by the regular exposure to pleasurable experiences with books that they experienced in the reading club.

Benefiting from Participation in an Extramural Activity

Much of the value inherent in the concept of the reading club might be the very fact that it occurs after school. In accordance with Britsch et al (2005), the reading club was intended to, as far as possible, offer learners more than simply a duplication of the school day. The learners felt at liberty to express themselves and interact with each other in a way that was considerate to all, but not governed by a fear of authority or possible punishment. In a school with few extra-mural activities on offer besides sporadic netball and rugby, the reading club quickly became a popular and eagerly anticipated activity.

According to Spielberger and Halpern, the distinct benefits of after-school literacy programmes as opposed to formal school-based literacy intervention programmes are mostly thanks to the relaxed, nurturing, and social nature of the after-school reading programmes:

> Children typically see after-school programs as a safe context, with a relatively modest adult agenda. Unlike school, after-school programs are places designed for children to feel successful. Reading and writing efforts are not tied to tests and grades, promotion and retention, and the focus is not on errors but on individual interests, choices and accomplishments. Children not surprisingly enjoy reading and writing more when they know they will not be tested and quizzed on their efforts.
>
> (Spielberger and Halpern, 2002:88)

As an after-school reading programme, the reading club aimed to meet these ideals, by

providing learners with a nurturing and safe environment, free from academic pressure and the threat of humiliation. With regards to the types of activities on offer in the reading club, Britsch, Martin, Stuczynski, Tomala and Tucci (2005) report that common classroom literacy practices such as reading aloud, dramatization and book discussion may be of more benefit to learners within the after-school context as long as the activities presented during the after-school programmes are engaging, expand on their learning in ways that are relevant to them, and, importantly, do not duplicate what is happening during the school day (Britsch et al, 2005: 28), which is what the reading club aimed to provide.

Although attendance was not compulsory as with the sports teams, learners came regularly, and frequently approached the facilitator to ask whether reading club was definitely happening that week. They took pleasure in staying behind after school to participate. Some of the learners' reasons for attending reading club were things like, 'there's nothing to do at home', 'my mother works late so I'm alone all afternoon' and 'if I am at home I have to clean the house and look after my little brothers' (Observation, March 2015). These simple statements reveal the socio-economic condition of the learners (in that most have few entertainments at home, many learners are alone in the afternoons until their parents return from work, and parents often place more importance on household chores than reading or homework). However, they also suggest that the reading club as an after-school activity provides learners with things that they need and want: to be stimulated and occupied in a productive way, to socialise and interact with others, and to take part in enjoyable activities. Spielberger and Halpern claim that reading clubs are effective because they are designed to make learners feel successful, and because the focus is on learners' achievements, not on their errors (2002: 88). These positive feelings brought about by the reading club are what encourage learners to participate. Positive participation in extra-mural activities has also been linked to a smaller likelihood of learners becoming involved in drugs or delinquency (Feldman and Matjasko, 2005: 184 and 190), meaning that learners who attend programmes like the reading club might be less prone to the gangsterism and drug abuse which is so prevalent in the school's community.

It is believed that extracurricular activities such as reading club offer learners a means to express and explore their identity by developing skills, discovering preferences, and associating themselves with others. Being a member of a particular group, such as the reading club, structures the kind of values and norms to which learners are exposed, and helps them to understand themselves by allowing them to observe and interpret their own behaviour. Participation in extracurricular activities also strengthens relationships between learners and teachers or mentors, and builds trust and commitment (Feldman and Matjasko, 2005: 161- 2), as seen in the positive way in which learners began to react to the facilitator after they accepted that at reading club she was not a teacher but rather more like a fellow participant.

Therefore, the learners who participated in the reading club benefited from its operating outside of the norms and rules usually experienced in school. The relaxed yet nurturing environment provided learners with a sense of security, as well as providing opportunities for entertainment and socialisation away from the pressures and authority of the normal classroom.

6.4 SUMMARY OF KEY RESULTS IN TERMS OF THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This chapter provided a discussion of the results obtained from analysis of the qualitative data, which took the form of an auto-ethnographic reflective narrative which was created during observation of the reading club sessions. The data was analysed by identifying patterns and changes in learners' behaviour, attitudes, and abilities in two spheres: firstly, literacy competence, and secondly, personal and social development.

Analysis of the qualitative data showed that the learners who participated in the reading club and its activities underwent an improvement in their literacy competence. Over the course of the observation period, learners demonstrated: an improvement in listening skills and narrative recall abilities; an enhanced appreciation of books and competence in choosing

book; enhanced comprehension and a deeper understanding of narrative structures; greater confidence to read longer texts and write independently; the ability to dramatize stories, construct narratives, and infer meaning from pictures; and increased motivation to read and communicate in their mother-tongue. These are some of the ways in which the after-school reading club programme, which emphasised reading for enjoyment, contributed to the learners' literacy development. The examination of four of the learners' English marks over the course of the term also attest to the success of the reading club in contributing to an improvement in learners' literacy performance in the classroom.

The improvements that were observed in the Winterson Primary learners are similar to those observed by Pretorius and Machet (2008) and Pretorius and Mokhwesana (2009) in their studies on the effect of regular exposure to stories and reading on Grade R and Grade One learners. Although the learners in these two studies were significantly younger than those participating in this study, the results observed over the course of the reading club sessions are similar: by the end of the observation period, learners were displaying an improved ability to tell and retell stories, they were more familiar with the procedures and rituals of storytelling, such as gathering around the storyteller, listening attentively, and joining in with repeated phrases and choruses.

Learners showed an increased awareness of different ways in which reading could be done—alone, with a partner, or in a group; everyone reading together; or taking turns to read and listen. Learners also showed a motivation and eagerness to engage themselves in more literacy activities, usually starting to read as soon as books or supplements were handed out to them, whether in groups or alone. As shown in Pretorius and Mokhwesana's (2009) study, exposure to literacy activities does not necessarily have to occur on a daily basis in order for an improvement to take place. Although the Winterson Primary learners only engaged in the reading club activities for up to two hours per week, they still demonstrated an improvement, much like the learners at one of the schools in Pretorius and Mokhwesana's study who were not granted the same level of exposure to literacy activities as the other participating schools, yet still demonstrated a noticeable improvement in a range

of literacy-related skills.

However, the learners did not only improve their reading skills through participation in the programme. Due to the social nature of literacy, the benefits of the reading club's environment and activities can not only be viewed in terms of improvements in their individual literacy competence, but instead their holistic development must also be considered. The reading club also contributed to learners' personal and social development by creating a nurturing environment which encouraged creativity, confidence, and co-operation amongst the learners. Efforts were also made to increase learners' exposure to culturally relevant and diverse literature, and incorporate their own culture and experiences into group discussions about the texts. Learners also began to show interest in reading in their home languages more frequently.

As a group, the reading club members showed progress during the course of the observation period in areas such as confidence, self-esteem, motivation, and tolerance for others. In general, their group cooperation skills improved, as occurrences of arguing and fighting diminished and eventually disappeared by the end of the observation period. Learners also became more comfortable with working in groups to perform simple tasks such as constructing a group narrative based on an introduction or a picture. Learners also demonstrated a more critical approach to making choices and decisions, such as when choosing books—by the end of the observation period learners were observed discussing the merits of certain books, recommending them to each other, and examining blurbs, covers, and illustrations before deciding to read a particular book. Thus, their choices were based on informed decisions, and not simply taking the first book they saw, as they tended to do initially.

Individual learners such as Bradley and Tamryn stood out due to the noticeable development of their leadership qualities which was observed, as these two learners grew in confidence until they were taking an active role in the running of the reading club itself, taking charge by suggesting games, explaining the rules, and leading the other learners. By the end of the observation period, the participating learners were demonstrating evidence of: increased

recognition of literacy as a social activity; improved group co-operation and collaboration; increased confidence to voice their opinions and think critically to make informed decisions; enhanced leadership skills; greater sensitivity to diversity and otherness; acceptance of learners from different grade, peer, or cultural groups, or competence levels; and the development and internalisation of a reading culture. By participating in the reading club activities, learners gained a greater understanding and acceptance of themselves, their culture and identity, as well as the culture of others in the group.

Many learners showed a change in their perception of reading and books, which ultimately led to a development in their reading culture; learners began to show more enthusiasm towards books, and value the stories within more than they had in the beginning. Learners were also excited about having supplements and mini-books to take home to read, therefore making literacy a regular practice at home as well as at school. By the end of the observation period, some learners were more motivated to read, and were taking the time to read longer texts. There was also an increase in learners asking to take books home in order to finish them, or asking to borrow books to read over weekends. Obviously not all learners demonstrated this increased enthusiasm to the same degree, but the fact that some learners did show a marked improvement in their perception of reading as a pleasurable leisure activity attests to the potential of the reading club programme. If the reading club were to be implemented in every grade in the school, for a longer period of time, many more learners might discover the pleasure to be had in reading for enjoyment, and reap the benefits across their academic, social, and personal lives as the development of a reading culture spreads across the school community.

