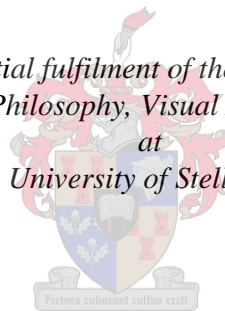


**The production and use of wordless
picture books in parent-child reading:
an exploratory study within a
South African context**

by
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*Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
Masters of Philosophy, Visual Arts (Illustration)
at
the University of Stellenbosch*



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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an exploratory study into the feasibility of the use of wordless picture books with the aim to develop a culture of and love for reading within the South African context, as approached from my viewpoint as an illustrator. Despite a growing body of literature that advocates the use of wordless picture books in educational and literacy development, not much research exists on their use within the South African context exists. Additionally, there are few locally published wordless picture books available in South Africa, with the market being dominated by American and European imports. Those that do exist locally lack variety and are largely labelled as educational. In addition, South Africa has a very low general reading rate, with reading and books being viewed as synonymous with an academic activity or obligation. Further, children are not encouraged to read for enjoyment at home, as their parents often do not have a reading culture of their own. Although educational books can be used in the home for joint reading, the use of books that are created for ‘strictly educational purposes’ leads to a risk of losing the magic of reading purely for enjoyment. A risk that runs parallel with this is the perpetuation of this negative view of reading in general. The inherent characteristics of wordless picture books serve as motivating factors that could contribute to developing a more positive attitude to books in general, and as such, foster a culture of reading that parents can transfer to their children. Through a semiotic and narratological analysis of wordless picture books, as well as a conceptualisation of the medium in my practical work, I debate the strengths of the medium as applied to the South African context. An empirical study forms part of this research in an effort to understand better how these books would function in joint reading between a child and their parent or primary caregiver. My fundamental argument is that the creation, production and use of this genre of picture books should be considered more favourably, and warrant further investigation within the South African context.

OPSOMMING

Hierdie verhandeling is 'n ondersoekende uitvoerbaarheidstudie oor die gebruik van boeke sonder woorde om 'n kultuur van en liefde vir lees in die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks te ontwikkel, soos gesien vanuit my uitgangspunt as illustreerder. Ten spyte van 'n groter wordende omvang van literatuur wat die gebruik van boeke sonder woorde in opvoedkundige- en geletterdheidsontwikkeling voorstaan, bestaan daar weinig navorsing oor hul gebruik in die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks. Daarbenewens is daar min boeke sonder woorde wat plaaslik uitgegee word en word dié mark deur invoere uit Amerika en Europa oorheers. Dit wat wel plaaslik beskikbaar is, toon 'n gebrek aan verskeidenheid en word meestal as opvoedkundig beskou. Verder het Suid-Afrika 'n baie lae algemene leesgeneigtheid waar lees en boeke as sinoniem met 'n akademiese aktiwiteit of verpligting beskou word. Voorts word kinders tuis nie aangemoedig om vir die genot daarvan te lees nie, omdat hul ouers dikwels self nie 'n leeskultuur handhaaf nie. Hoewel opvoedkundige boeke tuis vir gesamentlike lees gebruik kan word, skep die benutting van boeke van 'n 'suiwer opvoedkundige aard' die risiko dat lees bloot vir die genot daarvan, verlore mag gaan. 'n Risiko wat gelyktydig hiermee ontstaan, is die voortsetting van 'n negatiewe siening oor lees. Boeke sonder woorde beskik oor inherente eieskappe wat as motivering vir lees dien en sodoende 'n positiewer ingesteldheid teenoor boeke in die algemeen ontwikkel. Hierdeur kan 'n kultuur van lees gekweek word wat ouers weer aan hul kinders kan oordra. Deur middel van semiotieke en narratologiese ontleding van boeke sonder woorde, sowel as 'n konseptualisering van hierdie medium in my praktiese werk, beredeneer ek die sterkpunte van die medium soos toegepas binne die Suid-Afrikaanse opset. 'n Empiriese studie vorm deel van die navorsing ten einde 'n beter begrip te kry oor die benutting van dié boeke in gesamentlike lees tussen die kind en sy/haar ouer of primêre versorger. My grondliggende argument is dat die skepping, produksie en gebruik van hierdie genre van prentboeke sonder woorde gunstiger oorweeg behoort te word en verdere ondersoek binne die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks regverdig.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Dowhower (1997:63) outlines the wordless book as a literary genre that relates concepts, portrays themes or a sequence of ideas, gives information, provides entertainment and interaction, and/or tells a story through a series of illustrations without written text. Wordless picture books have secured a place as a distinct genre in the last four decades (Crawford & Hade 2000:66) and have since contradicted the popular misconception that they are not of serious literary value. Over the years, the development of these books has seen the content and characterization of the narratives change, with an emphasis on more realistic experiences for the reader to relate to (Dowhower 1997:60). The genre's design does not cater strictly for children, but appeals to both adolescent and adult audiences, and as such the wordless narrative can be verbalised by a dual audience on a variety of levels (Nikolajeva & Scott 2006:9, 21). Literature advocating the use of wordless picture books has been available since the early 1970's and motivation for encouraging the use of these books as an educational resource is numerous (Dowhower 1997:60).

A recent qualitative study conducted by the South Africa Book Development Council (SABDC 2011) investigated the literacy practices within South African households. The results reconfirmed the fact that there exists a lack of reading culture within the South African home, with only 14% of the population being active readers. Of the surveyed households 51% did not have a single book in their home and of the active readers, only 5% read books to, or with their children. Official rates regarding illiteracy in South Africa show that about 4.7 million adults in South Africa are illiterate and about 4.9 million adults are functionally illiterate (SABC 2011). Although the promotion of literacy amongst previously disadvantaged communities has been a key priority for government since South Africa's democracy in 1994, books promoted by the education department are often purely academic and produced on a tight budget. Non-governmental organisations, such as *Biblioneef*¹ and *Project Literacy*² offer a wider selection of books meant purely for recreational reading in order to foster a love for reading in conjunction with their literacy programmes. Despite their inclusion, these books are still far outweighed by pedagogic books (Johnson 2009:13).

¹ Biblioneef is a dynamic book donation agency based in Cape Town, South Africa. Their focus is to provide new books to needy children's schools and libraries throughout South Africa with emphasis on organisations in townships, informal settlements and in remote rural areas.

² Project Literacy was established in 1973 to address the needs of illiterate and semi-literate adults in South Africa

Miemie du Plessis (in Van Heerden 2008), a prominent South African publisher with LAPA Books, is of the opinion that most South Africans perceive reading as being an obligation or academic exercise, synonymous with studying. Despite growing support for literacy development in mother tongue, the local market is still dominated by English and Afrikaans children's picture book. Dismal sales in this market and financial constraints on libraries are among the reasons why publishers hesitate to produce children's books purely for enjoyment in African languages. The profitable production of books that address the many different cultures, while at the same time avoiding stereotyping and alienating the readers that they are trying to reach, are risks that authors and illustrators are exposed to, especially when one considers that South Africa has eleven official languages (Johnson 2009:12). Economic limitations also hinder the production and sales of books in African languages. Many South African families cannot afford to purchase school books for their children, let alone books meant for enjoyment. Clearly, the book as a cultural good has yet to ascertain its place in the people's and government's list of priorities (Adesyona in Christopher 2010). Reading for pleasure is less likely to be a habitual practice in South African families, which means that many children have no experience of parent-child reading before going to school.

Being able to read is one of the most needed and empowering skills for a person. Moss (2006:v) writes that "It is essential to teach children to read and write competently, enabling them to achieve today's high standard of literacy". Preschool years are critical to the development of emergent literacy. Print awareness³ and oral language development both play a crucial role in the acquisition of reading skills (Pullen & Justice 2006:39). Joint reading with children is an enormous contributing factor to developing these skills, and something parents should be able to utilize in their home environment.

Studies have shown that when parents engage in joint reading with their children, it not only contributes to the child's development, but also to a perceived improvement in their parenting capabilities. Parents who took part in Seden's (2007:137) study described how both they and their children benefitted from reading together and how books were embedded in their parenting activities. In most societies, children grow up with their parents or a close family member and these adults, along with any older siblings, become the child's first teachers

³ In developing print awareness a child begins to understand what print looks like, how it works, and the fact that print carries meaning. The foundation of all other literacy learning builds upon this knowledge (Strickland & Schickedanz 2004:1).

(Desmond 2006:5). De Bruin-Parecki (1999:22) is of the opinion that children are not born knowing how to apply their knowledge and experiences in ‘literate’ ways to printed and/or pictorial texts⁴. They must learn strategies for understanding texts in a way that is appropriate to their culture or social group. Joint reading creates an ideal opportunity for parents and children to co-construct knowledge and meaning in a social setting.

However, a parent who is illiterate, or has a low level of literacy may be intimidated, or feel that they are unable to make sense of by the print that accompanies so many locally produced children’s books. Reading, however, does not necessarily need to begin with written text. Defined simply as an active, constructive, *meaning-making process* (Colorado State University 2011), reading includes visual perception. According to Gestalt-Psychology, this perception is intimately involved in thinking and as such the construction of meaning (Schwarcz 1988:30). In Seden’s (2007:137), parents wanted to pass on a love of reading for pleasure and education, irrespective of their literacy background. Radebe (in Morris 2007:33), believes that through the use of picture books, the illiterate parent is able to create a narrative via the contextual clues of the visual story. In this way, he or she is still able to share a rich experience with the child. Wordless picture books connect visual literacy, cultural literacy and literacy with print and through these linkages, support the development of literacy skills (Jalongo *et al.* 2002:167).

With a growing body of literature that advocates the use of wordless picture books in educational and literacy development (Crawford & Hade 2000:67) it is surprising that not much research on their use exists within the South African context. Additionally, it also appears that there are very few locally published wordless picture books available in South Africa. The market is largely dominated by American or European imports, which can for the most part also be attributed to the same reasons as the non-availability of books in African languages mentioned earlier. In an e-mail conversation on the 28th August 2011, Jay Heale of *Bookchat*⁵ makes an interesting point by saying: “I do not understand why, in this multi-lingual country, we have not created hundreds more wordless [picture] books which can thus be ‘read’ in every language”.

⁴ A text is an assemblage of signs (such as words, images, sounds and/or gestures) constructed (and interpreted) with reference to the conventions associated with a genre and in a particular medium of communication (Chandler 2002:2-3).

⁵ Bookchat is a website dedicated to providing news and reviews about children’s books in South Africa (www.bookchat.co.za).

Stewig (in Dowhower 1997:65) is of the opinion that the wordless genre can serve as a motivating factor for readers, principally due to the visually oriented nature of children today. Wordless books do not require the decoding of words by the reader, and as such can be seen as more accessible especially to readers with low literacy levels. Lastly, wordless picture books have no correct or wrong interpretation. They are as such less corrective by nature than books that contain text and therefore lead to more divergent types of thinking (Crawford & Hade 2000:69). Wordless picture books may be capable of developing a more positive attitude to books in general, and as such, foster a much needed culture of reading that readers can carry on to their children.

Norton (1983:153) notes the value of wordless picture books when used with children from different backgrounds, as they allow for a variety of cultures to enjoy the same book. Children and adults alike enjoy the opportunity to become ‘authors’, providing the ‘text’ to go with the images. By allowing the reader an opportunity to create and respond to the text in their own sense, wordless picture books provide the reader with multiple narratives, without prescribing a correct interpretation. There is no text to bind readers to a prescribed mood, feeling or meaning (Williams 1994:38). Wordless picture books are often made use of in the planning and developing of beginner reading experiences in classrooms, due to the fact that they are able to encourage oral and written language use as well as creative thought (Whalen 1994). In addition, the process of storytelling linked to these books provides a powerful framework for understanding text, being tied to children’s own inner ‘storying’, which they use to make sense of the social world around them (Fang 1999:18). Greene (1988:2) states that “[t]he child’s introduction to literature is through the ear” and that as children listen to different prose, or stories told from wordless books, they unconsciously become aware of various forms of the written language. They are learning how print ‘sounds’. With joint reading, the physical response evoked by listening is also combined with the warmth and safety provided by the presence of the parent, creating a pleasant association with voluntary reading (Greene 1998:2).

When considering the illustrations that comprise wordless picture books as art, the genre can be linked with Nussbaum’s opinion that the arts and humanities teach children imaginative thinking. Through the development of what Ellison (in Nussbaum 2010:107) refers to as a ‘narrative imagination’, people are able to develop their ability to see the full humanness of the people that they encounter on a daily basis that are from different cultures and are

empowered to see beyond stereotypes of race, gender and ethnicity. Such skills would be particularly applicable within the multicultural South African context. The active involvement of children in discussions of the art in the book can act as a means of encouraging children to approach the world with awareness and an inquiring outlook.

In this thesis, I argue that wordless picture books as a genre can be used as an intervention method for cultivating a love for reading through joint-reading practices in the South African home environment. The aim of the study was to explore the use of economically viable wordless picture books as an intervention to facilitate joint reading between children and parents/primary care-givers within the South African context. Joint parent-child reading is a method of stimulating a love and culture of reading at the earliest stage. I argue that wordless picture books, due to their specific characteristics, could serve as a medium to foster this culture.

My initial aim had been to simply illustrate two wordless books based on stories sourced from the local community in Kayamandi⁶, in order to investigate the economically viable production of these. Whereas my practical work is concerned with creating wordless picture books for children and adults to enjoy, I decided to include an empirical study as part of my research to see what response my work received in practice. Existing wordless picture books were also included in this research to provide something to compare participant reactions to. I felt that by including an empirical study, in combination with a theoretical analysis, I could provide a more in depth contribution to research on the production and use of wordless picture books within the South African context. As such, the empirical aspect of my study serves as a preliminary investigation regarding the feasibility of these books to develop a culture and love of reading within the South African context. It was also conducted in an effort to understand better how wordless picture books would function in a joint reading situation between a child and his/her parent/primary caregiver.

As a means to further investigate the theoretical statements, I chose to host a joint reading programme, during which parents and their children could spend time reading a wordless picture book. These sessions took place at the Ikhaya Trust Centre, based in Kayamandi. The

⁶ Kayamandi is a township based on the outskirts of Stellenbosch. I chose Kayamandi to source stories from because of its rich Xhosa tradition and its proximity to the University of Stellenbosch. Further discussion on Kayamandi as a base for the empirical study is discussed in the chapter on research methodology.

centre provided a base for the study for a number of reasons. It is a safe, private area for uninterrupted joint reading sessions. The trust has been running the *Sithanda Ukufunda Programme (We love learning/reading)*⁷ since January 2010. The existence of an established literacy programme therefore provided access to input from other professionals, and made expert advice available in areas which I am not knowledgeable about, for example early literacy development. Furthermore, the centre's location in Kayamandi minimized travel requirements for participants, as they were all local residents.

Ethical clearance for the study was granted by the University of Stellenbosch's ethics committee on the 19th June 2011 (Appendix A), and the management of the Ikhaya Trust Centre granted me authorization to use the centre as a base to source participants and host the programme (Appendix B). Four wordless picture books were used for the reading programme, namely *Abongi's journey*⁸ (2004) (Figure 1.1), *Wave* (2008) (Figure 1.2) and two of my own books, *Iphi ibola?* (2011) (Figure 1.3) and *My mother's matt* (2011) (Figure 1.4).

The following objectives were set in order to reach the goal of the study:

- i. To conceptualise and contextualise wordless picture books as a genre.
- ii. To design, illustrate and produce two wordless picture books based on local stories from Kayamandi.
- iii. To conduct an empirical study on the use of wordless picture books in a joint reading programme between children and their parents / primary care-givers, held over the period of one month.
- iv. To reach conclusions and make recommendations regarding the use of wordless picture books to stimulate joint reading between parents and their children as a means of fostering a culture of reading.

Chapter 2 provides the literature review for the research, and addresses the first two objectives of the study. In this chapter I contextualised the wordless picture book by outlining a history of the genre and by distinguishing it from more conventional picture books, which are generally accompanied by text. The development of wordless picture books, including

⁷ The aim of this programme is to improve literacy levels by empowering and training facilitators, parents, volunteers and children in Kayamandi. The programme aims to "help children become lifelong readers and writers who appreciate and love literacy" (The Greater Stellenbosch Development Trust 2010).

⁸ *Abongi's Journey* received the 2002 Vivian Wilkes Award, which is awarded by the South African Children's Book Forum for books which have made a special contribution to South African children's literature (National Library of South Africa).

modern day examples, is discussed in order to demonstrate the power of imagery to convey messages and narratives that are both far-reaching and speak to different audiences at different levels (Belfer 2011). A semiotic and narratological analysis of the wordless picture book comprises the theoretical foundation of the study through which the four books used in the reading programme are analysed. The narrative strength of pictures as argued by Ryan (2011) is considered in relation to their ability to allow readers to create meaning from their own frame of reference (Williams 1994:38). The illustration, design and production of my own books serve as an attempt to conceptualise the wordless picture book and explore the manner in which it could be produced as an economically viable good. Reading skills inherent to the genre will be identified through an investigation of the use of the wordless picture book as an educational tool.

In order to contextualise the wordless picture book in South Africa, I examine the country's lack of a reading culture in with reference to the local publishing industry, the country's high illiteracy rates, the home as a micro-environment for leaning and a shortage of context specific reading materials in indigenous languages. Initiatives that attempt to address these problems are also considered in this discussion. Although illiteracy is a major part of that context that I investigate, it does not constitute the focus for the study, but is instead viewed as an obstacle in the creation of a culture of reading. Joint reading, Vygotsky's zone of proximal development and Nussbaum's theories regarding imaginative thinking are linked to the practice of reading with wordless books. The importance of fostering creativity in children is also outlined with reference to genre.

Chapter 3 comprises a discussion of the research methodology for the study, in order to address the third research objective. Intervention research is identified as a framework within a qualitative research approach. The framework's aims are identified as the promotion of an understanding of individual and community conditions, in order to contribute to their improvement (Fawcett *et al* 1994:25). Its participative nature also allows for contributions not only from participants, but from other from stakeholders that can give valuable input regarding the intervention process (Du Preez & Roux 2008:83). The research is examined only up to the fourth stage of the intervention research model, i.e. the early development and pilot testing phase, which is the extent to which the research was conducted. A purposive sample design secured the participants for the study, which consisted of 10 children that were enrolled in a programme at the Ikhaya Trust, and their respective parent/primary caregiver

(20 participants in total). The programme was held in August 2011, during which time the parent/caregiver–child groups attended one reading session a week. During these sessions the individual groups were invited to spend time reading a wordless picture book together. Data collection instruments took the form of two semi-structured interviews, the first of which was conducted after each reading session and focused on the participants' experience of the wordless picture book and reading session. The second interview, held upon conclusion of the programme, was aimed at establishing an overall impression of participants' feelings towards wordless picture books and their use in joint reading with their children. Prominent themes have been coded according to first and second level coding (Grinnell & Unrau in Schurink, Fouché & de Vos 2011:410).