Thus, the noticeable improvements in learners' literacy competencies attest to the power of reading for pleasure as a tool to improve learners' reading and writing outside of the restrictions of traditional literacy instruction in the classroom. The nature of the reading club, in that it strived to be a caring, encouraging environment conducive to self-expression and individuality, contributed significantly to learners' enhanced appreciation of their own culture, as well as that of others, and allowed learners the opportunity to grow in self-esteem,

self-confidence, and ability to collaborate in groups. This caused the group of learners attending the reading club to grow into a small community which valued tolerance, acceptance, individuality, and teamwork, such as when the group welcomed the participation of the special-needs learner Joshua, or when Bradley and Tamryn worked together to lead the rest of the group in games. Therefore, the results of this study confirm that an extra-curricular reading club focusing on reading-for-enjoyment is able to make a significant contribution to learners' holistic development.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

CONCLUSION

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The results of this study were discussed in detail in the previous chapter, where they indicated that reading clubs have the power to greatly contribute to the enhancement of learners' literacy competence, as well as their personal and social development. This final chapter presents a summary of the objective of this study, as well as a brief outline of the methodological approach and a summary of the results. This chapter also provides an evaluation of this study's significance in relation to prior studies in the field. The implications of the findings of this study are also discussed, as well as the limitations and some of the challenges. Lastly, this chapter suggests some recommendations for further research on the topic of after-school reading clubs, as well as making some recommendations as to how the facilitation of the reading club could be improved in the future.

7. 2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The primary objective of this study was to investigate how reading clubs and their related activities may benefit learners in terms of their literacy development as well as their personal and social development. This study was performed in order to demonstrate how and to what extent reading for enjoyment in an informal, extra-curricular setting can lead to enhancement in learners' literacy skills as well as their personal and social development.

The study took place over the course of four months at Winterson Primary School in Bethelsdorp, Port Elizabeth. A varied group of mostly Grade Six and Seven learners, as well as some Grade Four and Five learners, attended weekly reading club sessions on a voluntary basis in which they engaged in a variety of literacy-related activities, such as listening to stories, dramatizing stories, constructing their own narratives, and 'free reading' in which learners read a book of their choice alone, in pairs, or in a group. Learners also participated in songs, games, and writing activities.

These reading club sessions were observed by the researcher and an auto-ethnographic narrative was drawn up from this ethnographic observation of the learners' behaviour and progression during the sessions. This reflective narrative was the primary source of the qualitative data used in this study. The data was examined in order to find repeated patterns of behaviour or changes in learners' behaviour over the course of the observation period in order to determine whether learners' participation in the reading club's literacy-related activities resulted in any developments or improvements in the learners' literacy competence and/or personal and social development. The marks achieved in English as a school subject by the four most regular attendees of the reading club over three terms were briefly examined in order to determine whether these learners displayed any improvement in their academic achievements.

The analysis of this qualitative data indicated a generally noticeable improvement in various

areas of learners' literacy competence, such as listening to stories, reading, and constructing their own narratives. The analysis also revealed an enhancement in areas of learners' personal and social development, such as leadership, self-confidence, motivation, and tolerance. While these findings cannot be generalised beyond the particular context of this study, the results of this project may serve as a rationale for reading clubs by demonstrating how the Nal'ibali campaign's principles and suggested activities may be practically implemented in an under-resourced environment.

Although a study based on my own narrative and reflections on a process may be seen as unreliable, it is this observation itself which provides the proof of the reading club's effectiveness. According to Alexander, Bloch, et al, founders of PRAESA and the Nal'ibali campaign, a noticeable change in learners' behaviour serves as a measure of the reading club's success in achieving its aims:

> To date, there is no formal assessment to ascertain the ‘success’ of the reading clubs. However, the fact that the children return week in and week out is testimony itself. Moreover, many anecdotal reports from parents and teachers are made about the increased confidence levels of children, and improved reading and writing desires and abilities at home and in class. Thus, success can be ‘measured’ by changes in behaviour
>
> (Alexander, Bloch, et al, 2011: 6)

Although different from traditional qualitative data collection methods, narratives and reflection such as the one which provided the primary data for this study are valid and acceptable discourses for analysis. According to Pavlenko, autobiographic narratives offer insight into otherwise inaccessible perspectives on the process of language learning, and thus constitute a valuable information source for sociolinguistic research (Pavlenko, 2007: 164-165). She lists the positive characteristics of autobiographic narratives as the following:

> They are interesting and thus have aesthetic value and can engage the readers. They are accessible and thus can appeal to larger audiences. They are also textual and thus have reflective value for the readers who are encouraged to imagine alternative ways of being in the world. Most importantly, they are

> transformative as they shift the power relationship between researchers and participants.
>
> (Pavlenko, 2007: 180).

Therefore, the narrative and reflective nature of the data is not a drawback to this study, but rather an advantage, as it provides insights and observations on the learners' progress and participation, and the facilitator's practice, in a way which more traditional methods might not. In this study, for example, the facilitator, although also serving as the researcher, was in fact the true subject of the research, as she was ultimately reflecting on her own practice as facilitator. Thus, the auto-ethnographic reflective narrative served as a source of valid and insightful data.

The preliminary finding of this study was that an extra-curricular reading club programme which focused on providing a nurturing environment and exposing learners to enjoyment-orientated literacy activities successfully resulted in noticeable improvements in learners' literacy competencies, as well as enhancements in various areas of learners' personal and social development. An examination of selected learners' marks (chosen because these learners were among the most regular attendees) over the course of three terms revealed a steady improvement in all four learners' marks from the first term to the third term, which suggests that although the learners received no formal literacy instruction during the reading club sessions, their literacy competence developed significantly enough through reading for enjoyment to contribute to an improvement in learners' performance in formal literacy assessment tasks.

Of course, all learners did not demonstrate improvements in all areas or to the same degree, particularly because attendance of the reading club sessions was completely voluntary, which resulted in some learners attending more regularly than others. However, the noticeable enhancements in learners' abilities that were observed in individual learners as well as the group as a whole indicate the relative success of the reading club programme in improving learners' literacy and holistic development. Learners showed evidence of

increased motivation to read and engage in other literacy-related activities, such as storytelling and listening to stories. The learners who attended most of the sessions showed the greatest change in both their motivation to read, as well as their reading confidence, as they showed clear progression from choosing and reading books aimed at younger readers, to reading more complex, age-appropriate books confidently and independently.

This study differs from the most of the prior studies in the field in two ways. Firstly, this study's focus was on learners in the upper grades of primary school, the Intersen (Intermediate and Senior) Phase, meaning that the learners who participated in this study were mostly in Grades Six and Seven, but some were in Grade Five as well. South African studies such as Bloch (n.d.: 3), Bloch and Nkence (2000: 3), and Pretorius and Mokhwesana (2009: 60), and Pretorius and Machet (2008: 266) were similar to this study in that they examined how meaningful literacy activities such as free reading and storytelling can contribute to an improvement in learners' literacy skills, but these four studies all focused on learners in their early years of formal schooling, that is, Grade R and Grade One learners. Similar US-based studies are also focused predominantly on younger learners, such as the study reported on by Cohen (1968: 209) who investigated the effect of daily story readings on second-grade learners, and Morrow (1992: 27) who examined the impact of an enjoyment-based literacy programme in second-grade classrooms. Only McGinnis (2007), who investigated the benefits of collaborative and multi-modal literacy activities for multilingual and multicultural groups of learners, focused her research on an older group of learners. Thus, this study focuses on an older age group than all of the above-mentioned studies. Even though this study focused on older learners, similar results were obtained in that the improvements observed in the participants of this study were similar to those of the younger learners in these prior studies. This suggests that enjoyment-centred literacy activities are beneficial even to older groups of learners, implying that it is never too late to attempt to improve learners' literacy.

Secondly, with the exception of research done by McGinnis (whose supplementary literacy programme took place over the school holidays), in all of the previously mentioned research,

the literacy activities occurred during formal academic contact time, whereas the reading club sessions that were observed for this study were wholly extra-curricular, occurring after the formal school day had ended. The fact that this study investigated the effects of an extra-curricular reading programme is significant, as learners might have responded differently to the reading club sessions had they felt they were simply a part of the normal school programme. This study is also different to those previously mentioned because it investigated how the reading club could enhance not only learners' literacy skills, but also their personal skills such as self-esteem, leadership, and ability to work in a group, as well as encouraging the development of learners' empathy, tolerance, and appreciation of their own and others' cultures.

However, this study is similar to those mentioned above (particularly the South African studies, namely Bloch [n.d.: 3], Bloch and Nkence [2000: 3], and Pretorius and Mokhwesana [2009: 60], and Pretorius and Machet [2008: 266]) in that the participants of these studies came from communities of low socio-economic status. These studies, as well as the American studies of Morrow (1992: 27) and McGinnis (2007: 570) also focus on learners in multicultural and multicultural school environments, where the learners are often being taught in a language that is not their home language. Although many of the studies which are discussed here took place in the USA, they mostly focussed on learners from multilingual and disadvantaged backgrounds, making them relevant to this study, in which the participants were a multilingual group of learners from a socio-economically disadvantaged area of Port Elizabeth.

Regarding the findings of this study in relation to the prior body of research in the field, the findings of this study were similar to those of previous studies done both locally and internationally. As in Bloch (n.d., 33), who advocates the importance of "using both written and oral forms of language to ensure that children's school life involves literacy activities that are important to them", this study demonstrated the importance of meaningful and relevant reading and writing activities to build learners' motivation and competence. In Bloch and Nkence (2000: 6), a teacher comments on the learners' lack of confidence in their

own writing abilities:

> It quickly became apparent that they [the learners] came to school with a strong perception that they needed to have the teachers show them what to do, and that they should only copy, and not try to spell for themselves. They had a fear that they would 'do it wrong'...But then we did manage to get them to write and the results were amazing. We are getting there. Moving from copying and then trying to write.

This is what was observed happening when the learners participated in writing activities as part of this study. Initially, learners lacked confidence and were overly concerned with whether what they were doing was correct, even asking for permission to write certain words or phrases. By the end of the observation period, however, this behaviour had essentially disappeared, showing how consistent exposure to free writing activities without fear of marks or correction contributed to learners' confidence in their own writing abilities. These findings suggest how learners grew in both confidence and creativity when given the chance to write for themselves, without being restricted by what they were 'allowed' to do or not.

Pretorius and Mokhwesana concluded that the implementation of an intervention programme to improve learners reading skills in Northern Sotho by building a culture of reading at an under-resourced school resulted in "a steady increase in various aspects of reading competence" (2009: 1). This study experienced similar findings, based on the overall improvement in the learners' literacy that was observed, as well as the improvement in a small sample of learners' formal literacy assessments performed as part of their curriculum requirements for English. According to Pretorius and Mokhwesana, increasing learners' motivation to read was a key factor in improving literacy. They say,

> For these children to be successful they need access to books, they need opportunities to read, they need to be motivated to read and they need knowledgeable teachers to help them learn to read. The findings from this study indicate that when these factors are in place, then even in high poverty contexts children can learn to read well and to love reading in their home language (2009: 18).

This statement proved true for the members of the Winterson Primary reading club. By

being exposed to books and stories on a regular basis and in an environment which encouraged enjoyable encounters with literacy, learners developed a positive attitude towards reading, associating it with entertainment, enjoyment, and time spent with friends. The fact that a consistent group of learners continued to attend the sessions even though they were not compulsory is proof that the reading club environment and activities led to an increase in the learners' motivation to read.

The results of Morrow's investigation into the effect of an enjoyment-based literacy programme on learners' literacy achievement, use of literacy, and attitudes towards reading yielded results and observations which are echoed by the results of this study. Morrow concluded that the implementation of regular literature activities and giving learners the opportunity to engage in periods of independent reading and writing led to a substantial increase in the learners' literacy performance (1992: 271). Children who had been exposed to the literacy programme scored better in areas such as comprehension, language complexity, and story retelling, than the control groups who did not participate in the programme (Morrow, 1992: 271). Learners also showed an increased motivation for reading which the learners themselves stated was because reading and writing were made enjoyable by the appealing variety of literacy activities on offer (Morrow, 1992: 273). Similar results to these were observed in this study, with learners demonstrating an increase in their enthusiasm towards reading, and displaying evidence of enhanced literacy abilities. This demonstrates that, like the learners in Morrow's study, the learners at Winterson Primary showed evidence of increased literacy competence in areas such as comprehension, story recall, and construction of narratives, and also showed an improvement in their attitude towards reading, as they grew to associate reading with pleasure.

McGinnis researched how inquiry-based literacy projects in which learners work in collaborative groups can aid the literacy development of learners from diverse backgrounds, particularly when the LoLT is not the learners' home language (2007: 573). By encouraging learners to use their home languages in the discussion of their project as well as a variety of sources including their own knowledge and members of the community, McGinnis

demonstrated the importance of making literacy activities collaborative, culturally relevant, and of personal interest to learners. These findings are similar to what was observed in this study, namely that by encouraging learners to use their home language and making literacy activities relevant and interesting to their cultural backgrounds and personal lives, teachers create more opportunities for learners to share their opinions and engage more easily with literacy practices (2007: 573). Being encouraged to read, write and communicate in their home language encouraged learners to feel more comfortable and proud of their mother tongue, and discussions about learners' personal experiences in relation to the text helped learners to engage more easily with the stories, as well as making them aware of the value of their culture. The learners in the reading club responded well to traditional folk tales that had been adapted for the South African context, as well as the Nal'ibali supplement stories which featured in both their text and illustrations characters and settings with which the learners could identify.

7.3 PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study confirm that learners' competence in a variety of literacy-related fields, as well as their holistic development in terms of the development of important personal and social skills can be positively affected by an extra-curricular programme which focuses on reading for enjoyment, writing for real reasons, and enjoyable and collaborative literacy-related activities. These findings suggest several important factors that Winterson Primary, or any school who wishes to contribute to their learners' development in a similar way, should consider when implementing strategies for improving literacy. Firstly, the emphasis should be on reading for enjoyment, as learners are only motivated to read more when it becomes a pleasurable activity devoid of the fear of failure, punishment or embarrassment. Language teachers at the school should provide learners with more opportunities for leisure reading, instead of only requiring that learners read curriculum-based texts, such as worksheets, textbooks, and grade-level readers. For example, the school could implement a weekly reading period, where learners are free to read a book or

magazine of their choice alone, in pairs, or in a small group. In the Foundation Phase, even reading one story a day to the children could prove beneficial. Winterson Primary should endeavour to enlarge the small library which currently only serves the Foundation Phase learners, so that learners from all grades in the school are able to borrow books to take home.

In an attempt to encourage parents to build a culture of reading in their home, learners' parents should be informed of the benefits of creating opportunities for their children to engage in meaningful and enjoyable literacy activities in their own homes. Teachers could hold workshops for parents to share ideas for how literacy can be incorporated in parent-child activities in the home. Examples of these activities include: visiting a library to choose books, reading together and talking about books and stories, and writing for real reasons, such as making a shopping list or writing in a birthday card.

7.4 LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

Although this project was carefully prepared, the researcher was aware of its limitations and shortcomings. Firstly, because the population of the reading club group under observation was relatively small, and situated within a specific socio-cultural context, what was observed amongst them might not necessarily be applicable to the general primary school learner population. Many learners did not attend the sessions regularly, meaning that many of the learners were not exposed to the literacy activities of the reading club as consistently and regularly as the others. Thus, not all learners would have demonstrated enhanced competencies to the same degree as those who attended every session. In order to counteract this, observation focused primarily on the group as a generalised whole, and when the observation did concentrate on individual learners in order to present their changes in behaviour as evidence for the success of the reading club programme, it tended to focus on those who attended regularly. In addition, since the observation was conducted by the researcher while facilitating the reading club sessions, it is unavoidable that a certain degree of subjectivity was reflected. However, auto-ethnography chooses to acknowledge this

subjectivity and recognise the way that personal experience influences one's research (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011); therefore, this is not so much a shortcoming as a valuable aspect of an ethnographic study. The reliability of this study is due to the study being based on past best practice, as insights will be drawn from relevant case studies and similar research that was be analysed in the literature review, as well as the researcher's own personal experience as a teacher working in this specific context.

7.5 CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH THIS STUDY

There were several challenges experienced over the course of this study. Firstly, the regularity and frequency of the reading club sessions was often negatively affected by outside factors beyond the researcher's control. Several sessions were missed due to learners not attending school during mass protests against teacher shortages in which most Northern Areas schools were closed for almost two weeks. Urgent staff meetings, school camps and excursions, unexpected early dismissal of learners, high rates of absenteeism due to bad weather, and an irregular school timetable, were all outside factors which often resulted in reading club having to be postponed until the following week. This meant that often two or three weeks would go by without a reading club session being held, whereas, at other times, it was possible to hold two sessions a week in an attempt to catch up the missed sessions. This resulted in the reading club taking place irregularly, meaning that learners' exposure to the literacy activities was not consistent.

The voluntary nature of the reading club also contributed to a lack of consistency regarding attendance. Because reading club was not compulsory, some learners attended the sessions more frequently than others. Initially, the attendance at the reading club was very high, sometimes almost sixty learners, but many learners stopped attending until gradually the attendance figures dropped to about twenty-five learners per session. The reasons as to why some of these learners stopped attending after several weeks could merit further research. For example, the school's timetable proved problematic, as the school only allowed one day

per week (usually Tuesdays) for all extra-mural activities to take place. Learners therefore were essentially faced with a choice as to whether they wanted to attend the reading club or take part in a sport. This also resulted in irregular attendance from some learners, who were only able to attend reading club when sports practices were not happening. The clash between sport and reading club also suggests why there were so many learners in the beginning of the year, before school sports had started. This might also be a possible reason as to why not many boys participated in the reading club—boys might have experienced pressure from friends or family to take part in sport rather than reading club, or simply just preferred to play sport rather than read (this issue of gender in relation to literacy is one that also deserves further investigation). Learners' inconsistent attendance meant that it was more difficult to accurately observe behavioural changes or development in the group of learners as a whole because different learners attended every week. However, insisting on the learners attending reading club on a compulsory basis would have gone against the idea of reading club being voluntary and enjoyable, and would also have resulted in challenges for this study. Due to the varying attendance levels of learners, they were observed as individuals as well as a group, and those learners that attended almost every session (such as Tamryn, Kaylie, Mickayla, and Bradley) were usually the ones who showed the most noticeable changes in their abilities and behaviour and who ultimately provided the most evidence of how the reading club benefited their development.

Another challenge experienced in this study was finding ways to encourage learners to continue their enthusiasm for reading outside of the reading club sessions. The Nal'ibali supplements were frequently given to learners to take home so that they would have something to read, and learners were encouraged to share the stories and mini-books within the supplement with their parents, siblings, and other family members in order to contribute to the development of a reading culture within their own homes. However, because observation only took place during the reading club sessions, there was no way of knowing to what extent learners made use of these supplements in their home environment, if at all.