My research findings are presented in Chapter 4, where I delineate and discuss the main themes that arose from the data analysis. The themes that are discussed include reading; pictures and relevant content; storytelling; utilization of illustrations (pointing vs. narrative formation); wordless picture books and picture books with words; thinking for oneself; reading for pleasure, and an activity that can be done in the home.

The reading programme was concluded on the 29th August 2011, with feedback consisting of predominantly positive remarks from participants. Conclusions regarding the use of wordless picture books in the South African context that were drawn from the research findings are presented in Chapter 5. This chapter also serves as a platform for the recommendations made regarding the necessity and feasibility of the wordless picture book as a topic of further investigation within the South African context.

CHAPTER 2: The context of wordless picture books – a theoretical framework

In its broadest definition, a picture book is a book in which the illustrations play a significant role in telling the story (Backes 2009). Barbera Bader (1976:1) writes “[a] picture book is text, illustration, total design; an item of manufacture and a commercial product; a social, cultural, historical document; and, foremost, an experience for a child”. Within this wide-ranging definition, several types of books, including the wordless picture book, are found

Wordless picture books have become a distinct genre within children’s literature over the past four decades (Crawford & Hade 2000:66). One has, however, only to look at pre-literate history to realise that the genre’s roots extend well into the past. Stewig (in Dowhower 1997:61) claims that the appearance of wordless picture books is a precursor of an ancient form of communication which our ancestors used to recount events such as hunts, military incursions and bible stories. Media used to represent these happenings extend from cave painting to stained glass windows. Brilliant’s (in Dowhower 1997:61) 1984 study of ancient modes of communication concluded that “in classical antiquity, given the early prevalence of illiteracy and the dominating role played by rhetoric among the educated classes, it is likely that visual signals were always an important, if subordinate, means of communication”. In more recent history, wordless books as a unique art form have followed in the same tradition; using visual signs to convey meaning exclusively through images.

Dowhower is of the opinion that Thomas Bewick’s *A new year’s gift: for little master’s and misses*, which was first published in 1777, was one of the earliest English wordless picture books produced for children. In the United States, several unusually sophisticated wordless novels were published as early as the 1920’s. Lynn Ward carved *God’s man* (1929) and Milt Gross’s *Hearts of gold: the great american novel and not a word in it – no music too* (1930), were among the early classic silent novels of the 20’s and 30’s (Dowhower 1997:62).

The first American wordless picture book aimed specifically at children, however, was arguably *What whiskers did*, by Ruth Carroll, published in 1932. Although Dowhower (1997:66) argues that this wordless book remained virtually alone in the genre field until its reprint in the 1960’s, Bader (1976:540) starts her discussion of wordless books as a genre by referring to Helen Sewell’s picture book, *A head for happy* (1931). This is an illustrated work that tells the story three young girls’ adventures while trying to find a head for their stuffed

doll. Although the book does contain words in a very limited form, the narrative is carried principally by the visual sequence of illustrations. The words, in Bader's opinion, are not essential to the continuity of the story. They serve to punctuate the storyline and emit emotion, but Bader believes that one could do without the words altogether. Following *A Head for happy*, *What whiskers did* used only the occasional symbolic device such as a question mark to create a narrative. It was viewed as an original development in the creation of wordless narratives for an emerging preschooler audience (Bader 1976:540).

According to David Beronä (in Houpp 2003:1), the early 20th century's eager acceptance of comic strips and silent cinema were additional factors that were fundamental to the public's preoccupation with pictorial images. He writes that "...the dynamic period of artistic experimentation in Europe that followed World War I, when artists created works that were the antithesis of everything ordinary and natural, was a suitable time for the arrival of books without words". Pictures no longer simply assisted in the telling of stories, but instead were seen as adequate in telling the stories themselves.

A new emphasis on cognitive learning, which included 'reading pictures' as preparation for reading words, saw funds provided for the production of a myriad of wholly or partially wordless picture books. Maurice Sendak's wordless passages in *Where the wild things are* (1963) and *Hector protector* (1965) also assisted in laying the groundwork for wordless picture books to thrive as a format (Houpp 2003:3). An extract from Bader (1976:540) states, "[t]he wordless picture book was in the air". The next four decades would bring an inundation of wordless, or nearly wordless, picture books, aimed at all ages. The 44 books produced in the 1960's quickly rose to 317 as early as the 1970's. In addition to the increasing volumes being published, the types of wordless picture books also expanded quickly. Readers now had a wide range to choose from (Dowhower 1997:59).

A popular misconception of wordless picture books is that they cannot be of serious literary value. Since the first appearance of articles promoting the use of wordless picture books in the mid 1970's, they have been referred to predominantly under the genre of 'picture books', being defined only as books that tell a story through pictures. This underscores the mistaken belief that wordless picture books are exclusively in a basic narrative format, despite the fact that, ironically, many of the books catalogued under this label do not communicate stories in the conventional sense (Dowhower 1997:60). In fact, the variety of books available in the

wordless format supports the diversity that the medium can offer. These books range from a series of completely unrelated images, to set of illustrations that are linked by subject matter or give expository information. There are also formats that allow the reader to interact with the visual narrative in a game like fashion. In addition to the conventional book form, wordless picture books are also produced in an array of formats and styles, ranging from fold out to cloth books, accordion books, pop ups, half- or split-page books and comics (Dowhower 1997:60). Nikolajeva and Scott (2001:9,21) demonstrate the complexity of the wordless format by pointing out that many picture books are not designed strictly for small children, but that they cater for an adult audience as well. A wordless narrative as such demands to be verbalised by a dual audience on a variety of levels. The visual complexity and high inference levels of many wordless picture books make them more suitable for an adolescent or adult audience than for only young children. Dowhower (1997:61) provides examples such as *Flood* (Drooker 1992) and *The read thread* (Nygren 1987) to demonstrate this.

A more recent example of the genre's ability to draw interest from a diverse audience is Sean Tan's *The arrival* (2007). Described as wordless, yet having perfect narrative flow (Smith 2007), *The arrival* (Figure 2.1) tells the story of an immigrant's journey to a new country to build a better life for his family. The story is told in clear and mesmerising illustrations and, as the main character is unable to communicate in words, the reader shares this sense of isolation. Regarding the wordless format, Tan (2007) states:

[*The arrival*] also confirmed the power of the silent narrative, not only in removing the distraction of words, but slowing down to reader so that they might mediate on each small object and action, as well as reflect in many different ways on the story as a whole.

The narrative is driven by storyboarding and montage and pulled back into reflective mode through large scale landscape scenes. The value of this book is that it is an investigation of visual and representational codes in isolation that is able to communicate a multifaceted narrative with meaningful and resonating themes on an international level, while also engaging with important local discourses such as immigration, multiculturalism and acceptance (Jones 2007:11). The purposeful vagueness illustrates an incredibly complex story filled with subtleties, but which enables many people to relate to the story. It is a modern day demonstration of the power of imagery, and of wordless comics to illustrate messages and stories that are far-reaching and speak to different audiences at different levels (Belfer 2011).

2.1 A semiotic and narratological analysis of the wordless picture book as a genre

As can be seen from the preceding discussion, the notion of creating a complex narrative solely through illustrations is not novel. Yet, for the theoretical foundation of this thesis, it would be useful to investigate the manner in which this is accomplished. In this section I will look at how the construction of a wordless picture book encourages the reader to interact with a narrative. As wordless picture books lack text to ‘cue’ the reader as to a specific emotion, plot or sequence of events, the illustrations and format of the book need communicate in a manner that allows for verbalisation on a variety of levels. How then, does an illustrator create a book that needs to be ‘sounded’?

Using semiotics and narratology as a framework, I investigate these aspects through the analysis of two wordless picture books; *Wave* (2008), illustrated by Suzy Lee and published in the USA and *Abongi's journey* (2004), a locally produced book illustrated by Tania Rosser, with concept by Kerry Saadien-Raad. The books have been selected based on the fact that they were used as part of the empirical component of this study, during the joint reading programme held at the Ikhaya Trust in Kayamandi. I also investigate aspects of my own work, *Iphi ibola?* and *My mother's matt*, which were illustrated specifically for the programme.

Semiotics and narratology as frameworks are interwoven in the hermeneutic creation of meaning, to the extent that they largely overlap. There are some key differences though and as such, they will be discussed as separate frameworks. A narrative is broadly defined as a story or an account of events, experiences or the like, whether true or fictitious (dictionary.com). Shitemi (2009:83) states that “being narrative implies a predication on specific semiotic objects produced with intent to invoke narrative script in the mind of the audience/receiver”. Onega and Landa (in Herman & Vavaeck 2005:13) define narrative as “the semiotic representation of a series of events meaningfully connected in a temporal or causal way”. This definition allows for the tools of narratology to be used in the analysis of wordless picture books and oral storytelling, in addition to narrative’s traditionally narrower use as an exclusively linguistic phenomenon (Johnson 2009:53). Narrative as such is a means of assigning meaning and function to semiotic texts.

A semiotic text in turn, denotes anything that is considered to be a signifier of something else. In other words, a sign can be anything that has meaning within a given culture or conceptual framework. An initial investigative task of the narratology inherent to a text should therefore seek to identify the signs to be found in the text, and the codes within which these signs can be unlocked. This process will further expose the communication characteristics and properties of the signs that define the relationships between the signifiers and signified, thus highlighting paradigms by which to understand the text and further giving the ideological functions of the text as a whole (Chandler & Ryan in Shitemi 2009:82).

2.1.1 A semiotic analysis of wordless picture books

Ryan (2011) states that a semiotic approach to media focused on narrative asks about the storytelling abilities and limitations of the signs of the medium in question. Semiotics is broadly defined as the study of signs, and when used as a framework generally distinguishes between three broad media families: verbal, visual, and aural. Within each one of these are to be found sets and subsets of information layers and clusters. A medium is characterized by the codes and sensory channels upon which it relies. Typical questions that a semiotic analysis of narrative media would ask can include: how can images suggest time, how can gestures express causality (Ryan 2011) , what assumptions are made about the reader and how do these impact on the formulation of the super text and its sub-texts⁹ and layers (Shitemi 2009:82)?

There has been a shift of focus in literary theory over the years from the author (or in this instance, the illustrator as the visual author) as the producer of meaning to the production of meaning through a reading of the text. Roland Bathes's text, *Death of the author* (1968) is a seminal work in repositioning the creation of meaning to the reader (Johnson 2009:20). As a result, the manner in which picture books are constructed has changed to increasingly challenge the reader, with the result being that now, more than ever, the reader is required to bring his/her own conclusions to the text and to become an active author in creating the text, story and interpretation (Nikolajeva & Scott 2001:250). From this approach, all the elements in a wordless picture book are signs, which serve as an invitation to the reader to interact with

⁹ The super text is a narrative that possesses a variety of narrative properties, whereas a subtext may contain underlying or hidden themes in the narrative (Shitemi 2009:83).

the signs¹⁰ of the text in order to create a narrative. The absence of words in the genre means that readers are given an opportunity to create, and respond using their own sense, without being bound by words that prescribe mood, feelings or meaning (Williams 1994:38).

Wordless picture books make use of all three media families. Firstly, they are visual. The pictures are images that can be interpreted by a reader in a way that brings their past experiences, culture and social context to the table. Perry Nodelman (1988:186) argues that “children tend to express their enjoyment of wordless books by telling, in words, the stories the pictures suggest to them; they themselves turn purely visual experiences into verbal ones”. This statement suggests that wordless picture books also make use of the verbal and aural media forms in creating a narrative text.

The genre employs a language that relies on visual experience common to both author and reader and as such, pictures created by illustrators require reading and interpretation that are not always understood effortlessly (Houp 2003:3). Suzy Lee’s *Wave* captures a child's day at the beach within the 40 pages of a wordless book. Followed by a flock of seagulls, a girl runs delightedly to where waves break on the shore. She chases it as it retreats, runs away from it as it surges, splashes in it when it calms, taunts it as it rises, and finally succumbs to it crashing down upon her, in the process discovering what treasures the waves can bring (Figure 2.2) (Ha 2008:102). Although this text seems seemingly straightforward, the social context of the reader may well create a different reading altogether. Consider the reader who has not had any previous association with the ocean. Instead of seeing the images as a playful interaction with the ocean, Lee’s swirling, textured waves could be read as threatening. In contrast, adults and children who have grown up going to the beach may have many pleasant memories associated with the signs in the text and as such read the text as a carefree, positive interaction with the ocean. One could also argue that the choice of sensitive, hand drawn images over digital modes of creation communicates a carefree spirit, and the simple, expressive beauty which can be found in nature.

Perry Nodelman (1988:186-187) argues that although they resemble conventional picture books, wordless picture books are:

¹⁰ A sign can be defined as any motion, gesture, image, sound, pattern, or event that conveys meaning. Saussure (in Chandler 2002:18) offered a dyadic model of the sign in his definition of a sign being composed of a 'signifier' (signifiant), or the form which the sign takes; and a 'signified' (signifié), or the concept it represents. The *sign* as such, is the whole that results from the association of the signifier with the signified.

...very different ... one of their major differences is that ... the stories in them can be told by many different children in many different ways. Because these books have no words to focus our attention on their meaningful or important narrative detail, they require from us both close attention and a wide knowledge of the visual conventions that must be attended to before visual images can imply stories.

The semiotic conventions that Nodelman (1988:186-187) refers to include choices of media, colour and style that communicate a mood and atmosphere. *Wave* is printed on a panoramic trim size, which allows for the pages to convey the sheer enormity of the ocean effectively. The wave's movements are depicted from right to left on the page. Nodelman (1988:186-187) states that underlying assumptions about left and right, and cause and effect allow us to read meaning into a sequence of pictures. Johnson (2009:98) again emphasises the context of the reader in this with her statement, "[w]hereas it may be assumed that an American child would read the narrative from left to right, the same would not be true for a Japanese child". The gutter of the book is used to represent the end of the shoreline, and serves as a visual boundary until it is crossed by the little girl and her entourage of seagulls (Ha 2008:102). The characters gradually migrate from the protection of the left side of the page to unpredictability on the right (Figure 2.3). Lee uses the physical, concrete construction of the book to signify the triumph over fear and physical limitations.

Loosely rendered charcoal and acrylic, the images curl and flow like water and imitate playfulness, especially in the facial and bodily expressions of the child and seagulls. Lee pays attention to the conventional meanings of gestures and facial expressions. The little girl's dress and the environment convey 'unspoken' information about the character, which includes enlightenment on her social status and interior attitude (Nodelman 1988:186-187). She is clearly from a family that are in a position to spend a leisurely day at the beach, and her attitude towards the ocean varies from curious, yet cautious to overconfidence. The use of the colour blue in an otherwise gray-toned world calls attention to the ocean, which competes with the girl as the main character in this story (Ha 2008:102). Calmer scenes are depicted in a light, watery manner. The larger waves and swells become increasingly textured and higher in contrast, carrying a somewhat unpredictable and ominous air. Lee plays with size to indicate the constantly shifting positions of power between the little girl and the ocean; the little girl stands on her toes and yells at the ocean as it recedes, but is then dwarfed by a huge wave before it crashed down on her. The colour, line and shape used to depict the waves and the gestures of the girl point to important elements in the pictures and imply their relative

importance in the creation of a coherent narrative. Lee demonstrates the plurality of the sign with an obvious reference to the title on the last double page of the book (Figure 2.4). As she walks away, the girl turns and waves (a gesture) to the wave (the object), referring back to the symbol, or text ‘wave’, which appears only in the title of the book.

The end papers in *Wave* are used to introduce the reader to the topic of the book (Figure 2.5). Nikolajeva and Scott (2001:249) suggest that end papers can add to the narrative of the text and even influence our interpretation of the text. In my own illustrated book *My mother's matt* (2011), I repeat elements of autumn leaves and trees (Figure 2.6) to give an indication of the time that the story is set, and to create a more dramatic predicament for the main character, a little girl that is lost, alone in a city that she is unfamiliar with. The dead leaves also give an indication as to the fate of the little girl's mother, who passes away before presenting a final gift to her daughter.

Because there are no words to help readers, the illustrators of wordless picture books depend on the ability of pictures to suggest information that they do not actually offer. Nodelman (1988:187) believes that in the case of wordless picture books, it is important for the reader to recognise that there is a problem to be solved, or a puzzle to be completed in terms of creating a story from the illustrations. A certain type of ‘care’ is necessary when reading images; readers who glance too quickly at the pages may miss significant details that enrich a story and enhance characterisation (Weisner in Houpp 2003:22). Readers are required to search for clues and put together seemingly unrelated bits of visual information and in this manner they provide interpretation to complete the pictures out of their own storehouse of information (Nodelman 1988:186-187). Dondis (1973:12-13), in his discussion of the characteristics of visual messages, contends that visual information specifically works on three different levels: symbol (on the form of visual input), representation (of what we know), and the abstract (the pure visual message), summing up the act of seeing as “a multi-dimensional process, whose most striking characteristic is its simultaneity”. Crawford and Hade (2000:66) state that when using picture wordless books, “[children] ... construct meaning through the use of prior knowledge and experiences, attention to intertextual cues, multiple perspective taking, reliance upon story language and rituals, and the implementation of active, playful behaviours as part of the reading process”.

In recent years, the notion of literacy, or being literate, as exclusively applied to reading verbal texts has given way to a more contemporary understanding of ‘multiliteracy’. The term highlights that the globally increasing quantity of communication channels and linguistic diversity in the world calls for a much broader view of literacy than portrayed by a traditional language based approach (New London Group 1996). The expansion of the view of literacy to include that of visual literacy is not, however, without its problems. Arbuckle (2004:445) explains that the use of the term ‘visual literacy’ often seems to be:

[B]ased on the assumption that non-verbal visual images are a universal language that every sighted person can interpret. This is not always the case. Images on paper are essentially arrangements of lines and shapes on a flat surface - symbols which make up visual language representing objects in a three-dimensional world. Reading pictures is a cognitive skill and to understand a picture correctly, the viewer must know certain conventions.