7.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Were this study to be repeated or developed for further research, such as a PhD, I would make several changes to how the study was facilitated and how research was undertaken. Analysis of the reflective narrative suggests ways in which the reading club setting and procedure could be changed in order to provide a better literacy experience for the learners. Firstly, I would recommend observing the reading club sessions for a longer period of time, perhaps a full academic year or even two years, in order to give the learners more exposure to the reading club's literacy activities and thus be able to observe their progress more longitudinally.

I would also like to attempt a follow-up study using quantitative data in addition to the qualitative data obtained through ethnographic observation. The focus of this study was on whole child development, with reading and literacy as a vehicle for encouraging this development. However, a follow-up study could potentially focus on evaluating improvements in learners' literacy skills only. Learners' literacy skills could be formally assessed before and after the participation period in order to obtain empirical proof of whether and to what degree learners' literacy skills were enhanced by their participation in the reading club. The challenge of such a study would, of course, be determining how best to 'measure' the learners' literacy development. As previously mentioned, this study did not use learner responses in the form of surveys, questionnaires, or interviews as a source of data. As previously mentioned, data collected from these learners using such methods is unreliable due to the learners' desire to give the answer that they think is expected of them, in order to please teachers and other adults. Data collected in this manner would not have been appropriate for this study, in which analysis and processing of the reading club activities and its facilitation was the objective of the research.

One of the objectives of this research was to determine how the facilitation of the reading

club could be improved in order to provide a more enriching experience for the participating learners. In order to improve on the facilitation of the reading club, I would make the following changes: Firstly, I would endeavour to hold the sessions more often, perhaps twice a week, in order to increase the frequency of learners' participation to the reading club. I would also attempt to find a non-classroom space in which to hold the reading club, such as a small hall or even an unused classroom which could be transformed into a comfortable, nurturing environment, free of rows of desks and other furniture which could make the space feel too much like a classroom. Another idea would be to distance the reading club from the school setting even more, and hold it on weekends in a community centre or church hall, much like the flagship Nal'ibali reading club in Langa. This would make the reading club more of a community event and open the participation to learners from the whole community, not just from Winterson Primary, which would also allow parents to observe and join in the activities, or help out by reading to groups or telling stories. I would also involve the older or more proficient learners in more peer tutoring and group reading activities, as these seemed popular amongst all levels of learners. I would also like to allow more time for writing activities, as I feel retrospectively that not enough emphasis was placed on writing over the course of the observation period. I would also like to expand the variety of activities on offer to the learners during 'free' time, by including more interactive elements such as board games, puppets, and art supplies in order to give learners a wider variety of literacy experiences. By making these improvements to the facilitation of the reading club, learners can be given even more opportunities to develop their literacy through meaningful and enjoyable activities.

APPENDIX:

REFLEXIVE NARRATIVE OF OBSERVATIONS MADE DURING THIS STUDY

Session One

This was the first reading club session for the year. The reading club was advertised verbally during class time over the past few days, as well as by a notice on the reading club notice board on my classroom door. The school was dismissed at half-past one today, and it was not long before my classroom was filled to capacity with excited, eager Grade Six and Seven learners. A quick head count revealed the number in attendance to be almost 60. Most of the learners were girls; there were only three boys present, one of whom attended reading club regularly last year. I recognise a handful of other learners who are now in Grade Seven, who attended the reading club last year.

I could see immediately that such a large group was going to be a problem. Seating space in the classroom was an issue, as the learners needed to sit three or four to a desk in order for everyone to have a seat. I was also concerned about how I would manage to control so many children at once, and whether I would have enough resources. However, I knew from past experience that in a few weeks some of the learners would have lost interest, which would result in a smaller, more manageable group. The Nal'ibali guidelines recommend one adult per 10 children, but unfortunately I don't think that would ever be possible at this school. The only other teacher who showed any interest in helping me with the reading club was Miss Petersen, whom I hope will shortly be starting a reading club for the Grade Four and Five learners. As learners entered the classroom and found a spot to sit, the other learners waited expectantly. They were chatting loudly and there were some excited shrieks and laughs.

After about five minutes I looked out into the hallway, saw that no one else seemed to be

on their way to my classroom, and decided to begin with the session. When I returned from the door the learners looked at me expectantly. They were quiet, like they are in class, waiting for the teacher to begin with the lesson. I thought that hopefully over time they would start to understand that the reading club was not meant to be like school. I wanted them to enjoy it and get excited about what we did, but obviously I still expected them to show good manners. Unfortunately, the classroom was not the ideal space for the reading club; a room with a carpet and cushions for them to relax on would have been better than this classroom with its cramped upright desks, but I knew that there was little to no chance of such a facility ever being made available at the school. I talked for a few minutes about the reading club and what the learners could expect from the sessions. I felt that this was important to do because many parents as well as the learners seemed to think that the reading club consisted more of reading lessons or extra classes. Some learners came to me earlier in the day and asked whether they 'would be allowed to join' the reading club, because they do not read very well. Another group of children also asked me whether it was just for 'the English children', the learners in the English Home Language class of each grade, or whether it was only for the children who 'were good at reading'. While addressing the reading club, I made sure they understood that I would not be 'teaching' them reading; I repeatedly stressed that we were there to enjoy the experience of reading books and sharing stories with each other, no matter how good or bad one's reading is. I asked for a quick show of hands as to who was in Grade Six and who was in Grade Seven, and the split seemed fairly equal. While talking to them, I constantly switched between English and Afrikaans, most often saying something first in one language and then repeating it in the other language. I explained to them that the reading club recognises all languages, and encouraged learners to speak, read and write in their mother tongue or in whichever language they felt most comfortable.

Last year I usually started each session with some sort of physical activity, such as a game or easily learnt song, such as one involving repetition or call-and-response. This week, because the group was so large I decided to take them outside to the netball courts where we would have more space and any noise they made would not be so loud. On my

instruction, they left the classroom in an excited mass, and on the netball courts in the wind, I had them form a circle. It took a few minutes for everyone to be part of the circle, and for the circle to be an appropriate size. For today's game I chose a story-song which was explained in the Nal'ibali guidelines, Lion Hunt. It has always worked well because the song is spoken more than sung, and the lyrics are in call-and-response format. I led the group through the song and they picked it up quickly, marching in place in time with the rhythm and accurately copying the movements and words. Some even started to say the words along with me instead of only waiting for the next line. When we came into the middle of the circle they laughed. For the final verse, they quickly followed my lead to speak softer and slower, and creep carefully into the middle of the circle. When I roared like a lion at them for the finale, they shriek and run out of the circle laughing. I am surprised and relived that everyone seemed to enjoy it; I was concerned that they might be too old for songs with actions and that they would not respond, but they seemed to all join in with enthusiasm. I herded the group back inside the classroom and continued with the session.

In keeping with the theme, I read them a picture book called *Lazy Lion*. When I announced the book, the learners seemed genuinely excited at the prospect and it took a while before they were all sitting in their desks. I had to encourage them to move closer to me and to gather round so that they would be able to hear and see properly. After a few moments, they were quiet, looking up at me expectantly. Again I was surprised at their delight in the simple story. The book was a typical picture book, with only a sentence or two on each page, the text aimed more likely at Foundation Phase learners, but the learners enjoyed the story of the lion who orders the other African animals to build him a home, and each time he was not happy with it. As the story progressed, I asked the learners what they thought would happen next—they seemed unwilling to participate, whether from shyness or from not knowing, I am not sure. They were particularly drawn into the colourful illustrations; I heard gasps and exclamations of admiration at a particularly beautiful scene of weaver birds flying towards a tree, and the entire class laughed openly at the illustration of Lion stuck in a hollow tree stump with only his head and tail sticking out at either end. I commented on the pictures as I showed them to the class, and explained what was happening briefly in

Afrikaans. They applauded after the reading.

The last activity of the session was folding the mini-books from the latest Nal'ibali supplement. The title of the mini book was *How the Lion Got His Roar*, rounding off the theme of the day nicely. It was chaotic in the class for the next few minutes, as I attempted to share 28 supplements between almost 60 children, and they immediately set to work folding and cutting the books. There weren't many pairs of scissors so learners were encouraged to share and pass them on when they were done. Some failed to follow the instructions and cut along the wrong lines so their books fall apart. Joshua, a boy with severe learning disabilities who is prone to aggressive behaviour and seizures, could not seem to understand that there were not enough supplements for everyone to get their own one, and that he had to share with another boy. Once the books were cut and folded, I let the class read the story in their groups. Again, it was noisy and chaotic, and to be honest I'm not sure how much reading was done. Amidst the high volumes of noise, there were small pockets of learners sitting very quietly as they read. Demi and Chanelle, two learners from my Grade Six Mathematics class were deeply absorbed as they read the book together. I noticed a group of three Xhosa girls reading together, and walked over to talk to them. I was interested to see that they were reading the English text, even though the story appeared in isiXhosa as well. I pointed out to them that they are allowed to read the isiXhosa one and that they shouldn't feel like they must only read in English. Surprisingly, they said that they 'can't read isiXhosa', and that it is too difficult. “English is easier to read, teacher,” they said, “we can speak isiXhosa but we don't know how to read it'”. I pointed out to them they perhaps they should start using the bilingual stories to slowly teach themselves how to read isiXhosa, by comparing the English and the isiXhosa text. After a few more minutes, it was time to dismiss the learners, and they departed. Many greeted and thanked me on the way out, proudly carrying the books they have made.

Session Two

This week's session was even better attended than the last week's. I must admit, I am a little

daunted by the group who came streaming into my classroom after the school bell rang at two o' clock. Obviously, I was pleased to see such an interest from the children. Other than two or three sports at the school (volleyball, netball, rugby) there is not much in the way of extra-mural activity, so I am glad to be able to offer them something. I still expect that the numbers dwindle a little as time goes by. Miss Petersen was sitting in on the session today, so that she could get an idea of what the reading club entails before she starts facilitating the Grade Four and Five group. There seemed to be more children than last week; a few came up to me to ask if it was okay that they attended today's session, because they were not present at the previous one. Perhaps word is getting around amongst the kids about the reading club?

I took them outside onto the rugby field to play a simple game called 'Fruit Salad' – learners stood in a circle and were allocated the name of one of four fruits (e.g. Apple, banana, orange, pear). When the name of their fruit was called, learners raced across the circle and stood in another place. If I shouted 'Fruit salad!' than everybody had to run to another place. It's a simple game, without much point to it really, other than letting the kids run around, but they seemed to really enjoy it. One or two people tripped while running but no one was hurt (good thing I have them on the rugby field and not on the concrete netball courts!) I tried to trick them by calling out the names of other fruits, and there was much hilarity when Onesimo started running when I called out 'watermelon'. The kids also seemed to enjoy the fact that I took part in the game as well. After a few rounds we went back inside.

Once inside, they settled in the desks for story-time. This week, unlike last week, I didn't have to tell them to sit down and be quiet in preparation for the story—they do it on their own. I chose an Afrikaans version of the fairy tale 'Hansel and Gretel', ('Hansie en Grietjie') to read to them. It was a more complex text than the one of the previous week, but I was hopeful that most of them were familiar with the story, and there were lovely illustrations to show them. I asked them if they knew how fairy tales generally begin, and the group confidently shouted out 'once upon a time' and 'lank, lank, gelede'. By a show of hands, only about ten of them were familiar with the story (possibly because it's one of the few that

has not yet been made into a Disney movie?). I started reading, in Afrikaans, stopping every few lines to offer a summary in English, mostly for the benefit of the African learners whose Afrikaans might not be so good. As with the *Lazy Lion* last week, even though they were Grade Six and Seven, the learners enjoyed the story with childlike fervour, gasping at the cruelty of the stepmother who plans to abandon the children in the wood, and exclaiming in delight at the picture of the witch's gingerbread house, and again gasping in horror when they hear of the witch's plan to eat the children. I do not think they were 'putting on' – their excitement seemed genuine. I heard some of them predicting what they thought would happen next ("Hy sal die klippies gebruik om terug huis toe te gaan" ... "the birds are going to eat the crumbs" ..." Ek dink daai ou vrou is die heks!" ...) and I stopped occasionally to ask for their ideas, which they shared eagerly. Afterwards, I asked them about the message of the story, and a few confidently called out, "Be careful of strangers!", "Don't take sweets from people you don't know!", "Don't go into strange people's houses!" and so on.

For the final activity, I handed out Nal'ibali supplements containing the first instalment a two-part story called 'A Little Bit' and gave the learners time to free-read the story. Again, it was raucous and noisy, but not quite as bad as last week. I saw many more learners reading intently. I noticed that the illustration accompanying the story showed houses which look just like the RDP houses in the community in which most of the learners live. I had a few instances of having to warn learners about their behaviour (someone hitting someone else, someone doesn't want to share the supplement) and reminded the group that if anyone misbehaves they could be asked to leave. Before I dismissed them, I asked for a summary of the story, which they provided, and we shared a laugh about Sibu, the boy whose sneezes blow washing off the line and blow away children's homework. We tidied the classroom by picking up papers from the floor and throwing them away before I dismissed the class.

Session Three

To my relief, the group was slightly smaller this week, but only just—there were just over 50 learners in attendance. They seemed to be used to things now. They gathered quickly and quietly, finding a seat, squeezing into a desk with their friends, into their regular spot.

We started the session off with another call-and-response song. I enjoy using these for the reading club because the lyrics and repetitive nature make the songs easy to pick up; even those who don’t know the words will soon get the hang of it. This one, however, most of them know; in fact, I have heard them sing it on the bus whilst on excursions, so I knew they were familiar with it. The adapted version of the song goes like this, with me saying the line first and the learners repeating it: “Everywhere we go / People want to know / who we were / so we tell them / we were the reading club / the Winterson reading club”

This was repeated, but each time with a new word in place of Winterson: I used Bethelsdorp, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, at first, then moved on to adjectives—wonderful, fantastic, amazing, followed by some verbs, such as reading, writing, singing, playing. When the learners got into the pattern and rhythm, I started pointing at some of them and letting them fill in the word. At first they were hesitant, some were shy and shook their heads, or they couldn't think of a word in time, so I moved on to someone else, but some showed impressive creativity: One girl's offering was “the super-mazing reading club”, others suggested “super-duper”, “having-fun”, and “funny-bunny”. Throughout the song the learners participate with gusto, both with singing and clapping in rhythm. I felt like the kids would be able to carry on doing this forever, but as I began to get out of breath I brought it to a close and the learners applauded themselves enthusiastically. I got the feeling they would be very disappointed if for some reason I did not start a session with a game or song.

We moved on to a reading activity. We had to finish the story we started last week about sneezing Sibu. I asked them to remind me what we read the previous week, and was almost bombarded by the shouts as they jubilantly remembered all the funny things that happened when Sibu sneezed. This also helped the handful of learners who weren't present last week to catch up and to know what was happening. I handed out the supplement pages and was pleased to see the kids start reading immediately, some out loud, some silently, without any prompting from me. They seemed genuinely excited to read and find out what happened to Sibu. Today though, I wanted to try something different: there was a lot of dialogue in this story so I called for some volunteers who would like to read out loud in front of the class,

almost like a mini-drama. Surprisingly, the ones who volunteered were all Afrikaans Home Language learners, although the story was in English. I quickly assigned them characters and I took the role of the narrator. I reminded the rest of the group that they haven't practised so to give them a chance if they got stuck, but generally the actors did very well, occasionally losing their place but managing to read their parts successfully. Some even put in some great moments of expression or humour, which the rest of the class enjoyed. I involved the rest of the class by making them participate whenever the story read "everybody smiled" or "everybody laughed". The class applauded the actors and themselves enthusiastically afterwards. For the closing activity, I read them a story from an anthology which I was sent by Nal'ibali last year, a collection of South African stories. I chose "The Girl who wanted to Find the stars" and read it for the learners. Halfway through, I wondered if it was such a good choice—the reader must suspend disbelief and accept that it was perfectly possible for a little girl from rural south Africa to simply arrive at a space station and get on a rocket to the stars, and sometimes I feel that these kids struggle to identify with things that are too fantastical, so I am often torn between attempting to expand their horizons with something out of the ordinary, and sticking to texts which would be relevant and relatable to them. However, they seem to enjoy the story despite my concerns. The only downside was that the book was smaller format than a typical picture book, and so the illustrations were not very easy for the learners at the back of the class to see. Perhaps in future I should stick to larger format books so that everyone can see the pictures clearly. Before dismissing the group, I distributed old copies of the supplement to the learners to take and read at home. There was much excitement over this, and the learners were eager to have something to take home with them. I hope that perhaps by taking some reading material home, they can involve their parents more in their reading, by showing them what we do in reading cub, and possibly even reading a story to their siblings or friends.

Session Four

There were fewer children at today's session – 43 – which was a pleasant change from the previous group size of sixty-odd. I had another game in mind, but Bradley and Tamryn (two

Grade Sevens who were regular attendees last year) ask if we can play 'Doggie Doggie, Where's Your Bone?' so I agreed. I quickly explained the rules and we got started. It is a simple game which involves one learner, the 'doggie', turning their back and closing their eyes, while their 'bone' (in this case, the blackboard eraser) was hidden under someone's desk. When the class chants “Doggie, doggie, where's your bone?” the doggie turns around and is given three chances to guess who has it. Much to my surprise, no one today was able to correctly guess who had the bone. Perhaps it's because it’s such a large group so it's difficult to watch everyone to see if they were smiling or were showing other signs of guilt. After a few rounds, just as I was about to end the game, Bradley calls out, “Nou is dit Juffrou se beurt!” (“Now it's Teacher's turn!”) and I agreed laughingly. Sportingly, the kids say I can have five chances if I want, but I stick with three, jokingly accusing the kids of feeling sorry for me by giving me extra turns. Sure enough, I fail to guess correctly, much to the children's delight. I'm glad that Bradley suggested it, and that the others were so quick to side with him. It shows that they're starting to relax and enjoy the reading club, and not see me in quite as much of a teacher role.

For the next activity, I borrowed a CD player from one of the Grade One teachers. Last year, when GM Foundation donated some books to the reading club, included were two collections of stories in Afrikaans with audio CDs, so I thought I would give them a try today. A quick vote among the learners saw them choosing 'Gouelokkies' ('Goldilocks') as the first story, but some were very keen on the less familiar tale 'Die Heks van Hexrivier' ('The Witch of Hex River') and were disappointed when 'Gouelokkies' received the most votes. I offered a compromise and suggested that we could listen to both seeing as they were so popular. The children seemed engrossed from the moment the storyteller on the CD began. Because most of them were familiar with the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears, they started joining in with certain phrases which were repeated throughout the story. They enjoyed the different voices put on by the narrator, especially the squeaky voice of the baby bear.