Nodelman and Arbuckle’s concerns regarding the conventions required in interpreting images are set at ease slightly when one considers the predominantly visual world we live in. Children and adults alike are inundated by a wide variety of visual messages on a daily basis. These take the form of posters, billboards, television programmes and advertising in local shops and communities; most of these are found even in rural or poverty stricken areas. Furthermore, Ryan (2011) argues that pictures have specific narrative strengths when compared to language. They are capable of giving a far better idea of the spatial configuration of the story world, they can suggest emotions through facial expressions and body language and they can illustrate beauty directly, rather than identifying the property and leaving its interpretation to the reader’s mind. Because pictures are static, the viewer has sufficient time to inspect, and re-inspect them for significant details. When purely visual means fail, pictures can internalize language by showing objects containing inscriptions, such as signs or letters. They frequently make up for their inability to name characters by using established attributes for, and by suggesting abstract ideas through conventional visual symbols: a skull for death, a rain cloud for sadness. What is important to note here, however, is that symbols differ between culture groups. An illustrator should therefore be aware of the cultural implications that a symbol may or may not have.

2.1.2 A narratological analysis of wordless picture books

Narratology is defined by Jan Christoph Meister (2011) as “a humanities discipline dedicated to the study of the logic, principles, and practices of narrative representation”. Bal (1985:5) provides the following breakdown of a narrative text as being:

[A] text in which an agent relates a narrative. A *story* is a *fabula* that is presented in a certain manner. A *fabula* is a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors. An *event* is the transition from one state to another state. *Actors* are agents that perform actions. They are not necessarily human. To *act* is defined here as to cause or experience an event.

The term *fabula* is used by Kafalenos (2001:139) to describe a chronologically ordered sequence of events constructed by the viewer in response to a representation. When assessing the visual signs of a wordless book, the reader ultimately begins to assimilate a specific narrative by ordering them into time and space. Meaning thus begins to be constructed. Within the field of Narratology, *narrativity* proves to be a practical term in the analysis of wordless books. Shitemi (2009:83) writes that:

[P]ossessing narrativity implies the ability of the receiver to evoke narrative script whether the author intended the nature of invocation that particular analysis arrives at or not; or even more, whether there is a specific ‘author’ to be referred to or not.

Abbott (2011) notes that narrativity’s rise as a central term in narratological theory takes place in postclassical narratology, in the last decades of the 20th century. Postclassical narratology is less formalistic than classical narratology, and brings together poetics and hermeneutics. Narratives are studied as contextually situated practices. Narrativity has positioned itself to a shift away from the formalist limitations of structuralist narratology through turning the attention increasingly to transactions that occur between narratives and the audiences that bring them to life. Yet narrativity does not represent a negation of its predecessor, but rather acts as its extension. Described as an ‘adjectival’ noun, narrativity suggests a felt quality, something that is not entirely definable and is subject to gradations (Abbott 2011). Ryan’s (in Abbott 2011) distinction between ‘being a narrative’ and ‘possessing narrativity’ brings out the difference more clearly when she states: “...where a narrative is a ‘semiotic object’, narrativity consists of being able to inspire a narrative response”. Narrativity as a term also has a particular user friendliness which can be ascribed to its flexibility and comparative freedom from restrictive categorization (Abbott 2011). In

short, Ryan (2011) argues that, if narrative itself is a ‘fuzzy concept’, then narrativity is a term more closely attuned to its fuzziness.

When applied to wordless picture books, the practical advantage of narrativity as a term can be understood through narrativity’s consideration of transgeneric and transmedial narratology, which include narratives in genres and media where words are no longer central to narration and where readers become viewers and active participants (Abbott 2011).

To achieve narrativity, pictures must capture the temporal unfolding of a story through a static frame. Wolf (in Ryan 2011) distinguishes three kinds of pictorial narratives: “monophase works that evoke one moment in a story through a single image; polyphase works that capture several distinct moments within the same image; and series of pictures that capture a sequence of events”. A series of pictures are necessary to depict a story that is both reasonably determinate and new to the reader (Ryan 2011). As such, wordless picture books as a genre usually fall into this category; however, they can also combine methods. Nikolajeva and Scott (2006:119) state that:

[P]ictures have unlimited possibilities of conveying literally an ‘omnipresent’ perspective by giving a panoramic view of the setting, such as depicting several parallel events or several characters in different places, that is, expressing something the verbal text can only express indirectly, for instance by saying ‘At the same time’.

I experimented with this omnipresence in the illustrations of *Iphi ibola?* where the main character, a little boy, is depicted searching for his lost soccer ball. Three separate events are depicted in one image on the same double page spread (Figure 2.7). The majority of the book is, however, illustrated in a serial picture format.

Serial pictures can narrate in two ways. In the first instance, each picture is devoted to one episode in the life of a character by resorting to the techniques of the monophase pictures. The individual images depict self-contained mini-narratives separated from each other by significant time gaps, but the various scenes are connected by weak causal relations. Narrative content is suggested on the level of the individual images by their reliance on familiar scripts, identified by a constant visual feature.

The second technique is more common to wordless comic strips, and is exemplified in the illustrations of *Abongi's journey*. Each static image is associated with one instant in a continuous action, much like a frozen frame in a silent film. The separate images are broken up by smaller time spans than in the first instance, but are linked by stronger causal relations (Ryan 2011). In *Abongi's journey*, the main character (Abongi) pushes his wire car from the country to the city. As he is shown venturing through different landscapes and situations, a number of stories unfold and develop with each 'reading'. The illustrations in this wordless picture book directs our attention to an action, gesture, expression or landscape and shows it to us frozen, in an isolated moment removed from a temporal context.

In her article *Reading visual art, making – and forgetting fabulas*, Kafalenos (2001:139) asserts that the visual representation of a single scene does not constitute a narrative. She elaborates on this by explaining that the viewer of a visually represented moment interprets the depicted scene in relation to prior and subsequent events. These are selected from information that he or she possesses, or imagines in response to a single visual scene. Rosser (2004) ensures continuity between the static scenes in *Abongi's journey* by providing visual clues as to the next panorama on each page, for example, the donkey cart shown in the distance on page seven is the focus of pages eight and nine (Figure 2.8). Despite the inclusion of illustrated causal linkages, the events that occur in the spaces between are left open for the reader to interpret. Even when events are *told* a chronological sequence, the reader, during the process of listening, pays attention to indications of sequence and assembles for him or herself a chronologically ordered fabula. This same process of constructing a fabula is one of the ways in which we interpret a *visually* represented scene. This hermeneutic procedure enables the viewer to explore temporal and causal relations among events, and between isolated moments and prior or subsequent events and states by using a personal background as a framework (Kafalenos 2001:139). Questions that the reader may ask could include: Why is Abongi (should the reader chooses to accept this as his name) on this journey in the first place? Who are the children in the car? How did the car get to the field (Figure 2.9)?

2.1.3 Polyvalence and the social construction of meaning

The answer to the questions asked in the previous section will be different for individual readers of *Abongi's journey*. Although this polyvalence of images is not a new idea, narrative studies explain one of the reasons for it. Kafalanos (2001:141) imagines a visually depicted

scene as a crossroad, through which a number of narrative paths can pass, each of which includes the represented moment. Viewers may construct any (or several) of these fabulas in response to a static image. Fabulas are constructed in response to information that readers have about the depicted moment, as well as indications or clues in the illustrations that they interpret as indexical cues. An indexical cue is a mode in which the signifier is not purely arbitrary, but is directly connected in some way (physically or causally) to the signified - this link can be observed or inferred (Pierce in Chandler 2002:37). Fabulas made from these cues in turn influence the interpretation of static scenes by placing it in a temporal context from which causal relations between the scene and events prior or subsequent to it can be explored. Readers can for example, consider whether the depicted scene is a state of equilibrium, or an event that is about to initiate a further event or a process of change.

In his discussion of the influence that social context has on the meaning of narrative, Mieke Bal (1997:118) states that:

The so called extra-textual situation creates another problem; the influence of reality on the story, in so far as reality plays a part in it. Even if we do not wish to study relations between text and context as separate objects of analysis, we cannot ignore the fact that direct, or indirect knowledge of the content of certain characteristics contributes significantly to their meaning.

In my construction of *My mother's matt* particular reference is made to the BoKaap areas of Cape Town in one of the static scenes (Figure 2.10a). Although other imagery, such as cars and tall buildings, have been employed to reinforce it as a city scene, Cape Town based readers could perhaps interpret it on a more personal level than other readers, due to their familiarity with the area. *My mother's matt* was originally sourced from a facilitator at the Ikhaya Trust in Kayamandi, with my target audience for the book being the children within that community. With this in mind, I attempted to create the book consisting of scenes that the audience may have been exposed to. As large sections of Kayamandi's population are migrants from the Eastern Cape, I included elements of its rural landscape into the sequence of illustrations, as a means to spark recognition of the setting from the audience (Figure 2.10b). I had hoped that the hills and *rondavel*¹¹ huts depicted in the introduction scenes would inspire different, more personalised stories from older readers, for example the mothers and grandmothers that had grown up in that area. The younger readers, who are

¹¹ Noble (1997:160) defines a *rondavel* (from the Afrikaans word 'rondawel') as a westernised version of the African-style hut.

growing up in Kayamandi may not recognise the specific area, or link the images with particularly personal fabulas, but would expectedly still be able to recognise the transition from rural to urban that occurs during the story, albeit not specifically from the Eastern Cape to the BoKaap. The reading of an image can as such never offer a closed reading of a narrative, as both the illustrator and the reader bring factors from their own social environment (Bal 1997:118).

As an illustrator, my personal context shapes the manner in which I visually depict stories. Randal Johnson is quoted by Morris (2009:52) in a discussion regarding her own artistic and cultural motivations. Johnson reports on:

[The] need to objectify and analyze the relationship between the analyzer and his or her object of analysis. Failure to do so frequently result in the analyzer assuming a privileged position (always self-attributed) and effacing relations of power that may be inherent in the relationship.

In line with Morris's artistic practices, my illustrations for *My mother's matt* and *Iphi ibola?* were created with the aims of this study, in particular the reading programme, in mind. My goal in creating these books was to illustrate a narrative that was culturally relevant to the reader, following an objective investigation of the wordless picture book as a genre. It should be noted that my personal context will to a certain extent have an effect on the shaping of my narratives in a subjective manner, despite my best attempts to remain objective in my representations. The extent to which this might affect the research outcomes should therefore be taken into consideration in the analysis of the research findings.

As open as the development of creating fabulas in response to visual representation is, there is one element that stays constant throughout the process. The visual representation is available to the viewer in its entirety all at once, and does not physically change during the viewer's process of interpretation. Narratives which are told in words generally specify the events to include in the fabulas we construct. For this reason, they are generally assumed to be the less open of the two modes of communication (Kafelanos 2001:141).

From the foregoing discussion, it is apparent that the wordless genre allows the reader to interpret the narrative in a way that allows for multiple narratives, without specifying a correct or wrong interpretation. Each interpretation is unique to the context through which the

readers view the image and usually includes the knowledge they possess about the images. This creation of a narrative, or storytelling process, provides a powerful framework for understanding text. Such meaning-building practices can be tied to children's own inner 'storying', which they use to make sense of the social world around them and to create meaning (Fang 1999:18).

2.2 Wordless picture books as educational tools

As stated earlier, literature advocating the use of wordless picture books started appearing in the 1970's (Dowhower 1997:60). Jalongo *et al.* (2002:167) report that these books provide an excellent resource for educators of children, as wordless books connect visual literacy (learning to interpret things), cultural literacy (learning the characteristics and expectations of social groups) and literacy with print (learning to read and write language). Through these linkages, wordless picture books support the development of basic literacy skills, as will be highlighted below.

Firstly, wordless picture books develop book handling behaviours. Before children can learn to explore books for themselves, they need to learn how a book 'works'. As many children learn to express themselves through pictures long before they are able to master print, these books are helpful in teaching children to identify elements of the book format, such as front and back covers, top and bottom, turning pages and the idea that a book follows a specific sequence. Furthermore, Jalongo *et al.* consider wordless picture books to be well suited to contemporary children's strengths, as they live in a society dominated by visual images. Because these books relay the story entirely through images, they encourage children to employ visual literacy skills to draw inferences from what is pictured, as well as to respond to the quality of pictures and note the details in them. Wordless picture books also inspire storytelling in many different forms. The genre's ability to address different audiences means that these books can be shared and enjoyed by children (and adults) at many different stages of emergent reading (Jalongo *et al.* 2002:168).

From a pedagogic position, the stories children create from wordless picture books can be used to determine whether they can identify and reason about the main idea, predict possibilities and associate events in the story with their own personal experiences. Jenson (in Dowhower 1997:65) argues that by analysing children's spontaneous story construction using

a wordless book, insight can be gained into story knowledge, i.e. story structure, story language patterns and dialogue patterns. Read and Smith (in Whalen 1994) identify reading skills inherent to wordless picture books include sequencing, noting details, determining main ideas, making assumptions, drawing conclusions, noting cause and effect and making judgements.

In a study conducted by Sulzby (in Dowhower 1997:70) the importance of pictures in the process of becoming literate is highlighted. In her classification of storybook reading, the first four categories are of interest when considering the use of wordless picture books, as the child is 'reading' by only looking at storybook pictures. Sulzby's categories start with the reader attending to the images without forming a story, i.e. labelling, pointing, commenting and following the action. In the second category, the reader attends to the pictures by forming oral stories, similar to a conversation. The third, attending to images fluctuates between sounding like a 'reader' with modulation and sounding like a storyteller. The fourth category sees readers attending to the pictures by telling a verbatim like story and sounding like a reader. None of these categories include text, but the pictures in the storybook facilitate a 'pretend' storybook reading. This is considered a noteworthy link in the process of becoming literate, because as individuals develop narratives, they develop a sense of story and demonstrate an understanding of sequence, while practicing oral and written storytelling. The wordless picture book as a genre supports learners who are not yet decoding print, and can build their confidence as readers and writers (Jalongo *et al.* 2002:168). It would appear from the majority of my research, that wordless picture books are as such generally accepted as a beneficial medium in the development of literacy¹².

Wordless picture books are, however, not only for children. Similarly, adults who are more skilled in acts of verbalisation can also read the book and construct stories because there is no correct version. Although the two distinct readers, adult and child, may not read the book in the same way, both are able to appreciate the form. Wordless picture books as such are capable of crossing generational boundaries (Houp 2003:22). The absence of words also

¹² In an argument *against* the use of wordless picture books for literacy development, Patrick Groff, cited in Nodelman (1988:186), suggests that the predominance of television in children's lives 'prewires' them to see plots in pictures. This 'prewiring' is, however, not present when children are to see plots in writing. Nodelman (1988:186) counter argues through his statement that should children be prevented from learning to respond to more complex demands of words on their own, then Groff's attack should apply equally to pictures that are accompanied by words, as this prewiring is present in pictures that are accompanied by words.

allows for the genre's comfortable transmission into other cultures and languages, making its books capable of transcending these boundaries and providing for a variety of cultures to enjoy the same book (Houp 2003:22) (Norton 1983:153).

2.3 The South African context

The use of wordless picture books in classroom situations as well as in literacy programmes abroad have been well documented over the last decade. Numerous studies have been conducted on the use of the medium as a tool to develop early literacy and to foster a love for reading in both young and old¹³. One has only to refer to the *The reading teacher* journals for ample literature on the subject. Various authors, including Reese (1996:172) promote the use of wordless picture books in the classroom situation; detailing the benefits they provide to develop reading and language competence. Furthermore, articles such as *Using storytelling to promote language and literacy development* by Peck (1989:138), and *The partnership for family reading* by Handel (1992:116), although older resources, define the basic principles that much of current language development are based on. Later articles, such as *A picture are worth a thousand words: using visual images to improve comprehension for middle school struggling readers* (Hibbing & Rankin-Erickson 2003:758-770) expand on the basic frameworks provided by earlier articles. I have also referred to the journal *Early childhood education* article *Using picture books to support emergent literacy* by Jalongo *et al.* (2002:167-177) for a more recent publication on the topic, although the basic premise of the article is similar to that found in the older *The reading teacher* articles.

South Africa presents a unique context for the use of wordless picture books, because of the so-called first and third world areas coexisting in very close proximity. As such, it faces a plethora of both first and third world problems. As a case study, the country comprises of a privileged minority that represents the affluent 'first world', whereas the majority of the population reside in rural areas and urban townships that represents the underdeveloped, poor parts of the country, sometimes referred to as the 'third world' component of South Africa (Molawa 2009:1). Statistics SA (2010) state that between 10 and 15 million South Africans live in areas that are characterised by extreme poverty and underdevelopment.

¹³ I refer to various articles from *The Reading Teacher* and to Dowhower's (1997:65-70) chapter on Wordless Book Research, in which she summarizes the research done to date and highlights other areas that may contribute to our knowledge and use of the genre. These studies include wordless books in descriptive, intervention and assessment studies.

With the benefits of wordless picture books clearly delineated abroad, I was surprised that few studies have given attention to the production and use of wordless books within a South African context. Katherine Arbuckle's (2004:445-448) article in the *Literacy matters* journal, *The language of pictures: visual literacy and print materials for Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET)* is the one of the only articles I found that investigates the use of illustrations as a singular means of communication, albeit from an educational viewpoint. Further research on a wordless picture book was found in the First Words In Print (FWIP) baseline study by Angela Schaffer and Kathy Watters (2003). This study included *Abongi's journey*, as part of the FWIP project run by the Centre for the Book¹⁴. The project aims to ensure that all very young South African children have access to the stimulation of picture books and story books in their own languages, and distributed four books to four areas in which the pilot phase of the programme was launched. The baseline report provides a formative evaluation of FWIP's first book delivery and distribution in the pilot areas of their study. The document gives insight into the effectiveness of the delivery model and strategy and the extent to which the books reached the target recipients and the manner in which they were used by them¹⁵. The study includes a brief outline of how readers responded to the different books. Only one wordless picture book was included in the study. *Abongi's journey*, the included book, clearly elicited a different response to the books with text. Schaffer and Watters (2003:12) write that "[m]any caregivers stated they had not understood *Abongi's Journey* as there were no words. More confident caregivers, usually ECD [Early Childhood Development] educators, expressed excitement about how the book could be used to stimulate storytelling and the child's imagination".