The second story, 'Die Heks van Hexrivier', was unfamiliar to me as well as them, and turned

out to be a bit of a ghost story. Still, they were interested, particularly in the pictures included in the storybook which I held up to show them. Afterwards, they told me that they liked the atmospheric music which played softly in the background during the story. There was a very excited discussion afterwards when I asked them to share any ghost stories that they had heard within the community—I was told a chilling (and apparently true) story about a learner at the school who died a few years ago after breaking into the school's roof and falling through the ceiling, who apparently haunts the school, and strange tales of the 'Bubbaloon Vrou' who is a witch-sort of figure who is supposed to carry off children who go outside after dark in the Northern Areas. Afterwards, I gave a rough translation of the story into English for those whose Afrikaans might not be so good.

For the final activity, I handed out two Nal'ibali supplements containing the story of 'The Boerewors Man', a retelling of 'The Gingerbread Man' in a South African context. While part of me will always prefer the original of such stories, I am glad for the learners' sake that it has been made more relevant to them, because I'm sure that not many of them were familiar with the particularly European gingerbread. I started reading the story but stopped after a paragraph to see if someone wanted to read. Ameera, a Grade Seven girl who read well for me during their prepared reading assessment for English the past week, put her hand up and she read very well, really accentuating the emotion in the excited shouts and screams of the characters. When it was time for the Boerewors Man to sing his song, the whole class spontaneously joined in to chant it together. Through the story, several more kids volunteered to read, some struggled on certain words and there were a few laughs which I quashed as soon as I could, reminding learners that we don't laugh at each other's mistakes and that we were all here to learn. Ameera wanted to read again so I let her. She was by far one of the best readers in the group.

Session Five

The number of learners seemed to be settling, with 43 attending again this week. A quick show of hands revealed that most were Grade Sevens, with only about a dozen Grade Six

learners and a small group of Grade Fives who were so desperate to join the reading club that I could not say no. As usual, there were only two boys. The game we started off with was similar to the classic game 'Simon Says' – I called out a number from one to five and held up some fingers to the class. They needed to follow my verbal instructions and hold up the correct number of fingers, even if I for instance called out “three” and held up two fingers, they should all hold up three: Verbal instructions were what they had to follow. After a brief explanation and some practice rounds, we got started, and the learners responded enthusiastically. Most were good sports and sat down of their own accord when they realised they held up the wrong number of fingers. There were a few accusations thrown around as someone insisted the person next to them got it wrong but the accused was adamant they were still in, but I chose not to press the issue and carried on. I encouraged good sportsmanship but I also am trying to discourage the learners from the cycle of tattling which seems to persist in every class in the school—the learners love pointing out what others are or are not doing, which is incredibly disruptive in the classroom. That was why when we played games in the reading club, I reminded the learners to focus on themselves, not on the others, in the hope that they might carry this behaviour over to the classroom. After several rounds, there were only about 10 learners left in the game, and even though I picked up the pace and included my other five fingers in order to have the numbers range from one to 10, they proved difficult to eliminate, and eventually I gave up, declaring all those who were still standing the winners.

I decided to try something a bit different today, by letting the learners read books in groups. Up until now, I haven't yet let the learners handle and read the small collection of books I have in the cupboard. They have only experienced them when I read to them from one. Previously, I felt that the group was too big and there would not be enough suitable books, so I did not let them read them in order to prevent mass arguments and disagreements amongst the 60 learners. However, now that the group was a little smaller, I felt that I was able to control them a bit more. I felt very protective over these books-some I have bought myself, but most were donated. I am very particular about how I handle books of any kind, and having seen how carelessly the learners treat their school textbooks, part of me was a

little reluctant to 'turn them loose' on these pristine story- and picture-books for fear they would be damaged. Before we began I gave the learners a little talk and demo about how precious books were and how they must be treated with respect, not only because they were expensive, but because of the wealth of information within them. I demonstrated how to correctly turn pages, how to handle the books, and asked for suggestions as to how we could look after the books. The learners made good suggestions such as not bending covers back or breaking the spine, ensuring one has clean hands, not eating and drinking while reading, etc. I then let the learners divide into groups of four. Here and there was a group of five or three, but I accepted it as the division was quick and easy and most seemed to have gravitated towards their friends. Prior to the session beginning, I had chosen 13 books from the cupboard which I thought would be appropriate for the learners to read together. It did feel strange handing picture books out to Grade Six and Sevens, but at least I knew that the illustrations and simple storyline would hold their interest, and the text was of a level which all in the group would understand. I saw two groups made up of slightly stronger learners, so I was sure to allocate books to them of a higher level. Still, all of the books were picture books, with illustrations and fairly simple text, mostly English but a few in Afrikaans. I told the groups they could read in any way they wanted to, and reminded them not to force people to read who did not want to.

Over the next half hour, I observed the reading. All the groups were occupied with their books. No-one seemed bored or unwilling to participate. In a group of Grade Six girls, two girls in the group, Mickayla and Kaylie, took turns reading out loud to the others. They emulated typical 'teacher' style story-reading, holding the book in front of them and reading, and then showing the pictures to the rest of the group. I noticed that this group took quite a long time to finish their book—they were reading slowly and precisely, and spending time looking at the pictures. The other three girls listened intently with big smiles.

In a mostly Grade Seven Afrikaans learner group, the book was placed in the middle of the group, and they each took turns to read a few lines, allowing all of the group members to see the text at the same time while one of the others was reading. When the reader

encountered a difficult word, the others chimed in with it and then allowed the reader to continue. They turned the pages quickly and did not spend much time looking at the pictures. Because there were some strong readers in this group, they finished their first book quite soon and so I gave them another.

In another group of Grade Five girls, the entire group read the story together, line for line. I've noticed that especially in the younger grades, much of the reading work done in the classroom is done this way at the school—loud, chanting, sing-song style reading, with forty learners reading all together. I wondered if this is why these girls are reading like that, because it is what they have experienced as reading in the classroom?

In a group of Grade Seven English home language learners, there appears to be a rift. The two boys, Bradley and Caleb, seem to have split off from the others, girls who were engrossed in *Pinocchio*. I give them another book and they read this together, but silently, waiting until they were both done with the page before turning to the next one. The girls read this longer story of Pinocchio together, taking turns to read paragraphs. The boys called me and asked me how to pronounce the name of the alien Flerg in their book—one claimed it was 'flurg' while the other gave it a more Afrikaans pronunciation of 'vlerg' (almost like the Afrikaans word 'vlerk') I pointed out that seeing the alien was from another planet, none of us know how his name was pronounced so I would say both pronunciations were correct. The boys seem satisfied with this and continued reading.

One mixed group of Grade Six and Seven girls at the back of the class were laughing loudly. They have been doing all the animals noises in the book, and actually starting to act out some of the scenes while they read. From a distance, I heard raised voices and movement and thought there was an argument brewing, but when I went over there I saw that Carly was only being a trumpeting elephant, while Chelsey was playing the part of grumpy rhinoceros. They laughed when I told them I thought they were fighting about something.

Session Six

Once again, there were about 40 learners at this week's session. One or two came to me during the course of the day to excuse themselves. Bradley asked me if we could play 'Broken Telephones' and I willingly agreed. He'd been asking to play this game for the last week, so I was happy to oblige. Last year when I played this game with the reading club, I did it with the entire group at once. However, that was only when I had about 25 to 30 learners attending regularly. This time, I felt that things could get silly if the circle was too big, so I had the learners split up into four groups. Of course, friendship groups rapidly came together, as most of them were sitting near each other anyway. Three girls remained sitting in the middle of the classroom; they hadn't moved to join a group. I suspect they felt a bit shy about simply joining an established group uninvited, so I spotted a group that was short a few members and suggested that the three girls join them. I was pleased to see the others gladly made space for them and accepted them into the group. I briefly explained the rules, for those who didn't know the game, and they began. I encouraged them to try passing some messages in English and some in Afrikaans, to keep things interesting. Very soon the classroom was filled with laughter as the message in its garbled state was revealed, having been passed around the circle from person to person. I wandered around and watched, listening to the final message and asking what the original one was. The learners clearly enjoyed the simple hilarity of this game. I left them to play for about fifteen minutes, to allow as many as possible to have a turn to come up with a sentence to pass around. They did not seem to get bored with the game; fifteen minutes on the laughter was just as loud as before. I had a bit of a job to quiet them down enough to read them a story, this time it was a book called *The Ghost Library*. I chose it because of its message about how stories can be created by anyone, as I would like to encourage the learners in their own creativity. Before we started I showed them the cover and asked them to name the title, author, and illustrator which they did comfortably, having become familiar with these terms. I turned quickly through the first few pages of the books showing them the pictures, and asking for their suggestions as to what they think the story will be about. They started with the obvious answers – “Ghosts”, “A library”, but then start to give more detailed suggestions, such as “A girl who reads books to ghosts”, “Ghosts who have a library and like reading”, “Ghosts

that aren't scary but like to help children to read". As I read I stopped and asked for suggestions as to what would happen, and the learners impressed me with their creativity: "Maybe the ghosts will keep her there forever", "The ghosts will write a story about themselves" and so on. The story was well received by the learners, who particularly enjoyed the ghosts' funny names, and the story-within-the story about the witch's smelly socks. After the story, I let them read in groups again, like the previous week. The groups that the learners formed were very much the same, but this time I let them choose their books from a selection. Some of the groups immediately went for a book they had read previously: I heard some saying, "This was a nice book. Let's read this again". I was also pleased to hear someone comment, "Chante said this one's nice. Let's read this one". Some groups, on the other hand, went for completely new books. Again I witnessed a variety of reading styles, some in groups, taking turns, some groups reading aloud all together, and some group broke up into smaller groups.

Session Seven

The group was slightly smaller again this week as about 30 learners were in attendance. About half were Grade Seven and the other half were Grade Six. The game we started off with was a simple clapping game, 'Who Stole the Cookie from the Cookie Jar?" in which learners took turns to accuse each other of 'stealing the cookie', deny it, and pass the accusation on to someone else. It took them a while to grasp the rhythm of the call and response. While the words were easy enough the timing of the responses had to be quite accurate, and some of them struggled to get used to the phrasing. After a few rounds however, they got used to it and we had a fairly successful singing session. I then told a related story, called 'The Stolen Smells', which comes from the resource handbook provided by Nal'ibali. The children were well rehearsed at story-time by now—they gathered almost instantly around me, waiting expectantly. The story was about a baker, so I added lots of description about the delicious cakes, breads, rolls, and so forth which the baker produces in his bakery, and the learners responded audibly, with *Mmmms* of pleasure, some even

closing their eyes, savouring the thought of freshly baked cakes and doughnuts. They got quite involved in the story, making gasps of disbelief when the baker had a man arrested for 'stealing' the smells of his baked goods, and even stronger reactions when the man was unjustly found guilty, and they applauded with glee at the story's happy ending.

Because they were a more manageable group, I packed the books out on the desks and allowed them to do 'free reading' for half an hour. I asked them to, as usual, look after all the books, not to fight over them or grab them from each other, and give them some hints about choosing a book that was up to their level. I let them come up in rows to choose their books. Some headed straight for a book and took it back to their desks, some took longer, flipping through a few of them, before eventually settling on one. Several chose to sit and read on their own, but most sat in pairs or threes and read together. Even amongst the ones sitting on their own, there were many children who read aloud. I heard one Grade Seven girl who was sitting on her own, reading the sound effects and exclamations of her book aloud with real feeling. Again, the picture books were the most popular—most of the chapter books were left on the desks, as most learners went for the books with fewer words and full-colour illustrations. Some of the older learners chose chapter books initially, but returned them to the table after a few minutes, unread. Some finished their first book quickly and immediately were back looking for another one. Some spent the whole 30-minute session on one book. I noticed that Carly in Grade Seven finished a book and then straight away turned back to the beginning and started reading it again. At the table where the books were laid out, I heard some learners recommending books they have read to each other. I noticed that the books which I have read aloud to them were particularly popular. When the session was over, I dismissed the learners, handing out copies of old supplements to them as they leave.

Session Eight

Today was the first session for the second term. The same group of Grade Six and Seven learners returned, and there was also a small group of Grade Four and Five learners who

had been invited to join the reading club. The Grade Five Afrikaans teacher Miss Petersen, who sat in on one or two sessions last term, was also here. It was agreed that she would help with the facilitation of the reading club. Having two facilitators would improve things in the club, because it would be easier to give the learners attention, and if necessary we could split the learners up into groups for reading or other games or activities that might not work so well in a large group.

We took the learners outside to play a game – I'm not sure what the name of the game is, but it is one that I learned when I was about the kids' age at church youth group, and have since used it as an 'ice breaker' activity several times at camps and workshops, and other school activities. It has always been well received. The game involved learners in groups of three making the shapes of four objects: elephant, cuckoo clock, cow, and jelly, using their bodies. A circle is formed and a person in the centre points at someone and shout the name of one of the four objects. The one who was pointed at as well as the children on either side of that person must make the shape as instructed. If they were too slow or made the wrong shape, then that person had to go into the middle. Naturally, there was lots of laughter at the silly actions that the learners had to do, and even more laughter when one of them got it wrong. Even the new Grade Four and Five recruits were getting into the spirit of the game. I noticed that learners did not only choose to point at their friends when they were in the circle, but were readily choosing learners from other grades and friendship groups. The learners were also quick to accept when they got it wrong—there were no arguments or disagreements about whether someone in in the middle or not. They laughed at themselves, accepted that they were wrong, and went into the middle. A boy called Joshua had joined the club recently having attended the last few sessions. He was in Grade Seven, but is already 15 years old. He has been held back several times because of his severe learning disabilities. He also suffers from severe fits. He can barely read or write (but is interestingly, brilliant at mental maths) and lacks basic social skills. He doesn't really have any friends because he is prone to aggressive outbursts and so he usually sits on his own in class and spends break times wandering up and down the playground alone, occasionally talking to someone or playing with them, but it doesn't last long before he gets angry and

hits them or swears at them. Anyway, I watched Joshua closely while we were playing this game. He stood happily between two Grade Five girls, laughing with the others. When it was his turn to form an animal shape he got it right about half the time. Often he was daydreaming and didn't even notice someone pointing at him, other times he made a good effort and performed the action adequately. I am pleased to see he was able to laugh at himself when he got it wrong. Previously in class he has been very sensitive about people laughing at him and has been quick to strike out in aggression, but in reading club he seems more relaxed and at ease. Perhaps it was because for once he felt part of something; there were learners holding his hand to stand in a circle, playing games with him, laughing with him. The rest of the learners seemed to really enjoy having him in the group as well. Yes, they laughed when he got it wrong, but it was not malicious laughter, and they readily clapped and cheered when he got it right. After the game, Joshua was beaming. He came up to me, his big eyes glowing, asked, “Did you see me playing the game, teacher? When I had to do the cow but I made the elephant? I made everyone laugh. It was fun, teacher”

Inside, we gave the learners some time do free reading. Because of the large number (40 plus) I didn't really have enough reading books to go around but learners were happy to read in pairs. I spread the books out and let the rows come up in turn to choose their books. Some picked a book straight away, others spent some time paging through them and picking up a few different ones before they were satisfied. A Grade Six girl paired up to read with Joshua. Soon everyone was sitting in their pairs, reading contentedly. I saw two Grade Six girls at the book table discussing the different books quite intently and reading extracts out of them to see if they were interested in them or not. Two Grade Five girls sitting together were not reading much but were looking closely at the illustrations in a picture book about a duckling called *Ruby Flew Too*. They were discussing the pictures as they turned the pages: “Kyk, daar is die mamma eend,” “Nou is daar vyf baba eendjies,” “Die eende swem met die paddas”. My two Grade Seven regulars, Tamryn and Bradley, were reading an abridged version of Alice in Wonderland. They called me over and tell me laughingly how Bradley mispronounced 'drink' as 'drunk', and Tamryn said 'window' instead of 'wandered'. They carried on reading, teasing each other gently as they corrected each other’s

pronunciation. Joshua was listening as his partner read aloud to him. He looked at the pictures while she read. When it was his turn he managed to spell out a few words out instead of reading them, and was able to read the easy words like 'the ', 'and; and 'far'. I see his partner helping him, pointing out some letters to him, correcting his pronunciation. At the end of the session, I asked for the learners' help in collecting and packing away the books. Most did this quickly and correctly; a few girls took charge, collecting the books from the other learners and stacking them in neat piles according to size, before bringing them to me to be packed into the cupboard.

Session Nine

This week was a big group again, particularly because some of the Grade Fours and Fives were joining the session. Miss Petersen was facilitating the session today so I was merely observing. Bradley and Tamryn asked to play 'Doggie Doggie Where's Your Bone?' and Miss Petersen agreed, letting Bradley and Tamryn take control of the game as they explained the rules to newcomers and got the game started. This simple game seemed to be one of the group's favourites, as they participated enthusiastically, their chanting getting louder and louder with each turn. Surprisingly, a few learners managed to get their guesses correct this time. Instead of one of us telling or reading a story today, Miss Petersen announced that the learners will be telling their own story. She handed out a bit of paper to learners in groups of three, with the beginning of a story on it called 'The Giant Cabbage', and learners had to continue the story in their groups, taking turns to add to the introduction, the middle, and the ending. I noticed a group of Grade Four girls sitting shyly at the back, not really talking to each other. They explained to me that they didn't know what to say, they didn't know how to make up a story. So I started asking probing questions to get them started. “What does the ouma do when she gets home from the market with her seeds?” I asked. They said, “She plants them!” So I asked, “How does she do that?” and the girls responded, “She must dig in the ground, and sprinkle the seeds” and another says, “And she waters them!” “With what?” I ask “Water! In a red bucket!” one girl answers. I keep on like this, asking them

questions, making them elaborate, add description, and so on, until eventually they have 'told' me a lovely story about how the ouma planted her cabbage, and it grew so big it started rolling away, so she chopped it up and made it into a breyani which she shared with her family. They were surprised and proud of themselves when at the end I said to them, “There you go girls, that was a perfect story!” As I left to listen to the other groups, I heard them retelling the story to each other. Some seemed to struggle with the concept of a story structure, ending their story abruptly, or not really having a strong middle. As I listened to the stories, I interrupted and asked learners to elaborate on certain facts, or to explain their ending better, to encourage them to add more to their stories. Miss Petersen then handed out copies of the latest Nal'ibali supplement which was the main resource for today's session. Inside was a story, 'The King of the Birds', which the learners read in pairs. They were comfortable with this sort of exercise now, pairing up quickly and quietly and settling down to read with minimum disturbance. As usual, some were taking turns to read sentence by sentence, some paragraph by paragraph, and some were reading in unison. The younger learners showed particular interest in the illustrations depicting different types of African birds. After the reading Miss Petersen led a discussion of the story, asking the children to remind her who the main characters were, and what the birds' competition was about. This week's supplement contained two fold out books so the last part of the session involved letting the learners each choose a book to cut out and fold. Scissors were passed around and I noticed many learners helping others to fold and cut out their books. Some even started reading them straight away.