Based on the investigation into the nature and philosophy of wordless picture books, I believe that the wordless book and its use within the South African home is a topic that warrants further investigation. The creation of a wider variety of indigenous wordless picture books for the local market runs parallel with this consideration. These books could serve as a means of intervention to address the lack of a reading culture that is prevalent in South Africa. In order to give a background regarding the genre's local production, the South African context in

¹⁴ The Centre for the Book is a unit of the National Library of South Africa. Its mission is to promote a South African culture of reading, writing and publishing in all local languages, and easy access to books for all South Africans. The Centre advocates through its programmes the importance of reading for the nation and is involved in coordinating, promoting and encouraging book related activities in South Africa in all local languages. The Centre also coordinates various events and functions such as poetry readings, conferences, book launches, writing groups and writing workshops for teachers, youth and children (National Library of South Africa).

¹⁵ The complete report can be found on the National Library of South Africa's website, www.nlsa.ac.za.

terms of publishing, its reading culture and literacy development will be discussed in the following section. The wordless picture book's current standing in South Africa, as well as the manner in which wordless books could stimulate a love for reading will follow thereafter.

2.3.1 Literacy, illiteracy and the South Africa publishing industry

In his article, *Literacy growth and book development in Africa: is there any relationship?* Christopher (2010) argues that book reading and publishing are not an indigenous culture. The book as a cultural good has yet to ascertain its rightful place on the list of priorities of the government and the population alike. The fact that literacy is still being perceived in its rudimentary definition, i.e. that of being able to read and write, is a problem that he believes further contributes to the lack of an indigenous reading and publishing culture.

True literacy development should produce an increased readership and increased demands for books and other print material, as well as drive the production of diverse reading materials locally (Christopher 2010). Official figures show that about 4.7 million adults in South Africa are illiterate, with another 4.9 million adults being functionally illiterate having left school before grade seven (SABDC 2011). During National Book Week 2011, the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) Director General, Xaba Sibusiso (SABC 2011) stated that the purpose of this week is:

[To] encourage the culture of reading and writing in SA - given that we've got very low literate rates in certain parts of our communities, but also we've got a very low general reading rates in the country so we want to encourage people to read to buy books, to read to their children as well as to share books and donate books to those who cannot afford them

National Book Week is part of the government's New Growth Path scheme, which aims to eradicate poverty within South Africa. First established in September 2010 by a DAC entity, the South African Book Development Council (SABDC), this week aims to promote a culture of reading and writing. The intention is to create a platform where government, the book sector and civil society can establish partnerships to promote access to books and contribute towards the creation of a reading society (DAC 2011)¹⁶. It plans to do so through an

¹⁶ According to the SABDC, the scheme's emphasis has the potential to influence local scientific, technological and industrial progression, while at the same time also placing emphasis on socio-cultural development, public-private partnerships and the fostering of an informed citizenry to the benefit of government, industry and civil society alike (PASA 2011).

emphasis on reading promotion and access to information. Within this plan, the book is regarded as one of the most powerful mechanisms in achieving their goal. SABDC CEO Elitha van der Sandt (Just Curious 2011) explains:

It is in our interest to invest in reading promotion and increasing access to books. We launched National Book Week last September to instil a sense of national pride and encourage South Africans to read books, be they books in English or in our own languages.

The SABDC recently conducted a qualitative investigation into the literacy practices within the South African household. The results were alarming. A mere 14% of South Africans are active readers, with 51% of South African households not having a single book in their homes. Of the active South African readers, only 5% read books to, or with their children (SABDC 2011). The National Book Week website (2011) reports that there are thousands of books written by South African-born and -based authors available at libraries and bookstores across the country, but that only a few of these get passed around to be enjoyed. Other significant results include that 45% of those interviewed felt that books were too expensive, 27% said they do not read due to not having access to a nearby library, and 22% said that books are too difficult to read. Commenting on the above findings, Van der Sandt said: “The success of National Book Week will drive growth in our industry. It calls on us to become very creative, pool our resources and be consistent in our efforts to promote reading” (SABDC 2011).

According to van Heerden, South Africa has a relatively small trade book publishing industry, with very small print runs. On the other hand, the country has a very active publishing industry for educational books, which according to Du Plessis (in Van Heerden 2008) is the only truly viable market for publishers in South Africa. Van Heerden is of the opinion that there lies a danger herein; with the “new” South Africa’s focus on education, many writers and illustrators produce books in an assembly line fashion, creating materials that become “strictly educational”. Within this industry, we risk losing the magic of creating work that can be read purely for pleasure (Van Heerden 2008).

Despite the growing support for literacy development in mother tongue languages, the local market is still dominated by the English and Afrikaans children’s picture books, with more than 90% of books being produced in these languages. Local publishers still hesitate to produce children’s books purely for enjoyment in African languages, with dismal sales and

financial constraints on libraries being among their reasons (Du Plessis in Van Heerden 2008). Jean Williams (n.d.), executive director of Biblionef writes that the acquisition of books in all the South African languages is a challenge. Since the printing of new children's books in African languages is generally not considered to be profitable, such books are hard to find. Publishers are either hesitant to print books in indigenous languages or they have stored them away after getting the impression that the market does not have the interest, nor the means to buy these books. In short, it appears as if the absence of a widespread reading culture acts as an effective barrier to the development, restructuring and international competitiveness of the publishing industry. But it's not just the publishers who are at risk. Johnson (2009:12) notes that the profitable production of books that address the multitude of cultures, while avoiding stereotyping and alienating the readers that they are trying to reach becomes a risk that authors and illustrators are also exposed to, especially when one considers that South Africa has eleven official languages.

One of the areas that my empirical research examines is the ability of wordless picture books to overcome language barriers. I have already mentioned that theorists believe that many cultures can enjoy the same wordless picture books, and because they are not limited to a particular language, the readers are free to express themselves in a language of their choice. Although certain context relevancy still needs to be taken into consideration, surely wordless picture books can offer a means of producing a book that is not limited to one language?

2.3.2 The South Africa home environment and a culture of reading

The home as a micro-environment for learning, the role of the parents in a child's education, as well as the availability of reading material in South African homes provide insight into the lack of a local reading culture, as well as the literacy problems that South Africa is facing. Tiemensma (2008:51) discusses the South African literary environment in her master's thesis, entitled *The literary environment in support of voluntary reading*. She believes that creating an availability of books in the home is one way to develop a culture of reading. Du Plessis (in Van Heerden 2008) is of the opinion that most South Africans see reading and books as synonymous with an academic exercise or obligation. Parents who do not have a reading culture of their own often see reading only in relation to its educational purposes (Tiemensma 2008:61). Low levels of awareness exist as to the value of reading for personal and career development. This low awareness also leads to the fact that many children do not experience

parent-child joint reading before starting school. The high levels of illiteracy discussed earlier, as well as the shortage of context specific reading materials in indigenous languages lead to the fact that reading for pleasure is less likely to be a habitual practice within the South African home (Du Plessis in Van Heerden 2008).

At this point, it is important to note a distinct difference in reading for pleasure compared to reading for educational purposes. At a storytelling workshop I attended in June 2011, Xolisa Guzula of PRAESA (Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa) emphasised the importance of telling children stories to entertain them. In her discussion with the Kayamandi community, where the workshop was held, she said that when stories are told for enjoyment, children learn much more effectively, they learn through enjoyment. As children are told stories, they enter their own fantasy world, which makes stories a powerful form of entertainment.

Within the South African context, many social factors hinder the development of a reading culture within the home. Many South African parents are unable to support their children in developing their reading because of work and other commitments. In a study conducted by the Belfield Reading Project (in Tiemensma 2008:57), parents who were not involved in their child's reading development were affected by a combination of adverse factors, such as unemployment, health issues, financial difficulties and a lack of access to reading materials in the home. Many South African families cannot afford to purchase school books for their children, let alone books meant for enjoyment. Other parents did not value literacy and may have been uninformed with regards to supporting their child's literacy development. In these cases, although money is available, it is not spent on reading materials for the home. Despite the fact that the role of the parent as perceived by schools has also changed over the years, and that family involvement in a child's education is now more extensively recognised as important element in effective schooling, many parents still do not think that they have an educational responsibility once the child goes to school (Cruikshank in Tiemensma 2008:62). Cultivating a learner's interest in reading can help overcome home disadvantages and can also serve as a motivating factor to address the lack of reading culture in South Africa (Tiemensma 2008:57).

Access and availability to print materials and books is an important factor when trying to engage individuals and foster a love for reading. Speaking at a the *Free the Book* discussion,

hosted during Open Book Week in Cape Town, Mignon Hardy (2011) of the FunDza Literacy Trust and Cover2cover stated that South Africa does not provide the right content to get children interested in reading, simply because it has no connection to their lives. Cover2Cover has recently released the *Harmony High* series, a series of books aimed at teens, written by local authors and telling stories through the eyes of young people living in the townships (Nkosi 2011). The popularity of these books in the area in which they were circulated has lead Hardy to believe that by emphasising local, relevant content, the desire to read will be increased. FunDza has a five step plan through which it aims to boost literacy by popularising reading and building a community of teen and young adult readers across South Africa. Hardy (2011) roughly outlined the plan as follows: providing i) the right books, at ii) the right prices, iii) through different types of distribution such as iv) harnessing the cell phone culture in order to v) build a community of readers. FunDza aims to achieve this by providing content that is relevant to the lives of millions of young South Africans and leveraging the reach of mobile technology within this demographic (FunDza 2011).

Aside from local content, access to libraries is also a problem faced by millions of South Africans. Equal Education's (EE) publication *We can't afford not to* (Dwayne *et al.* 2011:1) argues that illiteracy and a lack of reading culture can be combated by ensuring that every ordinary public school has a stocked library serviced by a qualified, full time librarian. Currently only 7.7% of ordinary public schools have fully functional libraries. The role that libraries play in cultivating a culture of reading is highlighted by South Africa's Library and Information Services (LIS) Transformation Charter (in Dwayne *et al.* 2011:7), where it is stated that "[a]s an institution, libraries contribute significantly to a culture of reading with an emphasis on writing and learning. Although reading occurs both inside and outside libraries, they play the leading role in building a nation of life-long readers." Parents who cannot afford to purchase books for their children are not supported by school libraries that are able to aid the distribution of books to their homes, and the distance that many have to travel to reach a public library serve as a discouraging factor to lending books.

Various studies have found that a home environment rich in literacy activities exerts a lasting influence on developing a positive attitude towards books. Furthermore, parental involvement in reading activities has been found to sometimes be a more influential force in developing a culture of reading than other family background variables such as social class or the level of parental education. Parents who feel that reading is important will usually influence their

children to feel the same (Tiemensma 2008:51, 60). In most societies, children grow up with their parents or a close family member and these adults, along with any older siblings, become the child's first teachers (Desmond 2006:5). The vital role played by parents, grandparents and other care-givers at all stages in their children's education is gaining recognition. As a result, there is a growing need to support those parents who may wish to improve their own literacy skills and confidence in the context of family life and learning (NALA 2004:9). Andrea DeBruin-Parecki (1999:22) is of the opinion that in conjunction with this notion is a responsibility to assist a child in establishing literacy habits that lead to clearer understandings, enhanced critical thinking, consistent use of strategies, and an enthusiasm to learn. However, in order to achieve these, the parents must establish these habits themselves.

Family literacy programmes have increased its attention to reading practices within the home. Morrow *et al.* (2006:63) states that:

[It] is clear that if we do not attend to the home when we discuss literacy development, whatever strategies we carry out in school will never be completely successful. It is time for issues in family literacy to get front-page treatment.

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA 2004:9), based in Dublin, uses the term Family Literacy to describe the uses of literacy within family networks, especially activities which involve two or more generations. Furthermore it refers to education programmes which help to develop literacy and numeracy learning in a family context. The family literacy approach as used by the agency supports the learning that happens in the home and in communities, while trying to break down barriers between learning in different contexts. This approach gives insight as to how parents whose own education has been limited for various reasons can be supported, while striving to develop both children's and adults' literacy learning.

The parent's role in development is widely acknowledged in Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development. This theory views interaction with peers as an effective way of developing skills and strategies. Vygotsky, a social development theorist, states that a child follows an adult's example and gradually develops the ability to do certain tasks without help¹⁷.

¹⁷ The zone of proximal development as a concept was introduced by Vygotsky as a counterbalance to the concrete stage of Piaget's cognitive developmental theory. Piaget believed that the period of concrete operations extended from approximately the age of 7 to 11 years. During this stage, the child develops the ability to think logically on a concrete level, i.e. the child has overcome the major obstacles to logical thinking

Vygotsky pointed out that in his understanding of the relationship between education and development, children have a limited potential. This limited potential was found not within the zone of their actual development, but in the zone of proximal development (Kravtsova 2009:11). Vygotsky defines the Zone of Proximal Development as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (1978:86). Thus, the zone of proximal development constitutes what children cannot do autonomously, but can do with the help of an adult. Based on this understanding of the psychological essence of the zone of proximal development, two of Vygotsky's conclusions are particularly noteworthy for the purposes of this study. Firstly, the only good education is an education that leads to development, and secondly, what children do today with the help of an adult (or a more capable peer), they will do tomorrow independently (Kravtsova 2009:11). Although more in depth discussions arguing both for and against Vygotsky's theories exist, they are too lengthy to include in the scope of this thesis, and as such, I have limited the discussion to the basic outline of his theories to the extent that it is valid for the purposes of this study.

Tiemensma (2008:62) infers that South Africa is facing an enormous challenge in terms of promoting reading at home. The lack of social, political and economic support for many parents in dealing with housing, health and other social problems put many children at risk of not ever experiencing a book as a source of enjoyment, or as a joint reading exercise with their parents. However, in order to create a world of engaged readers, attention needs to be given to the affective side of reading and literacy – the *enjoyment* that a reader derives from engaging with a book, the motivations that drive them to read, the wide variety of social and cultural factors that influence them to read and the array of forms that literacy can take and the roles that it can play.

2.3.3 Joint reading

Research conducted by the SABDC (2011) and discussed earlier in this chapter showed that and alarmingly low 5% of active South African readers shared books with their children

that were apparent in earlier developmental stages (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman 2010:118). Piaget proposed that development follows an invariant sequence, whereas Vygotsky placed a stronger emphasis on social interactions. Vygotsky believed that knowledge is not individually constructed, but co-constructed between two people. Remembering, problem solving, planning, and abstract thinking have a social origin (Meece 2002).

through joint reading. Joint reading is seen as one of the earliest means to develop literacy and a foster a love of reading within the home. Considering the preceding analysis of the home reading environment, it could be presupposed that many South Africans are missing out on the benefits such a strategy can offer.

Reading with a child is a seemingly ordinary activity. Yet children's books offer new and different ways of learning and identify with both every day events and imaginative worlds. Books provide an opportunity to experience life from various perspectives (Seden 2007:135). Dwyer and Newman (2008:498) state that children as young as 6 months respond to book reading and that is never too early to start reading with a child. They are of the opinion that shared book reading is the single most important activity to help children become literate.

Although children are exposed to reading at school through teachers and carers, Machado (2010:608) is of the opinion that parents have the advantage of being able to connect story book features not only to personal experiences that they have shared with their child, but that they also have a special insight of the unique character of their child's personality, interests desires and abilities. The parent and child have an emotional bond that can be harnessed to connect book reading to an experience of pleasantness for the child.

Book sharing is defined by Price, Van Kleeck and Huberty (2009:171) as an activity "during which parents mediate texts for young children, scaffolding their comprehension through interactions about the content and the illustrations and helping the child to participate in more sophisticated ways than he or she would be capable of independently". Joint reading creates an ideal opportunity for parents and children to co-construct knowledge and meaning in a social setting.

During a shared reading session, parents can ask questions, point to objects in illustrations and use hesitance to promote guessing, as such allowing their child to discover cause-and-effect relationships. Story book illustrations can also be 'read' and discussed in detail. Studies suggest that book reading not only stimulates vocabulary development and knowledge about the world, but also increases children's motivation and interest in becoming literate (Bus *et al.* Dwyer & Neuman 2008:489). With regards to the benefits that joint reading has for children, Seden (2007:134) explains how theorists about children's literature report that joint reading creates a capacity for the child to engage with a range of literacies, to develop

imagination and empathy and fosters the child's social, psychological and spiritual development.

Comprehension skills, similar to those found in wordless books reading, and an encouragement to enjoy reading are gained primarily through the dialogue that is facilitated through joint reading (De Bruin-Parecki 1999:2). The parent or primary caregiver is also in a position to make stories relevant to the child's life, and to give praise and feedback based on their personal understanding of and relationship with the child. Parents are generally very aware of their child's learning style and language skills and as such can explain and elaborate aspects of stories in a way that enhances the child's literary skills at his/her specific reading level (Lacher, Nichols & May 2005:59). Adults can promote positive attitudes toward reading through enthusiasm, animation, and modelling (Hiebert, Holdaway in De Bruin-Parecki 1999:3).

The benefits of shared book reading extend beyond that which is experienced by the child. In a study by Seden (2007:137), parents who engaged in joint reading with their children not only felt that they were contributing to the child's development, but also perceived an improvement in their parenting capacities¹⁸. The adults who partook in this study described how they believed that both their children and they, as parents, benefitted from reading together. All the parents enjoyed books and wanted to impart a love of reading not only for its educational value, but also for the pleasure it brings to their children.

Seden (2007:137-138) notes that apart from reading capabilities, the parent/child relationship also profited from the joint reading activities. It also emerged that the process of reading was important to parents in creating emotional warmth and stability with their children. One participant described the reading time as "[a] bond, that 5 minutes for you and them . . . this is their loving and special time." Parents all expressed the view that the reading was an activity which promoted emotional closeness, empathetic responsiveness and secure attachment in their families. Seden (2007:139) concludes her findings by stating that:

Critically, reading is an activity where children and a parent interact. Such interaction is essential for language relationship development and the way the child constructs personal

¹⁸ Seden (2007:135) defines parenting capacity as "both the functional aspects needed to ensure that children are fed, clothed and kept safe and also the ability to respond with empathy and sensitivity to each individual child's particular developmental needs".

meaning. Sharing a book with a child is can be an extremely rich experience, and the literature in education and psychology on the topic illuminates how books can be both a “mirror to nature” and a means for adults to explore the links between their own “outer and inner” worlds

Upon an overview of the South African environment, we can conclude that being able to read is one of the most needed and empowering skills for a person. Preschool years are critical to the development of emergent literacy and both print awareness and oral language development play a crucial role in the acquisition of reading skills (Pullen & Justice 2006:39). Joint reading with children is an important contributing factor to developing these skills. Ideally, parents should be able to utilize this technique in their home environment, yet a parent who is illiterate, or has a low level of literacy may not feel that they are able to make sense of the print that accompanies many locally produced children’s books.

The discussion of the South African context, paints a rather negative picture for the development of a reading culture in the country. However, as noted in my introduction, reading does not need to begin with words. Reading can simply be defined as an active, constructive, *meaning-making process* (Colorado State University 2011). Gestalt-Psychology notes that visual perception is intimately involved in thinking (Schwarcz 1988:30) and thus, in the making of meaning. The growing body of literature that advocates the use of wordless picture books in educational programs bears testament to the genre’s ability to address literacy development as well being a motivating factor for readers (Stewig in Dowhower 1997:65).

2.4 The wordless picture book in the creation of a reading culture.

Stewig (in Dowhower 1997:65) suggests three reasons that wordless picture books may be popular as a motivating factor for readers. Firstly, children today are visually oriented. Secondly, due to the fact that the genre does not have words that necessitate decoding by the reader, wordless picture books may be seen as more accessible. Lastly, Stewig believes that wordless picture books allow a wider (oral and written) interpretation than books that do include text. Wordless narratives have no right or wrong answers, nor do they require a person to be able to ‘read’ the words to enjoy the action. For these reasons, wordless picture books may encourage readers to develop a more positive attitude to books in general, and as such, foster a culture of reading that these readers can transfer to their children.

Seden's (2007:137) study indicated that parents wanted to pass on a love of reading for pleasure and education, irrespective of their literacy background. Parents who were unable to read simply looked at picture books and discussed them with their children. Radebe (in Morris 2007:33) argues that although illiterate parents may be intimidated by the text on a page, through the use of picture books, they are able to create a narrative via the contextual clues of the visual story, and in this way still share a rich experience with the child. On the other hand, literate parents may not be certain of how to simply start the story telling process with their child (Lacher, Nichols & May 2005:59). Wordless picture books could provide an ideal catalyst for the unsure parent to begin telling a story. Parents can also share these stories with their children in their home language, providing them with a firm basis for learning other languages (Fulton 2006:11). Arbuckle (2004:446) states that

[P]ictures in print materials attract readers by capturing their attention. This is of particular value when the audience may be reluctant readers or readers who may be intimidated or put off by expanses of unbroken text, such as readers with limited education.

She also believes that the aesthetic element in illustration takes advantage of the nature of humans to be attracted to visual stimuli. People the world over have decorations and various art forms that are important in their lives. Modern advertising, for example, relies heavily on visual elements to 'brand' products and attract customers (Arbuckle 2004:446).

Apart from literacy linked benefits, illustrations in wordless books can be viewed as a means of cultivating imagination. Nussbaum believes that the arts and humanities teach children to think imaginatively. Through the development of this 'narrative imagination', Ellison (in Nussbaum 2010:107) proposes that people are able to develop their ability to see the full humanness of people from other cultures that we encounter in daily life. These skills bring people in contact with issues of gender, race, ethnicity and cross-cultural experiences, and empower them to see beyond stereotypes. Nussbaum argues that the Socratic¹⁹ kind of thinking that the humanities is capable of imparting to learners is particularly important in societies that need to come to grips with the presence of people that differ in ethnicity, caste and religion (Nussbaum 2010:54). When looking at South Africa's population, its 11 official languages and the variety of cultures and religions that abound, one can easily see how this

¹⁹The Merriam Webster Online Dictionary (2011) defines the term as: "of or relating to Socrates, his followers, or his philosophical method of systematic doubt and questioning of another to elicit a clear expression of a truth supposed to be knowable by all rational beings".

theory is applicable to this context. Furthermore the Socratic activity is connected with the concept of an education as ‘liberal’, in that it liberates people’s minds from their bondage to simple habit and tradition, so that they can progressively take responsibility for their own thoughts and speech (Seneca in Nussbaum 2004:45). Fisher and Williams (2004:1) expand on the importance of creative thinking in their argument that the promotion of creative thinking is a powerful way to engage children with their learning. Not only do children who are encouraged to think creatively show increased levels of self esteem and motivation, but they are empowered with flexible skills that help them adjust in new situations. In conclusion, Nussbaum (2010:53) argues that creativity, imagination and independent thinking are crucial to maintain a successful culture of change.

The act of actively interpreting illustrations could also serve as a means of preparing children and adults alike to recognise the power that visual images have. This knowledge can empower them to make more conscious decisions with regards to the images that they will encounter in their daily lives, for example the glossy images used in advertising. Duncum (2004:264) puts forward that the cultural forms of global capital combine images, words, and sounds to produce highly seductive experiences that are not always in everyone's best interests. The need for a citizenry equipped to deal with multimodal cultural sites remains pressing. The active involvement of children in discussions of the art in the book can be a means of encouraging children to approach the world with awareness and an inquiring outlook.

2.5 The production and use of wordless picture books in South African

There appear to be very few locally published wordless picture books available in South Africa. During a search for such books²⁰, it was found that the market is largely dominated by American or European imports, which is not surprising given the discussion on the availability of African language books earlier.

Many of the wordless books that were located during my research are specifically aimed at the classroom situation, for example READ’s Picture Story Packs (1995), which contain a series of eight full-colour posters that can be read without words. These usually included a

²⁰ An online search, as well as a search of local libraries and bookstores was conducted. Biblionef and Bookchat were also contacted with regards to the topic.

teacher's guide and a list of specific outcomes that had been outlined for each interaction with the book/poster. Furthermore, the *Storieboom* series was published before 1991, and depict wordless stories of a white family living in a suburb. Not only were these books specifically educational, but they are contextually irrelevant to the majority of the South African population who live in poverty. When compared to an imported selection, the South African output of wordless books seems to lean heavily on an 'educational' label and lack diversity. This is not surprising given the earlier discussion regarding illiteracy and current attempts to alleviate the situation. The educational system does seem to provide the best way of distributing these kinds of books, and as such, it is expected that the distributors would prefer to produce and view them as pedagogic material.

When looking at the context of wordless picture books in South Africa, it is naturally important to emphasise the importance of the local relevance of picture books and to take into account the educational level of the child (i.e. is the child advanced enough to decode graphic devices like motion blurs and character actions?) and cultural sensitivity (i.e. using snow to show seasonal changes in an area with a moderate climate would confuse the reader) (Johnson 2009:98). Books labelled as 'educational' can also, of course be used in the home and for joint reading. I do, however, agree with Van Heerden (2008) that by relying on wordless books that are produced into a 'strictly educational' fashion, we risk losing the magic of creating work that can be read purely for pleasure and perpetuate the current view that reading and story creation are for purely educational outcomes. The illustrator in the South African context is at risk of not being allowed to cultivate his or her talent by creating in a way that is quite different from the standard approach in developing learning materials.

A brief overview of the books²¹ I have located during my research provides some insight into the current market for wordless books in South Africa. *A very nice day* (2006), illustrated by Natalie Hinrichsen with concept by Anne Walton is part of the First Words in Print series (Figure 2.11). It presents a visual narrative of little girl as she goes about her day, getting dressed, going to the shops and returning home to make a meal. It is aimed at readers aged nought to one year. *Ibhokisi lemilingo* (2002) by Ian Lusted and Comien van Wyk is

²¹ There are certain books such as *The Butterfly's Christmas Day* (2003) by Savannah de Bres and *Friends* by Barbara Coombe & Maggie Slingsby, illustrated by Heather Moore that I have not included in this discussion. Although they have been identified as wordless books, the information I have regarding them is inadequate to include them in the discussion, as I have not been able to locate a hardcopy of either of these books. *Friends'* translation into several languages also casts doubt on its completely wordless nature.

illustrated in a similar style and tells the story of two children, a girl and a boy, that go on an imaginary adventure using a cardboard box as their transport (Figure 2.12). Both of the above books have been published with funding from various sponsors, and are available in a simple, staple bound format. The narratives are aimed at very young readers, are not complicated and provide the reader with various objects to identify and label. *Max* (2010) by Hilary Atkinson, has a slightly more advanced narrative, being classified as suited for children aged three to five as a first step in learning to read using illustrations only and has been made available for download online (Figure 2.13). *The rainbow birds* (2001) by Piet Grobler (Figure 2.14), Geoff Walton's *One starry night* (2011) (Figure 2.15) and *Abongi's journey* (2004) by Kerry Saadien-Raad and Tania Rosser are all wordless books in Masker Miller Longman's *Stars of Africa* reading series. The books are classified in the Stories section of the R-1 reading level. The illustrations are mostly in colour and are set in urban and rural areas all over South Africa. MML (2007) describes them as "[a]bout Africa for children in Africa".

All of the discussed books are published under an educational label; despite the *Stars of Africa* series providing a separate series for 'stories' within the predominantly educational series. An online search found the majority of these books also classified as 'readers' or educational²². The fact that many of the books are aimed at very young readers could perpetuate the misconception that wordless picture books are not of serious literary value, and should be used only with very young children. The Masker Miller Longman series however provides more complex narratives, as well as a diversity of styles, providing readers with a wider variety of reading experiences. These books comprise the most diverse selection of readily available wordless books that can be used to encourage reading for pleasure that my search has found to date.

Comparing the local selection to the imported wordless picture books, I feel that the international selection offers the readers more imaginative scenes with which to interact. Wordless picture books such as Shaun Tan's *The arrival*, and the 2007 Caldecot medal winner, *Flotsam*, by David Weisner (Figure 2.16), exhibit the expressive power of the image to convey an array of meaning, emotion and questions to its readers. As mentioned earlier by Van Heerden (2008) there is a certain risk in creating print materials for strictly educational purposes, losing the 'magic' that a book can provide to stimulate a love of reading. Although

²² I refer to sites such as Kalahari.com (2011), Loot.co.za (2011) and also catalogues provided by publishers and distributors such as Maskew Miller Longman (2007).

Grobler's *Rainbow birds* deviates from an educational formula through his use of more emotive illustrations, and *Abongi's journey* seems to function more as a story book than an educational one, I feel that South African wordless picture books still veer towards an educational label, again reinforcing common belief that a pedagogic outcome needs to be attached to reading. This is in stark contrast to the overseas production of wordless picture books. For example, Lemniscaat's²³ selection of wordless picture books, such as *Die verassing* (2003) (Figure 2.17) and *Monkie* (1986) in their children and youth section, consists of a variety of books that aim to present their picture book list not as just a Dutch list, but as a unique European list, with many different styles and influences that are reflected in their selection. It is this kind of variety that should ideally be published within the South African context, harnessing a myriad of local talent and styles to create a selection for readers to pick and choose from, and to provide a captivating reading experience.

At this stage the current use of wordless picture books locally should be touched on. As noted earlier, Schaffer and Watters' (2003) baseline study is the only current research that I have found that deals specifically with the use of a wordless picture book within a home reading environment. Although the study dealt mainly with the distribution of books, an excerpt from the report regarding the use of *Abongi's journey* points to the success that this book may have already had within the home: "[o]ne ECD educator was excited when children began telling different versions of the story to her as this meant that the story was being read and understood at home" (Schaffer and Watters 2003:12).

Reading at home is promoted by the Family Literacy Programme in KZN through a Box Library project. This project enables readers to take a box of books home to share with each other and with their children. Lynn Stefano (2011), of the Family Literacy Programme in KZN says that their programmes do not make use of wordless picture books specifically. The programme does, however, encourage parents and carers to tell the story rather than try read the text in the Zulu and English books that they predominantly make use of. Facilitators also encourage parents to get their children to tell them what is happening in the story from the illustrations if they are unable to read the text. With regards to the literature available within reading programmes, *Project Literacy* (in Johnson 2009:14) believes that a text in which the content is relevant and familiar to their life experiences is easier for a learner to understand

²³ Lemniscaat is a small, independent publishing house that specializes in quality picture books and juvenile novels.

and interact with. I believe that wordless picture books that are created in interesting and context relevant ways could prove especially beneficial to family literacy programmes, where the participants will be able to make use of the genre independently, in their own homes.

2.5.1 Distribution issues

Although this topic goes beyond the scope of this thesis, it is an important factor in creating a culture of reading in South Africa. There are currently several local initiatives that are creating cost effective ways to distribute books and promote literacy in schools *and* in homes.

The School of Education and Development based in KwaZulu Natal currently runs a programme aimed at supplying story books to school children in severely under-resourced schools in the area. The SEED Book series consist of 23 copyright free, short picture books which were designed to be easily photocopied to enable teachers to make more books as they are needed. About 14 000 books were printed in December 2009 for distribution during 2010. The books cost only R1.57 each to print with the cost being covered by a local sponsor. Clare Verbeek, the mastermind behind the initiative, explained, “[w]e want children to be able to take their copies of the books home, to read with their families” (UKZN 2010). The Little Hands Trust (2010) has developed a series of books in conjunction with PRAESA, which are available on a website, and can be printed out and stapled together for children to read. Although there are no wordless picture books in the catalogue, I feel that their innovative approach to distribution possibilities merits recognition. FunDza (2011), as discussed earlier, is harnessing mobile technology to create an interest in their series of teen books.

2.6 Conclusion

Dowhower (1997:63) outlines the wordless picture book as a literary genre that relates concepts, portrays themes or a sequence of ideas, gives information, provides entertainment and interaction, and/or tells a story through a series of illustrations without written text. As a more recent genre of books, with its wide array of formats and illustration styles, it appeals to an extensive audience and variety of age levels. Children’s tendency to express their enjoyment of wordless picture books by telling stories that the pictures suggest to them is a practice that, according to Nodelman (1988:186), surely contributes to the development of literacy. I have argued that the strictly educational production style of wordless picture books

locally could serve as a deterrent for the medium to serve as a catalyst in creating a culture of reading in the home, but that further investigation into this is needed.

This chapter has attempted to provide insight into the lack of reading culture in South Africa through an investigation of the home as a micro-environment for learning, the role of the parents in a child's education, as well as the availability of reading material in South African homes. It would appear that the lack of research on and the limited creation and distribution of wordless books in South Africa prevent the genre from realising its full benefits. I argue that wordless books as a genre can be used as an intervention method for cultivating a love for reading through joint-reading practices in the South African home environment. In order to provide a more in depth view how these books would function in a joint reading situation between a child and their parent/primary caregiver, the empirical aspect of my research includes a joint reading programme using wordless picture books. The research design and methodology for the programme is the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: Research methodology

The previous chapter contextualised wordless picture books and provided a theoretical grounding for the research through a semiotic and narratological analysis of four wordless picture books. The lack of a local reading culture was examined in terms of the home as a micro-environment for learning, the role of the parents in a child's education, as well as the availability of reading material in South African. High levels of illiteracy in addition to a shortage of context specific reading materials in indigenous languages, were identified as factors that prevent reading for pleasure becoming a habitual practice within the South African home (Du Plessis in Van Heerden 2008). The theoretical framework was used to pose the research question that guided the rest of the study. The focus of this chapter is the discussion of the research methodology and design that was employed for the practical component of my research.

3.1 Research hypothesis

Based on the conclusion of Chapter 2, the research question was defined as follows: can economically viable wordless books be used as an intervention to stimulate a culture of reading, through joint parent child reading, within the South African home?

Whereas my practical work was concerned with creating wordless picture books for children and adults to enjoy, I decided to include an empirical study as part of my research in order to evaluate the response my work received in practice. In order to have something to compare the reactions to my own work with, existing (published) wordless picture books were also included in the research. My primary aim was to provide a more in depth contribution to research on the use of these books locally, and I concluded that the addition of an empirical component in combination with a theoretical analysis of the genre could achieve this better than the latter by itself. A recent talk at by Manuel Castells at the University of Stellenbosch provides insight into my decision. Castells (2011), a sociologist associated with information society and communication research, stated that one could either do a theoretical study and say what others said, thus drawing conclusions from the theory, or by drawing conclusions from the results of fieldwork, together with those from theoretical research . As such, the empirical aspect of my study serves as a preliminary investigation regarding the feasibility of wordless books within the home to develop a culture and love of reading within a South

African context. The research was conducted in an effort to better understand how these books would function in a joint reading situation between a child and their parent/primary caregiver. Could narrative illustrations alone serve to convey a complete story and facilitate the enjoyment of reading and, if so, would the genre's use and possibilities within South Africa warrant further research?

It should be noted that although illiteracy is a major part of that context that I have been investigating, it is not the focus. Rather, illiteracy is seen as a barrier to cultivating a culture of reading, and I have argued that wordless picture books could serve as a medium to address this by harnessing a tradition of storytelling that exists within the mostly Xhosa speaking community of Kayamandi. The benefits of fostering such a culture of reading would certainly create conditions that could result in improved literacy development, but for the purposes of this study, my focus remains on a culture of reading as opposed to illiteracy.

In order to verify and elaborate on my theoretical argument, I decided employ a joint reading programme as the empirical part of my research. The programme would consist of four individual reading sessions, in which parents and their children were invited to spend time reading a wordless picture book. These sessions needed to take place in an environment that allowed privacy, for participants to express themselves and to enjoy the genre without being concerned about "getting it right". Four wordless picture books, discussed in the previous chapter, were chosen for the programme. They are *Abongi's journey*, *Wave* and two of my own books, *Iphi ibola?* and *My mother's matt*. I felt that this selection would expose the readers to a variety of styles and themes. The books also consisted of relatively uncomplicated narratives that would not create unnecessary confusion. When taking into consideration that some wordless picture books are more abstract, consisting of little or no narrative at all, I felt that it was important that the chosen books had a definite narrative, and that the images be linked by strong causal effects. The comparison of locally produced books to an imported one also provided useful insight for the study in terms of the manner in which readers reacted to imported content. Using my own books in the study not only served as a means to test how successful their narrative function was, but was used to examine if readers responded differently to books that were produced 'cheaply'. My books had been produced using rudimentary paper types and inexpensive binding techniques, as part of the practical investigation into creating economically viable wordless books. A practical investigation of the importance of creating local content for readers was also embarked on through the

creation of *My mother's matt*. The original concept and story for the illustrated book was sourced from a facilitator at the Ikhaya Trust, who was also a resident of Kayamandi.