Session Ten

Today we did a reprise of the Fruit Salad game. The learners were much quicker to organise themselves into a circle outside, and when I announced the game, I asked those who could remember to explain it to the rest. For a few minutes there was a buzz as the Grade Six and Sevens shared the rules with the newer Grade Fours and Fives. I also asked for suggestions for fruits, accepting the learners’ ideas of banana, strawberry, and lemon. There was

laughter when Simone calls out 'komkommer!" ('cucumber!') We had a good session, full of running around and shrieking, and thankfully, with no injuries. Again, the learners enjoyed seeing Miss Petersen and I take part, running along with them. Because it was Mothers' Day on Sunday, Miss Petersen and I decided to give the learners a chance to make Mothers' Day cards during today's session. We started with a discussion about Mothers' Day, why we do it, why was it important, and so on, letting the learners share their insights about why mothers were important and why we should recognise them. I am aware that many of the learners might not have a mother. For some, their maternal figure is an aunt or grandmother, so I made sure to refer to aunts and grannies as well, not just mothers, and encouraged learners to make a card for the person who is most like a mother in their life, if their mother is no longer around. The younger learners especially needed some guidance on the basics of card making. We showed them how to fold their A4 white pages into halves or quarters depending on the size of card they want, and briefly touched on how a card looks. Most of the older learners knew that there is usually a picture on the front, with maybe a short message, and a longer more detailed message inside, but I emphasised that learners shouldn't worry about doing what was 'right' or 'wrong', they could do what they wanted to do. As a group, I asked them for suggestions for what to write in the card. They immediately come up with the obvious ones, 'Happy Mothers' Day' and 'Geseende Moedersdag', but after a bit of discussion they suggested more personal messages for the inside of the card, such as 'thank you for always looking after me', 'I love you because you hug me when I am sad', and so on. Miss Petersen and I set out tubs of felt-tip pens and wax crayons and let them get started on their cards. One or two girls got stuck in very quickly and showed great creativity: Kaylie in Grade Six noticed some Grade Seven work on the classroom walls—acrostic poems written by the 7A class on subjects such as 'friends', 'soccer', 'school' and 'family'. She called me over and asked if she could do one as her card. As I walked around a little later, I saw that Kaylie had written a beautiful acrostic poem with the title 'Mother'. Not once did she asked for help as to how to do it or to check if what she was doing was 'right' – confidently and quietly she managed to follow the examples on the wall and create her own original piece. She did not even have to ask me for any help in writing one, as she

independently looked at the examples and worked out how to do it. I felt very proud of Kaylie. She is in my Mathematics class and although she tries hard, she is struggling a little in Maths, but what she was doing today in reading club proved that she is a bright girl, able to work independently and creatively. Some of the younger learners seemed to be quite concerned about whether their work was right or wrong, asking if they were 'allowed' to write certain things or draw certain pictures in their cards. Perhaps this comes from teachers being overly prescriptive in the lower grades and giving strict instructions that do not allow the learners much creativity or originality? Strangely, two girls also seem unfamiliar with the concept of a Mothers' Day card—at the end of the session they ask me if they must hand them in to me! Most of the learners, particularly those who were in reading club last year (during which time we made Valentine's Day, Easter, Mothers' Day, and Fathers' Day cards) were able to do a card without any assistance. They managed to put together cards with pictures on the front (mostly hearts), a generic 'Happy Mothers' Day' message on the front and something more personal inside. It seemed to be the younger ones, Grade Four and Five, who didn't seem to have much experience with making cards. They really seemed to enjoy colouring in, taking their time to do fancy borders and intricate styles of lettering on their cards. I knew that many of them do not own pencil crayons or felt-tip pens. On a few occasions in class I've asked learners to take out some different coloured crayons and only a handful in the class were able to comply. Once the cards were finished, I asked learners to walk around and look at each other's work (unless some were too shy to put their work on display, but happily, no one objects). We packed up the stationery and the session came to an end.

Session Eleven

It was a smaller group today again, only 24 learners, which was probably due to the sports matches taking place after school today. There were home matches for volleyball, netball, and rugby and so many learners were playing in the matches or had chosen to watch the games. We took the children outside for a few minutes to play a game, and so that they

could see a bit of the activity happening at the school. We played a simple game where learners all run around on the grass, and have to rush to get into groups of the correct number as quickly as possible when I call a number out. They were familiar with the game and ran around enthusiastically; as the group was basically all girls (except for faithful Bradley) there was much squealing and shrieking as they rushed to form their groups correctly. They did well with the smaller numbers, but I needed to step in and count and send a person or two to another group when I ask them for groups of 8 or 12. I end off by calling for a group of 24, and with loud cheers they all rush together to form one group. Spontaneously, they all hold hands and jump up and down, cheering gleefully. They really were a nice group to work with, and its moments like that when I could see how they were starting to feel much closer to each other and treat each other with more respect. It's been a long time since I had to talk to anyone for being aggressive or mean to others, and even the learners in the different grades mix well with each other.

At that moment, it was particularly fitting to have the principal come striding across to where we were, holding up the new Winterson Primary flag. It was the school's 20th anniversary this year, and as part of the celebrations I assisted the headmaster in designing a school flag and having it manufactured. The principal had received the flag earlier that day and was coming to show it to me. My reading club applauded and cheered even more loudly when I asked them what they thought of the flag. Hopefully the principal could see the strong school community feelings amongst my reading club learners!

Once inside again, we delved into the new Nal'ibali supplement. We turned to a story called 'Mama gets muddled', about a mother who, despite her daughter's suggestions, tried to impress with her baking, failed, and ended up doing what she should have done all along, which was bake her tried-and-tested pancake recipe. I gave the learners the choice of reading it in their own groups, or all together, and they unanimously voted to read it all together. I started them off, and asked for volunteers, and learners were eager to be chosen to read, with about six learners taking turns to read a paragraph or two each. They read confidently, loudly and well. I am particularly impressed by some of the Grade Fives who

have recently joined, who read surprisingly fluently. The word 'dough' presented some problems to several of the learners (they pronounce it to rhyme with 'tough' –but who can blame them?) so I pointed out how it should be said, and then we continued. Afterwards I asked them to talk to me about the moral of the story, and they were quick to offer suggestions, such as “Don't always try to impress people—be yourself”, “Listen to people if they try to help you”, and so forth. I did not even need to explain the word 'moral' to them anymore because it had come up several times in previous sessions.

They were very pleased when I told them they could keep their copies of the supplement and take them home, and they happily spent the last few minutes of the day reading the other stories and doing the puzzles in the supplement. At the end of the session, a small group of girls came up to me and asked to borrow a book each and return it to me the next day. I agreed and they quickly chose a book each from the cupboard.

Session Twelve

The number of learners attending seems to have stabilised at about 25 or so, which was a nice workable group. We played a game to start off with—the learners wanted to play 'Broken Telephones’, so we got organised into our groups and they began. Again, I asked them to share the rules with those who didn't know, and to use whichever language they felt happiest with. They had a great quarter of an hour, sharing silly sentences. They seemed quicker to come up with the original sentences, and I heard more clamouring for each to get their turn to start a sentence, unlike last time when some seemed very shy.

I tried another storytelling exercise this week, using pictures from magazines (a house on fire, a dog and a bird next to each other, two children in a messy kitchen and so on). I handed a picture out to groups of four or five learners, and asked them to, in their groups, put together the story behind the picture, taking turns to tell the story. This time, there were no groups that said they didn't know what to do. As I walked around I heard brilliant and imaginative stories coming from the learners, and lots of laughter at each other's suggestions. I asked for some groups to share their stories with the whole group and noticed that this time

around, most of the stories had a clear beginning, middle, and ending.

Afterwards, we do some free reading time. Last time the learners read, I encouraged some of the stronger readers to try the slightly longer books with chapters instead of always taking the picture books, and many of them marked their place in these books with a piece of paper. I was pleased to see many more readers take longer books, especially the Grade Sevens. Tamryn took a book from the Thoroughbred series—fairly long, with no pictures at all, and seemed to get stuck in straight away. Mickayla started an Enid Blyton chapter book, and Bradley was soon engrossed in the adventures of a naughty cat in *Sinbad the Runaway*. Some of the isiXhosa-speaking girls were paging through a Nal'ibali publication of children's stories in isiXhosa—the same girls who earlier this year said they couldn't read isiXhosa. Thus, I felt it quite fitting that in this week's session I had planned for the learners to make personalised bookmarks. I created a template which I printed and copied, of a bookmark with a space for their name, which they could cut out, colour in or decorate, and glue the two halves together. They really seemed to enjoy writing '…. is reading this book!' and some even added their own phrases and sentences without any prompting from me, such as 'I love reading', 'I love reading club', 'I love books' and so on. This time around, no one was asking me for 'permission' to write or draw something. They enjoyed cutting and pasting, and even though we had limited numbers of glue and scissors, the kids shared well, passing around willingly and some even asking, “Who needs the scissors next?” or “Who needs glue?” Most of the kids made at least three or four bookmarks. When they were done, I collected one from each learner to keep in the reading club cupboard to use when we read, and the others they could take home. We ended the lesson with the kids proudly putting their special bookmarks in the books they had been reading to keep their places.

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