3.2 Issues of measurement: intervention research

Intervention Research was chosen as a method to investigate the above hypothesis. The basic principle of this research is to create a means for improving community life and wellbeing through empirical research. Intervention research strives to promote the understanding of individual and community conditions and to contribute to their improvement (De Vos & Strydom 2011:475). As a qualitative research approach, smaller but focused samples are sufficient to conduct research (McBride and Schostak 2008).

Du Preez and Roux (2008:83) argue that *participative* intervention research should put emphasis on taking action that could lead to transformation and emancipation. In contrast to an understanding of intervention research as “methodology-as-technique”, they propose an understanding of it as ‘methodology-as-philosophy’. This awareness would highlight the role of philosophical assumptions in research (Hammersley in Du Preez & Roux 2008:81). By initiating a philosophical debate about intervention research that pays more attention to the methodological, epistemological and ontological aspects of the methodology, Hammersley (in Du Preez & Roux 2008:81) argues that philosophical literature should:

... [H]elp us to understand the full range of positions that are available – instead of assuming, for example, that one must either be a naïve realist, believing that the world simply is as it appears, or an extreme constructionist, denying the very possibility of knowledge simply because our experience is constituted through socio-cultural capacities and practices.

Participative intervention research which is informed by critical theory could direct the research to becoming more participatory and reflexive. Critical theory has emancipation as its main purpose and focuses on raising awareness, questioning and changing people’s self-understanding and actions in order to free them from societal limitation, prejudice and repression. Waghid (in Du Preez & Roux 2008:82) is of the opinion that research based on critical theory requires processes of self-reflection to identify and address power relations, mutual participation among researchers and research participants, and a disposition to take real action that could lead to transformation and emancipation. Du Preez and Roux (2008:83)

also argue that intervention research that is based on critical theory will allow the possibility for participants to reflect on their individual positions and actions.

Traditional research implies that the researcher is the sole bearer of authority and as such decides what intervention is needed, based on an interpretative study. He or she then intervenes accordingly. A participative process, on the other hand, should include not only the target group for whom the intervention is intended, but also other stakeholders that could give valuable input regarding the intervention process (Du Preez & Roux 2008:83). It is this participative process that I have based my research methodology on. By actively involving the participants, their opinions and feedback in the research process, I hoped to gain relevant better understanding how wordless books could function in the South African home.

Intervention research design generally has six phases, outlined by De Vos & Strydom (2011:476) as follows: (i) problem analysis and project planning, (ii) information gathering and synthesis, (iii) design, (iv) early development and pilot testing, (v) evaluation and advanced development and lastly (vi) dissemination. For purposes of this thesis, research was only conducted until stage four of the process, the early development and pilot testing phase. Once the data had been analysed and presented in the research findings chapter, it was presented in a manner that could serve as a base for the implementation of further research and pilot testing on the topic.

3.3 Sample design and sampling measurement

The participants for the research were sourced from the Ikhaya Trust Centre, a non-profit organisation based in Kayamandi, a township just outside Stellenbosch. A purposive sample design was used for the research. This sampling²⁴ technique is based on the judgement of the researcher, in that a sample is composed of the elements that contain the most characteristics, representative or typical attributes of the population that serve the purpose of the study best (Strydom 2011:223,232). Creswell (in Strydom & Delpont 2011:392) also states that this form of sampling as used in qualitative research allows the researcher to select participants and sites that can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem. As such, the sampling of participants from the Ikhaya Trust could provide rich detail to maximise the

²⁴ Sampling entails taking a portion or smaller number of units of a population as representative or having particular characteristics of that population (Strydom 2011:223,232).

range of specific information that can be obtained from and about the context (Strydom & Delpont 2011:392).

Authorization was granted by the management at the Ikhaya Trust to accommodate the research at their centre (Appendix B). There are a number of reasons why Kayamandi, and specifically the Ikhaya Trust Centre, was selected as an area to sample from and conduct the research in. Kayamandi as a community can be considered as representing the problems that hinder a South African culture of reading, as outlined in Chapter 2. Of Kayamandi's estimated 33 000 population, 10% are children under the age of 10 years and more than 50% of these children are from single mother homes. The area is still rich in Xhosa culture (Vision AfriKa). Lindner's (2006) study on the area gives insights into the challenges the area is faced with. The majority of Kayamandi's population are migrants from the rural areas of the Eastern Cape. Lindner writes that the correlation between poverty and migration has been identified as a further problem with regard to family life and protective measures for children in the area. The large-scale migration of people from rural to urban areas in their search for work has a tremendous effect on children's socialisation, and in such cases the parents and other adult caretakers are described as very influential in the development of the child's personality and behaviour. As a typical household in the area consists of seven adults and children, with an average of R1000 income per month (Vision AfriKa), it is understandable that the parents in this situation are truly the child's first role models (Lindner 2006:209). In their 2008-2009 progress report, Siziwe Kuboni (2010:2) of the Greater Stellenbosch Developmental Trust writes that:

Illiteracy, a general low level of skills, a high incidence of HIV/AIDS and numerous complementary factors make the transition from an oral to a literate culture and from a rural to an urban environment complex and difficult. Yet, Kayamandi is also a dynamic community with substantial reservoirs of energy and aspirations.

The children that attend the Ikhaya Trust are from low income households, and as such their attendance of the programmes at the Trust is funded by sponsors in Germany (Greater Stellenbosch Developmental Trust 2011). The parents of the children in attendance at the centre also reflect the different employment situations, and as such, could provide valuable insight to different reading situations in the home. Some parents are unemployed, others only work on a part time basis and some are employed full time, often working extremely long hours and seeing little of their children. The difficulties that the inhabitants of the area face

are comparable on a wider scale to the problems that the larger part of the South African population faces, and as such, represent a portion of the population.

The Ikhaya Trust Centre as a base provided me with a safe and private area for uninterrupted joint reading sessions. The centre is situated centrally in Kayamandi and as such lessened travel requirements for the participants, as they were all local residents. The existence of an established literacy programme, the *Sithanda Ukufunda* Literacy Programme²⁵, also provided access to valuable input from other stakeholders and professional, such as Adele Botha, the literacy development specialist. Botha in particular provided an immense source of knowledge in a field in which I am not familiar with - literacy and early childhood development. Her contribution in this area provided a solid foundation for the research sampling from the centre's preschool, aftercare and grade one group. The centre also served as a credible means of introducing myself and the research to the community and of creating a good rapport.

The residents of Kayamandi constituted the universe for the study, with the population being narrowed down to groups consisting of children that attend a programme²⁶ at the Ikhaya Trust, and their parent or primary caregiver. Children within this population were sampled based on their age, i.e. between six and nine years old. The reason for this was firstly that the ages of children in the preschool and grade one group varied between these ages, and secondly that, within this age range, many of the children would have had some exposure to books. This would give participants something to compare their experience of the wordless books to, and minimize the risk of it being their first encounter with a book. The final criteria for the sample was consequently as follows: children, between the ages of six and nine, that are currently in attendance at the Ikhaya Trust, and their parent or primary caregiver²⁷ who are interested in the research, would be willing to volunteer as a participant and would be able to set aside the time necessary for participation in the study. All of this information was outlined in an information form regarding the research (Appendix C), as well as a consent form which was given to each volunteer participant. Due to space and time constraints, the sample

²⁵ As mentioned in the introduction, The Ikhaya Trust Centre has been running the *Sithanda Ukufunda* Literacy Programme since January 2010. Its main focus is to improve literacy levels through empowering and training the facilitators, parents, volunteers and children in Kayamandi (Greater Stellenbosch Developmental Trust 2011).

²⁶ I refer to the preschool or aftercare groups. More information on these groups is available on the Ikhaya Trusts website <http://www.ikhayatrust.org.za/home.html>

²⁷ the primary caregiver is not always the biological parent

comprised of 10 units of analysis, with one unit consisting of a parent or caregiver and their child, thus 20 participants in total.

3.3.1 Ethical considerations

Strydom's, *Ethical aspects of research in the social sciences and human services professions* (2011:115-130) provided guidelines regarding ethical considerations that were taken into consideration for the duration of the programme. The research was based on common trust, cooperation and mutually accepted standards and expectations from all parties involved. The data obtained from the research was not at the expense of any of the participants, and their identities and any information given during the interviews have been kept strictly confidential.

All participants were informed that their participation was confidential and voluntary, and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time, without any negative consequences. Their children could also individually decide to withdraw from the research at any stage without any negative implication regarding their placement at the trust or relationship with any of the trust's employees, as their identities would be kept confidential.

3.4 Fieldwork practice and data collection methods

A letter of invitation to take part in the research was used as an instrument to implement the programme. This was sent out to the preschool and grade one class at the Ikhaya Trust in June 2011. I was also able to make contact with members of the community with whom I attended a story-telling workshop²⁸ in June 2011. The workshop was also based at the Ikhaya Trust Centre and was used as an opportunity to distribute the same letters of invitation to parents who expressed interest in the research. The letter provided parents with a basic outline of what the research would involve, a contact number where they could obtain more information and the name of a facilitator at the Trust who they could speak to should they prefer that I made contact with them (in case they did not have airtime or access to a telephone). They were invited to attend an introduction session on the 19th of July 2011, held at the Ikhaya trust, where they were encouraged to ask questions regarding the research and

²⁸ This workshop was hosted by PRAESA on the 11th and 18th of June 2011.

could leave their details if they remained interested in taking part. The individuals that expressed a readiness to volunteer were then contacted individually and approached as participants for the research.

Upon volunteering for the research the parent/primary caregiver was required to sign an informed consent form (Appendix F), giving written permission for both themselves and their child to participate in the study. The children were also asked to sign assent forms (Appendix G). All forms were provided in English and Xhosa²⁹, and a translator was available to assist in clarifying any uncertainties in the documentation. Arrangements were made for consent to be given individually, as a means of protecting the confidentiality of participants. Participants were also informed of the nature of the research as participative, and encouraged to express any opinions or suggestions they had before, at any time during or after the programme.

The research required participants to come to the Ikhaya Trust Centre once a week for a reading session. A time frame of 60 minutes was provided for each session. This included an interview held with the participants after each session, and enough time to clear and clean the room before the next session began. During their session, participants were asked to read, explore and talk about a wordless picture book together. The room provided was solely for their use, and no observation would occur during their reading time. The sessions were held over the period of a month, in August 2011, and a weekly timetable was worked out that suited all participants. The facility was also available after hours to accommodate working parents, or parents that needed to reschedule a reading session due to unforeseen circumstances. In total, each unit of assessment, or 'group' were required to 'read' four wordless picture books, one book per session. In order to guarantee the individual participant's privacy, confidentiality and provide adequate time for them to spend reading the books, emphasis was placed on frequent and effective communication as a necessity when it came to the scheduling of sessions.

Two semi-structured interview schedules were utilised as data collection instruments (Flick 2009:211). The interviews were conducted with the parent and the child, and input was received from both participants. The first interview was aimed at gathering data regarding the group's experience after each joint reading session, taking the participant's perception of and

²⁹ Only the English versions of the forms are attached as appendices.

interaction with the visual narrative, enjoyment of the genre and experience of the reading situation into consideration (Appendix D). An interview schedule was drawn up with a set of predetermined questions to engage participants on a narrative terrain (Greeff 2011:352). Having determined the overall issues that needed to be dealt with, the semi-structured interview then allowed for ordinary conversation and exchanges that relied on mutual attentiveness, monitoring and responsiveness (Sacks *et al.* in Greeff 2011:353). The participant was allowed a strong role in how this interview proceeded, and in some cases the interview deviated from the structured questions to include other topics.

The second interview focused on the participant's perceptions of the overall programme, and was held after the final reading session had been completed (Appendix E). Participants were asked to give overall opinion of the four wordless picture books, and elaborate on their experience with them in the reading situation. Their thoughts on using the medium in a home based activity were also considered. Permission to record participants was always gained before proceeding with the interview, and in the case where a participant was not comfortable with this, detailed notes were taken as the recording method. This data was then analysed, trends identified and are presented in fourth chapter of this thesis.

3.4.1 Biographical profile of the respondents

The research project consisted of 10 groups, comprising of a parent/primary caregiver and their child. Of the ten groups, only one included a primary caregiver, a grandmother, whereas the rest were all the biological parent of the child. The employment status of parents ranged from being employed full time to being unemployed. The majority were employed only on a part time basis. All of the adult participants were female. The ages of the children varied between six and seven years old. Six of the child participants were six years old, whereas four were aged seven. Three of the children were already in grade one at local schools in the surrounding area, with the remainder being enrolled in the preschool programme at the Ikhaya Trust Centre. Of the child participants, eight were female and two were male. Xhosa was the primary language spoken at the home of all participants. All participants were able to speak and understand English at least at a basic level, and nine of the 10 children were enrolled in English based education programmes. One child was enrolled in an Afrikaans school. All participants are residents of Kayamandi and are from low income households.

3.4.2 Participant attendance

Of the 10 groups, nine completed reading all four reading books. A minimum of three sessions were attended by nine of the groups, with one group attending only two sessions. Although the timetable was not strictly adhered to during the research, all participants had adequate time to spend reading in a private area, and arrangements were made to reschedule reading sessions when participants were unable to attend. The mothers that worked part time, and at irregular hours sometimes missed reading sessions, but clear communication between all parties ensured that the programme was flexible and could be adapted to suit their circumstances. In the case where an alternative time could not be found to accommodate a group during that week, the group was asked to read two books during one session. This occurred only once for each group and every effort was made to keep these cases to a minimum. A positive result that did arise from this situation was an opportunity for groups to compare the reading experience of two wordless picture books in one session. This organic development of the research process led to valuable data that surfaced during the interviews. Non-attendance was a concern that was considered during the planning phase of the reading program. However, I feel that the turn out for the programme was very positive given the context and time of year that the programme was run. Heavy rain, winter temperatures and public holidays³⁰ were factors that could have hindered participant attendance. Non-attendance could be ascribed to external factors such as irregular working hours and illness, rather than a lack of interest in the programme itself. Time constraints limited the program to August only. All of the participants completed the final interview.

3 4.3 Data capturing and analysis

Interview data was captured by taking handwritten notes during the interview, as well as recording the interview. Permission to record the interview was always gained from participants before proceeding. Only one participant was not comfortable with being recorded, and in this case the data capturing consisted of detailed notes taken during the interview process. The recorded data was backed up on a personal laptop and all interviews were transcribed and stored in the same manner.

³⁰ A public holiday on the 9th August (a Tuesday) also meant that access to the centre was restricted for two days.

Qualitative analysis is the “...non-numerical examination and interpretation of observations, for the purpose of discovering underlying meanings and patterns of relationships” (Babbie in Schurink, Fouché & De Vos 2011:399). Data from the interviews was reduced by generating categories and coding it. Prominent themes, recurring ideas or language and patterns of belief that linked people together were identified through detailed attention to the data content. This process reduced the raw data into manageable quantities which could then be categorised. The categories of meaning that emerged allowed for a search of themes that are internally consistent but distinct from one another. Grinnell and Unrau (in Schurink, Fouché & De Vos 2011:410) refer to this process as first level coding. The first level coding then provides the foundation for the data to be refined in “second level coding”, which consists of interpreting data in terms of what the first level categories mean, and shifting from the context of interviewee to the context of categories. This process was repeated until the data had been refined into small controllable sets of themes from which a coherent set of findings could be presented. Bogdan and Biklen (in Schurink, Fouché & De Vos 2011:411) describe the coding process in the following manner:

You search through your data for regularities and patterns as well as for topics your data cover and then you write down with words and phrases to represent these topics and patterns. These words and phrases are coding categories. They are a means of sorting the descriptive data you have collected ... so that the material bearing on a given topic can be physically separated from other data.

Two analytic procedures are basic to the coding process. The first pertains to making comparisons and the second to asking questions. The data I have collected was initially sorted through using open coding, i.e. naming and classifying data through a close examination. These parts were then compared for similarities and differences, and questions were asked about the phenomenon reflected by the data. Axial coding³¹ was then used in addition to the basic open coding process. Connections were made between a category and its subcategories, which are presented in Chapter 4. An example of this is the theme of using pictures to create stories. A subcategory that arose when looking at the data for this theme was the importance of local content to the reader. These processes allowed for research findings to be systematically linked to the theoretical groundings discussed in Chapter 2, and to investigate whether the results within a South African context are comparable to the overseas findings that were presented.

³¹ Axial coding is a procedure that involves putting data back together in new ways after the open coding process.

During this analysis of the data, Krueger and Neuman (in Schurink, Fouché & De Vos 2011:415) suggest that a process of evaluating how things which are *not in the data* could be important for analysis³². For example the working conditions of the parents need to be taken into account in this study. After the data had been analysed, it was then interpreted by forming a broader opinion of what that data draws attention to. Lastly, the quality of the data was assessed in terms of Lincoln and Guba's (in Schurink, Fouché & De Vos 2011:491-421) criteria for good research³³, i.e. (i) credibility/authenticity, (ii) transferability, (iii) dependability and (iv) conformability.

3.4.4 Shortcomings and sources of error

It should be noted that this research was conducted using a small sample group in a specific area of South Africa. Although Kayamandi is largely representative of many of the problems experienced on a national level, my findings cannot be generalised to apply to the larger public. Furthermore, the voluntary nature of participants' involvement in the research means that persons who participate may facilitate the task of the researcher, be more motivated and skilled than those who do not apply voluntarily (Strydom & Delpont 2011:394). Researchers using purposive sampling deliberately seek typical and divergent data (Strydom & Delpont 2011:392) to draw inferences from. The judgement of the researcher is a prominent factor in this type of research and should be taken into consideration as a factor that could affect the research outcomes.

3.5 Conclusion

The joint reading programme hosted at the Ikhaya Trust Centre concluded on the 29th of August. All the participants were provided with copies of the information, consent and child assent forms that had been signed before the reading programme was instigated. All data has been stored in a safe manner, and, as per the stipulations of the study's ethical clearance

³² This entails a search through the data during which the patterns and instances in the data are challenged while being incorporated into larger constructs. This part of the evaluation helps to determine how useful certain data is in illuminating the questions being explored, and how central they are to the study of the phenomenon at hand Krueger and Neuman (in Schurink, Fouché & de Vos 2011:415).

³³ Although there some debate exists regarding the criteria as outlined by Lincoln and Guba, I have made use of it for the purposes of my research. A complete description of both the criteria and discussion surrounding it is available in Schurink, Fouché & de Vos' (2011) chapter on qualitative data analysis and interpretation, in the fourth edition of *Research at Grass Roots* (de Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delpont [eds] 2011).

grant, will be destroyed within two months of publishing this thesis, to ensure that participant's identities stay anonymous and the information they provided remains confidential. Feedback from the final interviews was mostly positive and included suggestions from parents that the programme should be expanded at the centre. This is an option that could be looked into as a further step, along with other suggestions that are discussed in Chapter 4 where the research findings are presented and discussed.

CHAPTER 4: Research Findings

The focus of this chapter is on the analysis and interpretation of the qualitative data collected from the respondents who participated in the research. The manner in which this data relate back to the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter 2 will be investigated. The aim of the study was to explore the use of economically viable wordless picture books as an intervention to facilitate joint reading between children and parents/primary care-givers within a South African context.

The following objectives were set in order to reach the goal of the study:

- i. To conceptualise and contextualise wordless picture books as a genre.
- ii. To design, illustrate and produce two wordless picture books based on stories collected from the local community in Kayamandi.
- iii. To conduct an empirical study on use of wordless picture books in a joint reading programme between children and their parents/primary care-giver held over the period of one month.
- iv. To reach conclusions and make recommendations regarding the use of wordless picture books to stimulate joint reading between parents of and their children as a means of fostering a culture of reading.

Narratology as a theoretical framework was used to investigate the construction of wordless picture books in the formation of a coherent narrative and intervention research was utilised as applied research, within a qualitative approach for the empirical aspect of the study. A collective case study was used in the research design, and allowed personal communication with individuals involved in the sample group. Two semi-structured interviews were used as a data collection method. Purposive sampling was used to approach participants for the research. The sample consisted of children, between the ages of six and nine, who were enrolled at the Ikhaya Trust, and their parent or primary caregiver who was willing to volunteer as a participant and who would be able to set aside the time necessary for participation in the study.

Qualitative data was gathered from the 20 participants using two semi-structured interviews as a data collection method for the study. After each reading session, participant groups would be interviewed regarding the book(s) that they had just read. A separate interview

schedule was drawn up to be used after the participants had completed all the reading sessions, and was consequently also used as a debriefing tool. The first interview investigated the participants' perception of the visual narrative, enjoyment of the genre and experience of the reading situation. The second aimed to determine the participants' perception of the overall programme, and they were asked to give an overall opinion of the four wordless picture books, and to elaborate on their experience with them in the reading situation. Thoughts on using the medium in a home based activity were also explored.

The interview process started off statically on during the first sessions, but from the second session onwards participants were more willing to offer opinions and suggestions regarding the reading material. A readiness to discuss both negative and positive views regarding the books was noted. By the final session a good rapport had been established between researcher and the participants, and the information gathered from simple organic conversation proved valuable during the data analysis process.

The data was then analysed through first and second level coding techniques. Subcategories were then systematically linked back to theoretical groundings to include new dimensions and properties (Schurink, Fouché & De Vos 2011:411). The dominant themes that arose from the data are discussed in the following sections.

4.1. Discussion of themes

Both semi-structured interview schedules contained a minimum of five structured questions that addressed the aims and objectives of the research directly. The interviews were conducted in a manner that facilitated conversation, and allowed for topics that were not in the interviews to be covered. Both the parent/caregiver and child were present for the interview and input was received from both participants. The dominant themes that arose during the analysis of the interview data are discussed below.

4.1.1 Reading pictures and relevant content

Reactions to using only pictures to create a narrative were mostly positive. The majority of the participants found the books easy to use and the illustrations easy to follow. The pictures provided clues as to the setting of the stories, and much information was gathered from the

facial expression and gestures of the characters. The semiotic conventions that communicate mood and atmosphere as noted by Nodelman (1988:186-187), such as choice of media and colour, were noted by participants in their interpretation of the illustrations. For example, the whimsical acrylic rendering of the ocean in *Wave* was read by many of the groups as playful, and nonthreatening. The direction lines used as the seagull were used to interpret the direction and speed at which they were moving. Furthermore, the facial expressions in all of the books served as a guide for the mood during the narrative's progression. *Iphi ibola?* in particular proved successful at communicating emotions such as sadness, confusion and happiness through facial expression. After reading *Wave*, one of the mothers described how the illustrations guided their construction of a narrative; "[the pictures] helped so much because you can see her facial expression".

Most of the adult participants described the process of story creation using images as 'interesting'. They were surprised at the vocabulary that their children displayed while talking about the images, and also the detail that they noted in the images. One mother in particular insisted that her child (age six) repeat the story to me. On asking her if she was surprised at her child's interaction with the book, she said that she had no idea her daughter could create a story like that on her own.

However, some of the individual parent-child groups did not find all the books as easy to use. One mother described that her son found the book difficult to read. She said:

He would point at things, and recognise things like kids and birds and clouds, but got confused between a horse and a donkey. He did see that the dog wanted to lick the boys feet and that the boy was scared. But he didn't really make a complete story out of the pictures.

Although her son recognised elements in the story, his mother felt that they were not put together in a coherent narrative. In other cases, where participants described the book as more difficult, it was found that the images had been confusing. They struggled to link the previous image to the one that followed, and felt that parts of the story were missing. There was not a single book that stood out as 'difficult', and different individuals experienced difficulties with different books, for example one participant delighted in *My mother's matt*, while another described it as confusing.

The absence of words in these books relied on the illustrations to convey information that the authors did not provide the readers with (Nodelman 1988:186-187). The above reaction indicates the importance of constructing images that do not confuse readers, especially in the case of wordless books that are meant for independent use in the home. Arbuckle (2004:445) and Nodelman's (1988: 186-187) concerns regarding the reader's knowledge of visual conventions, and the recognition that the book presents a problem to be solved is demonstrated clearly here. An aspect that should be noted, however, is that as the readers interacted with the books and became familiar with the genre, they became more comfortable with creating stories. The parent-child groups that were hesitant or confused by the genre at the beginning of the reading programme also started expressing more enjoyment of the books once they had spent some time with them. When asked how she approached her daughter's hesitance to the fact that the book did not have text, one mother said that she explained to her that they didn't need words, they could make their own using the illustrations.

When examining the books that the readers found more difficult to use, a common theme that arose was the unfamiliarity with the content of the book. The comparison of two wordless books read during one session proved useful for this topic of examination. When reading *Iphi ibola?* and *My mother's matt* in the same session, one parent-child group explained to me that they could make more connections with the latter than the first. Her mother noted:

For this one [*My mother's matt*], it was easier because she had connections. But the soccer book was difficult for her. I had to ask questions every time, but here she could say something about everything. It reminds her of the Eastern Cape. At home we've got those, the *rondavels*. So, it's like at home. There is also a lot of livestock. So she said these are her grandfather's sheep.

Bal's (1997:118) theories regarding the 'extra-textual' situation was very clearly visible in this instance, as the readers' direct, or indirect knowledge of the content or of certain characteristics contributed significantly to the meaning that they derived from the illustrations. *Wave* also proved to be a particularly interesting example. The parents who took their children to the beach often had overwhelmingly positive reactions to the book; they easily built a narrative and created complete stories. In contrast, the parents who had never taken their children to the beach described the book as confusing. When asked why they did not enjoy it, compared to another book that they did, an overarching response was that the favoured book depicted things that they and their children were familiar with, for example an MTN sign, a taxi and a bus. Project Literacy (in Johnson 2009:14) believes that a text is more

easily understood by readers if the content is relevant and familiar to their own life experiences. Reactions in my own research that supports this view included statements such as “I think this one is the things that she is used to, like the wire car” and ”I understand this ... the ball [*Iphi ibola?*] and the first one [referring to *Abongi's journey*], they were relevant and easy to understand. Most of the things we are used to”.

Student-centred learning (SCL), also referred to as child-centred learning, is an approach to education which focuses on students' needs, abilities, interests and learning styles rather than those of others involved in the educational process, such as teachers. As a classroom teaching method, SCL acknowledges the student voice as central to the learning experience for every learner (Sue 2009). This approach has many implications for curriculum design, course content, as well as the interactivity of courses. The emphasis on local content is again stressed within this approach to learning. Sue (2009) argues that when what is being taught is relevant to the student, he or she is more likely to retain information and participate in the learning experience. She believes that for this reason, child-centred education has the potential to reach more learners and teach students more effectively. Furthermore, the student's responsibility and independence that SCL provides, help to develop the characteristics of lifelong learners. Motivation, self-evaluation, time management and the skills to access information are underscored as important outcomes of SCL by Ingleton *et al.* (2000:3). Research in student learning emphasizes the importance of concentrating on what learners do, and why they think they are doing it, rather than what the teacher does (Biggs & Shuell in Ingleton *et al.* 2000:3).

Morris (2009:42) argues that visual literacy is significant in the development of a reading culture in South Africa, but that notions of literacy should include its social context in order for a child to develop a meaningful relationship with reading and writing. This was reflected too in the participants' selection of their favourite book during the program. Again, the reasons they offered for choosing a specific book had mostly to do with how they related the content to their personal context, rather than the enjoyment of the illustrations themselves. *Abongi's journey* was the book that was most indicated as a favourite among participants. However, each of the four books was chosen as a favourite by at least one group.

In Chapter 2, I noted that the extent to which my personal and artistic motivations might impact on the research outcomes would need to be taken into consideration during the data

analysis phase of the research. The results from the data analysis, however, indicated that my motivations in creating the illustrations did not have a direct effect on the manner in which the participants used the wordless format. Participants interacted with my illustrations in the same manner as they did with the published wordless books provided for the reading sessions. It should also be noted that the cost-effective production of my books did not have an effect on the reading experience.

4.1.2 Storytelling

The storytelling itself was the aspect that all the participants enjoyed the most during the reading sessions. Although they expressed an appreciation for the illustrations and colour, the creation of their own narrative attracted them much more. Factors that contributed to their enjoyment were also related to the process of joint reading itself, comparable to Seden's (2007:137-138) description of joint reading as an activity to promote emotional closeness, empathetic responsiveness and secure attachment. One parent described her experience of creating stories from the books as follows: "I like it. I would like to learn more. I am learning more about her [her daughter] too". Some of the parent-child groups described their enjoyment of "working together to tell a story". It was clear that the storytelling facilitated a dialogue between parent /caregiver and child. The joint reading situation created an opportunity for parents/caregivers and children to co-construct knowledge and meaning in a social setting that was relevant to their context, as argued by De Bruin-Parecki (1999:22).

Storytelling proved to be a powerful communication and meaning making tool between adult and child participants. Fang (1999:18), describes 'storying' as being linked to a child's inner sense making processes. One mother told me that her son really enjoyed the storytelling, even when he was a little confused about the narrative. She said that he was laughing and positive during the sessions and communicated well with her through stories, whereas he is often withdrawn and quiet when she asks him about his day at school.

Narratives created using a wordless picture book also differed from group to group. The illustrations were interpreted differently by each participant, sometimes to the extent that narratives differed between parent/caregiver and child during a session. An example of this is provided by one of the mother's explaining the narrative derived from *Wave*:

... [M]aking stories out of the pictures for me, it was something different then what she was saying from the stories. So she would see other things, especially with *Wave* one. She was talking more about the waves, and to me, it was more the seagulls telling her what to do. For her, she was telling a story different to the one of mine.

The main storyteller during the sessions also varied. In some sessions, the child would tell his or her parent/caregiver a story, in other cases the roles were reversed and the adult would formulate the majority of the story. In a third another scenario, the parent-child group would formulate a story together, by asking questions about the illustrations and giving their opinions as to what was happening. In each case, the participants enjoyed both the telling of and the listening to stories.

The freedom the genre provided the participants to create their own narrative proved particularly functional in harnessing the storytelling tradition that is so dominant in South Africa. Sindiwe Magona (2011) reports that stories in the Xhosa culture are an integral part of socialization. I believe that by linking the book as a facilitating object in the process of storytelling, could serve to elevate the 'book as a cultural good' (Christopher 2010) in a community's list of priorities.

4.1.3 Utilization of illustrations: pointing vs. narrative formation

The manner in which the illustrations were used by participants also showed two main trends. In cases where the child told most of the story during a reading session, the school going children and some of the preschool group generally formed complete narratives. The images were linked together as a series, and a story was formed that had a logical beginning, progression and end. The child often gave the characters names, and basic casual relationships between the images were established.

In contrast, some of the preschool children would only point and name things that they recognised and name them, as in Sulzby's (in Dowhower 1997) first category of becoming literate. In this category the reader attends to images without forming a story, i.e. labelling, pointing, commenting and following the action. In these situations, the adult participant described how she helped the child formulate a story by asking questions about the images, such as "where do you think they are going?" The response elicited from the child was then used to build further conversation around the images. By accepting their child's comments

and ideas, the parent/caregiver reinforced the child's efforts and desire to share ideas (De Bruin-Parecki 1999). Although the school going children were more able to form a complete story from the images, problems were sometimes encountered with the structuring of their story. Here the parent/caregiver was able to assist in a similar manner.

During the sessions, parents were able to connect elements of the wordless picture books to things that were relevant in their child's life, and to create a personal experience for them both during the reading session. This was also argued by Machado (2010:608), who states that a parent's unique insight into the character of their child gives them an advantage of creating a pleasant reading experience, compared to reading experiences that the child may encounter in a school environment. Vygotsky's zone of proximal development also links in with the parent's ability to guide the child during the reading process. What children do today with the help of an adult, or a more capable peer, they will do tomorrow independently (Kravtsova 2009:11).

The critical role that the parent plays as the child's first teacher is highlighted in the above findings. Furthermore, insight was given into the ability of wordless books to function across a variety of developmental levels, as described by Houpp (2003: 22).

4.1.4 Wordless picture books and picture books with words.

All of the children in the reading program had been exposed to basic picture books that contained words prior to their participation in the research. During the interviews, the discussion would often lead to a comparison between the individual's experiences with using a wordless picture book, as opposed to using illustrations accompanied by text. Both positive and negative aspects arose when comparing the two. The negative aspects will be discussed first.

At the beginning of the program, some of the parents mentioned that they would prefer to read a book with their children that "had some words". When I enquired about their reasons for this, two main reactions were noted. The first was mostly in situations when the illustrations had been confusing, and they felt that some text would have clarified the illustrations to some extent, in order for them to see if they had made a 'correct' interpretation of the illustration. After reading *My mother's matt*, a six year old participant's

mother told me that her son “couldn’t figure out why the girl was crying” and that he wasn’t sure if he was telling the story right. Again, this was mostly the case where the books did not have a contextual relevance to the reader, or the narrative was perhaps more advanced for the preschool readers.

In the second instance, the parent felt that words were necessary so that, as one parent phrased it, “[they] can also read something”. A strong emphasis was placed on the books being used as an educational tool, with a developmental goal that needed to be achieved. This reaction draws attention to the earlier discussion on how reading is perceived as a purely educational activity, rather than something that is done for enjoyment. Although some of the parents did state that it was important for them that their child enjoyed the book, the majority was concerned with how these books may help their children to be able to read better in the future. This emphasis on the book as an educational medium was not interpreted to be completely negative, as I feel that it encouraged the parents to want to spend more time reading with their children.

The reading sessions were the first time that any of the adult participants had had shared a wordless picture book with their child. It was noted that in the groups where reading was an activity that was done at home, the books used were always accompanied by text. One mother told me that she had seen wordless books before, but was under the impression that they were ‘just for babies’. The misconception that a wordless picture book could not be read with older children was a recurring topic among the vast majority of the groups.

The positive reactions to the books were largely language based. The participants were able to tell stories in a language that they were comfortable with, and as with the story formation, participants were able to assist each other with the translation of words that they were unsure of. This occurred especially in cases where the group chose to tell a story in English and when the child or parent/caregiver could remember a descriptive word in Xhosa, but was unable to translate it into English. Both adult and child were involved in assisting one another in this respect, with the parent sometimes correcting the child, and in other cases, the child translating for the parent/caregiver. One caregiver-child group in particular said that the absence of words made telling the story easier for them. In this group, the grandmother spoke Xhosa and English, whereas her granddaughter was being educated in an Afrikaans school. She said that without the words, they were able to tell stories in all three languages, without

worrying about how the text needed to be decoded. Some of the participants also thought that these books would be useful for the illiterate parents in the community. One mother told me that, “for example, there are people who cannot read [Xhosa], but they can speak it, they can see the pictures and tell the stories with their kids”

The wordless picture books also lessened certain parents’ hesitance to read with their children. The absence of words allowed for parents to interact with the book without being intimidated by words that they could not read. One mother explained: “[it was] easier [for me] with the books without words, because sometimes you get these big words that I cannot pronounce.” For the majority of the books, the participants felt that the illustrations were adequate for them to interact with and to share with their children in the reading session; they did not feel that they required text³⁴.

Many of the adults ascribed importance to the visual literacy that their children displayed during the reading sessions. Signs, such as the MTN sign in *Abongi’s journey*, and the child’s recognition, linkages and interpretation of these were highlighted often during the interviews. Parents were impressed with the connotations that their children were able to make with the signs in the illustrations, and were also able to add elements of their own background to their child’s interpretation. A mother explained, “We as parents can see what is happening, now you want to see from her, what does she see and understand about the pictures. And she goes in so much detail! ... I am very surprised”. This sort of visual literacy seemed to spark dialogue that was not necessarily related to the creation of a specific narrative, but that involved a memory or an event specific to the reading group. *My mother’s matt* was an effective example of this, with many of the parents referring to the Eastern Cape, the *rondavels* and livestock as things that they were exposed to when they were younger.

4.1.5 Thinking for oneself

This was undoubtedly the most dominant theme identified by the adult participants during the interviews. Although the topic arose from conversations comparing wordless books to those accompanied by text, I feel that it warrants discussion as a separate theme. All of the

³⁴ Except in cases where the illustrations were confusing, as mentioned earlier

participants felt that the lack of words in the picture book forced their children to think for themselves. One mother explained:

I think this makes her open her mind wider, because everything comes from her. She looks at the picture and then she tells what is going on. It's different from reading to tell exactly what is going on. So for me it was very nice for her to create the stories on her own from the pictures. I never knew she could do that, so it was very interesting for me.

In the next session she added:

I think these books [are] good, to build for the children, not only to read it. She must think, what is going on. She must use her mind; what is going on here. These books are good to help the children think, not just to read. You must use your common sense.

There was a definite emphasis on the freedom that these books provided the children to express their own ideas and solve problems in their own manner. Many of the parents expressed the view that when using books with words, they sometimes felt that their children would memorize the text on the page and simply repeat it when reading through the book. Although this is an important part of literacy development, the parents enjoyed the fact that the wordless books allowed for some spontaneity and creative thought for both themselves and the child. A quote elaborates on this:

It's good, not having words. You can understand what he's thinking by seeing the pictures and what he is analysing and all that stuff. With the words, he can just study what is going on and doesn't think for himself. He is just reading, not thinking past that. It is important to me. Now I am also showing to him, you can just say what you think. Just thinking for yourself.

The wordless picture book also established itself as a medium that the children could confidently use. One mother explained how her son had decided to read to her during a session. She said, "It was easy for me, you know, because at first I wanted to show him how the book goes, and then he said, "No Mommy, let me give you *my* story, the way it is going the way I am thinking".

This type of thinking was seen by one of the mothers as important in teaching children a sense of self-efficacy³⁵. "... [I]t encourage[s] the young ones to have something to say" she explained when asked why she felt it was important for them to use their imagination and

³⁵ Perceived self-efficacy is defined by Bandura (1994) as: "people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives. Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave. Such beliefs produce these diverse effects through four major processes. They include cognitive, motivational, affective and selection processes".

think for themselves. The cultivation of imaginative thinking is stressed by Nussbaum (2010:107) as being integral to creating a society of citizens who are empowered to see beyond the stereotypes of gender, race and ethnicity. The ability of children to deal with the presence of people that differ from them, and their ability to see the full humanness of people we encounter in daily life, allows children to learn to deal with one another with respect, dignity and understanding (Nussbaum 2001:69 , 2010:107). In South Africa's multicultural society, this kind of understanding and respect is critical to foster an understanding society. Fisher (2004:11) believes that creative thinking provides a powerful message to individuals, i.e. that they can do something with what they are given. The element of play involved in the creation of stories often involve complex levels of thinking as individuals interpret and reinterpret experiences and share them with one another. It is during the reformulation of experience through thinking that deeper understanding is developed. Fisher contends that schools and social institutions should be challenged to develop people who are capable of thinking and doing new things. In this way, they will not simply repeat what previous generations have done, but rather be equipped for a world of challenge and change. Creative thinking is thus plays a fundamental role in generating new ways for solving problems (Fisher 2004:11, 23).

4.1.6 Reading for pleasure

All parent/caregiver–child groups indicated that they enjoyed both the reading sessions and the books provided for these. Although there is the concern that the adult participants were being polite when saying this, their description of their child's excitement of attending the sessions, and that they were 'sad' when the final one had concluded support their statements as being true. Another aspect that indicated that they truly enjoyed the sessions was that some the children would try to figure out who was attending sessions when, so that they could join that group. Although this doesn't have any concrete bearing on the findings, it was an aspect that I felt was interesting to include, especially considering the opinion that most South Africans see reading and books as synonymous with academic pursuits or an obligation, as articulated by Du Plessis (in Van Heerden 2008). Tiemensma (2008:62) argues that in order to create a world of engaged readers, the affective side of reading and literacy – the *enjoyment* that a reader derives from engaging with a book needs to be given more consideration. Although a large part of the enjoyment was, as mentioned earlier, derived from the storytelling, I believe that the fact that the use of illustrations in a book format to facilitate

storytelling can be used as a means to form positive relationships with reading and books at an early age. Tiemensma (2008:57) proposes that the cultivation of a learner's interest in books and reading could not only help overcome home disadvantages, but could serve as a motivating factor to address the lack of reading culture in South Africa as a whole.

The theme of reading for enjoyment compared to reading for education is another element that was brought to light during my discussions with parents. I believe the fact that the children were not expected to prove that they had learned anything from the sessions added to the fact that they experienced it as enjoyable. Children's hesitance to engage with school books at home was repeated by at least two of the school going children's parents. One mother expressed her happiness that her son enjoyed these books by saying:

I love it, he is sometimes lazy to study at home – he says “no, no, I know what is going on in that book. At school they give him some books to study at home and then he says no I know this book. I like this; he has to tell me what is going on.

4.1.7 An activity in the home

All of the participants felt that this was an activity they could continue with in their home, provided they had access to wordless picture books. The majority of them felt that they would be able to make time for this kind of reading and story creation with their children at home. The one parent that expressed concern about continuing with this reading at home, explained that she worked long and often unpredictable hours, sometimes leaving the house before her children were awake and returning after they had gone to bed. She did, however, say that she would like to teach her mother (the child's grandmother) to use these kinds of books with her son at home, as she saw how much he enjoyed interacting with the books. All of the adult respondents indicated that they believed reading with their children was both beneficial, and important.

None of the participants had wordless picture books in their home. Some of the parents did encourage their children to go to the library, although, when reading at home was an activity that was being done, it was usually done with school books or books with text. All parents felt that the wordless books were an easy, and manageable medium that they could make use of independently. It appeared as if most of the parents felt that they were contributing to their

child's development through the joint reading sessions, and I believe that if this activity could be continued at home, it could serve as a source of empowerment for the parent/caregiver, regardless of their own educational level. Shared book reading with children is a means of improving perceived parenting capabilities, as noted by the Seden (2007:137) study.

4.2 Conclusion of programme

The reading programme was concluded on the 29th August 2011. The feedback was predominantly positive, with many parents expressing interest at continuing with reading sessions, or suggesting that they be made available to parents who were not included in the research. The final interview schedule was used as a debriefing tool and all participants were provided with contact details for the Ikhaya Trust Centre, the University of Stellenbosch's ethical committee and myself should they have any problems or wish to make contact after the program concluded. Participants were also informed that they were free to request a copy of the thesis, and to change or withdraw any of the comments that they made during the interviews. From the research findings, conclusions were reached regarding the use of wordless books in the South African context which resulted in recommendations regarding possible further research. These are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5: Conclusion

Although literature advocating the use of wordless picture books has been available since the early 1970's (Dowhower 1997:60) and the motivation for encouraging the use of these books as an educational resource are numerous, there have been very few studies that call attention to the use of wordless picture books within the South African context. South Africa has a very low general reading rate, with reading and books being viewed as synonymous with academic pursuits or an obligation. Children are not encouraged to read for enjoyment at home, as their parents very often do not have a reading culture of their own. As such, many children do not have any contact with books before going to school (Du Plessis in Van Heerden 2008). Wordless picture books in South Africa are dominated by American and European imports and when compared to these, the local wordless books lack variety and appear to be predominantly for educational purposes. Although educational books can be used in the home for joint reading, Van Heerden (2008) notes that relying on books that are created in a 'strictly educational fashion' creates an environment in which we risk losing the magic of creating books that are read purely for enjoyment. The perpetuation of the view of reading for purely educational outcomes is a danger that runs parallel with this. Wordless picture books can serve as motivating factors for readers due to the visually oriented nature of children today and could be capable of developing a more positive attitude to books in general, and as such, foster a culture of reading that parents can transfer to their children (Stewig in Dowhower 1997:65).

My research was aimed at investigating the feasibility of wordless picture books within the home to develop a culture and love of reading within a South African context. Four main objectives were set in order to meet the aim of the study, each of which was discussed in separate chapters. The first two objectives, i.e. (i) the conceptualisation and contextualisation of wordless picture books as a genre, and (ii) the design, illustration and production of two wordless picture books based on local stories were discussed in Chapter 2. In this chapter, wordless books were contextualised through an outline of the genre's history, and the manner in which they differ from more conventional picture books, which are accompanied by text. A theoretical foundation for the research was provided through a semiotic and narratological analysis of wordless picture books. *Wave* and *Abongi's journey* were analysed to demonstrate how wordless picture books are able to construct a narrative without the use of text. I also attempted to conceptualise the wordless genre through the illustration, design and production

of my own wordless picture books, *Iphi ibola?* and *My mother's matt*. These were then analysed according to the same framework. The opportunity given to readers to respond to wordless picture books using their own frame of reference, without being bound by words that prescribe mood, feelings or meaning (Williams 1994:38) was investigated and the narrative strengths of pictures compared to language was also argued (Ryan 2011).

An investigation into the local publishing industry served to contextualise the wordless picture book in South Africa. The home as a micro-environment for learning, the role of the parents in a child's education, as well as the availability of reading material in South African homes provided insight into the lack of a local reading culture and the literacy problem that South Africa is facing. In order to provide a more in depth view of how wordless picture books could be used locally, an empirical study was included in my research in an effort to understand better how these books would function in a joint reading situation between a child and his/her parent or primary caregiver. The chapter was concluded by putting forward the research hypothesis that the wordless picture books as a genre can be used as an intervention method for cultivating a love for reading through joint-reading practices in the South African home environment.

Chapter 3 provided detail on the research methodology that was used to meet the third objective, (iii) conducting an empirical study on the use of wordless picture books, through a joint reading programme between children and their parents/primary care-givers, held over the period of one month. Participative intervention research was chosen as a method of investigation within the qualitative research approach and research was only conducted up to the fourth stage of the intervention research model, i.e. the early development and pilot testing phase. Purposive sampling was used to source the participants from the Ikhaya Trust Centre in Kayamandi, with a population that consisted of children that were enrolled in a programme at the Ikhaya Trust, and their parents/primary caregivers. Children within this population were sampled based on their age, i.e. between six and nine years old. The unit of analysis for the study consisted of a group made up of one parent/primary caregiver and the child. The programme was implemented in August 2011 and participants participated in one reading session a week, which was hosted at the Ikhaya Trust. During these sessions individual parent/caregiver-child groups were invited to spend time reading a wordless picture book together. In total, four wordless picture books were read. Two semi-structured interviews served as the data collection instruments for the study. Data was captured by

handwritten notes and voice recordings, and then analysed by generating categories and coding the data. Prominent themes, recurring ideas or language and patterns of belief were identified and then coded according to first and second level coding (Grinnell & Unrau in Schurink, Fouché & De Vos 2011:410).

5.1. Research findings

The research findings discussed in Chapter 4 were derived from an analysis and interpretation of the qualitative data collected via the two semi-structured interviews. Biographical data of participants and their attendance of the reading sessions were documented to contextualise the findings. Thereafter, the main themes identified were discussed with reference to the theoretical framework. The themes identified are as follows:

- **Reading pictures and relevant content:** The majority of participants found the wordless picture books easy to use and to create stories with. They were able to use cues from the illustrations as well as information from their personal background to create narratives. When participants experienced difficulty using the books, it was found that the illustrations were confusing, or the book did not have any relevance to the participant's daily life, i.e. they could not identify with the narrative on a personal level. The importance of both local content and the tactful construction of a series of illustrations to create a narrative were highlighted by this theme.
- **Storytelling:** This was the most enjoyable aspect of the reading programme for all participants. A number of different narratives were constructed by different individuals reading the same book, with a variation of narratives between participants in the same group sometimes being observed. Wordless picture books appeared to be a useful medium in facilitating the storytelling process, as the illustrations give a starting point, but do not limit the readers to a specific, set story. Readers could read the book in a language of their choice, as they were not required to decode text in a set language.
- **Utilization of illustrations: pointing vs. narrative formation:** The manner in which the books were used showed to main trends: firstly, the creation of a complete narrative, and secondly using the books to label, point, comment and follow actions

(Sulzby in Dowhower 1997:70). In both cases the adult participant described how she was able to help the child formulate or elaborate on a story by asking questions about or commenting on the images. By accepting their child's comments and ideas, the parent/caregiver was able to reinforce the child's efforts and desires to share ideas (De Bruin-Parecki 1999:2). The parents' insight into the character of their children allowed them to connect elements of the illustrations with their personal lives, to help create a pleasant reading experience and guide their children during the reading, as exemplified by Vygotsky's zone of proximal development.

- **Wordless picture books and picture books with words:** Both positive and negative responses were elicited with the comparison of wordless picture books to books that included text. The educational value that books should offer was emphasised by some parents who felt that the books should have some words in order for their children to read or learn something. This reaction reinforces the view of reading as obligatory or a strictly academic exercise as discussed in Chapter 2. Another misconception was that wordless picture books are strictly for very young readers, and that their children could not benefit from them. Positive reactions included the ability to tell the story in any language, even when language use varied within the group, as well as the fact that parents did not need to negotiate or be intimidated by difficult text that they could not pronounce or read during the reading session. This seemed to lessen parents' hesitation to sharing books with their children.

- **Thinking for oneself:** This was the principal theme that arose from the interviews. There was an emphasis on the manner in which wordless picture books allowed the children and adults to express their own ideas and solve problems in their own manner, without being bound by a right or wrong answer. Parents/caregivers enjoyed that the wordless picture books allowed for spontaneity and creative thoughts for both themselves and the children. How independent thought could teach children that they too have an opinion was also raised, and linked to Martha Nussbaum's (2010:107) theories regarding the cultivation of critical, imaginative thinking as being fundamental to creating a society of people who are empowered to see beyond the stereotypes of gender, race and ethnicity, and in this way treat others with respect and dignity.

- **Reading for pleasure:** All the participants indicated that they enjoyed both the wordless picture book as a format and the reading sessions that they attended. The majority of the adult participants indicated that their children were always excited to come to the reading sessions, and described them as “sad” when the final session concluded. Some of the children’s hesitance to engage with school books at home, compared to their willingness to interact with the wordless picture books they were given during the sessions, was a view reiterated by two of the school going children’s parents. Cultivating a learner’s interest in books and reading could not only help overcome home disadvantages, but could serve as a motivating factor to address the lack of reading culture in South Africa as a whole (Tiemensma 2008:57).
- **An activity in the home:** Nine of the 10 adult participants said that joint reading using wordless picture books is an activity that they could share in their own home. When parents expressed concern about continuing with this activity, it was generally due to working hours and the amount of time that they spend away from home. Most of the parents felt that they were contributing to their child’s development through the joint reading sessions. It was suggested that if this activity could be continued at home, it would serve as a source of empowerment for the parent/caregiver, regardless of their own educational level.

5.2 Conclusions regarding research findings

The research findings indicate that wordless picture books can be used as an effective intervention for fostering a culture of reading, by facilitating joint parent-child reading practices, and for the activity to be carried out in the home. The stories created through the interpretation of the illustrations were not only diverse, adapted to the reader’s social context, but also offered source of enjoyment for both the parent and the child. The illustrations facilitated dialogue and a shared co-construction of knowledge between participants, as they were able to assist each other in creating stories from shared understandings. The different uses of these books, i.e. pointing vs. creation of narrative indicate their ability to cater for different levels of development, and also how they can be used by parents to encourage children to share their own ideas and opinions. The wordless picture books allowed for both the parent and the child to be the primary narrator, and gave both an opportunity to play the role of storyteller or listener. These books appear to be a useful medium in facilitating the

storytelling process, as the illustrations give a starting point, but do not limit the readers to a specific, set story. Although the illustrations were appreciated, and readers enjoyed the facial expressions, gestures and colours used, the storytelling itself seemed to be more of an attraction with the use of these books.

When compared to picture books that are accompanied by text, it was found that the wordless picture books are as easy, or in some cases easier to use. The fact that parents did not have to struggle with text that they were unsure of seemed to ease some of the pressure of shared reading with their child. Furthermore, the lack of text also gave the readers the opportunity to create stories in a language of their choice. In cases where participants found the books difficult to use, or did not enjoy the genre, it was either that the illustrations were confusing, or that they were unable to relate to the content of the book, as the subject matter was not something in their frame of reference, or a subject that they particularly liked. This indicates the importance that the illustrator plays in the visual construction of these books, and the considerations that need to be made when linking a series of images into a narrative. Furthermore, this finding indicates the importance of relevant and local content in these books, as readers related better to images that they were familiar with or recognised in their everyday surroundings.

Although there was a strong emphasis on the educational value that these books might offer, the participants all enjoyed the spontaneity and creative freedom that the medium had to offer. They enjoyed the books, despite the fact they were not being used to teach their children anything in particular. The most dominant theme that arose was the fact that parents felt that these books provided their children with an opportunity to think, argue and solve problems for themselves, without text to prescribe an outcome to their story. There was very little emphasis on ‘getting the story right’. It appears that should access to these books be available, it is an activity that could easily be done independently by the participants in their own home. Based on the results of this small study, I propose that wordless picture books as a means to spark storytelling can be harnessed as a tool to address the negative connotations to books and the lack of reading culture that exists in South Africa.

5.3 Recommendations

It should be noted that the scale of this study was small, yet focussed. As such the findings cannot be generalised to apply to the larger population. I do, however, believe that based on the research findings, wordless picture books are a medium that merit further investigation within the South African context.

Jay Heale (2011) of *Bookchat* poses the question of why, in a country that has 11 official languages, we aren't producing more wordless books that can be 'read' in any language. Wordless picture books are a flexible platform from which to stimulate an interest in books, reading and storytelling, and are not limited to a specific language or literacy level. By placing more of these books into family literacy programmes and libraries, and making people aware of the benefits, facilitators in existing programmes can help parents make informed choices as to which books they may choose to share with their children. The wordless picture books that are currently available in South Africa are limited and generally labelled as educational. I believe this medium warrants more attention from local publishers who are interested in cultivating a love for reading. Maskew Miller Longman's *Stars of Africa* series has already taken a step in this direction through the publication of their wordless stories series, despite its classification in a wider educational series. The creation of wordless picture books that are not strictly meant for educational purposes would also provide local authors and illustrators with a chance to create local content in a manner that isn't limited by a specific style or outcome.

A rational next step would be to expand the scope of this study, or a similar one, to a larger sample size. The documenting of how wordless picture books are used in the actual home, in contrast to how they were used in an accommodated reading programme could give further insight into the manner in which the genre could prove useful to parents and caregivers who wish to participate in joint reading with their children. The distribution of these books to the home is also a further area of investigation that should be considered. Projects such as SEED, Little Hands and FunDza's show that innovative, inexpensive means of distribution is possible. Mobile platforms and the creation of mobile content or mobi-wordless books could also be considered as a specific research area.

5.4 Conclusion

Although the small scale of this study means it cannot be generalised to the larger South African population, I believe the positive results of this study indicate that the use of wordless picture books (or other wordless media) as a means of fostering a love for reading merits further research. The spontaneity and creativity that wordless picture books offer individual readers, as well as the manner in which the medium taps into storytelling traditions are characteristics that I believe endow the genre with the ability to communicate with readers in a manner that promotes enjoyment and an inquisitive outlook to reading.

When examining the problems that contribute to a lack of reading culture in South Africa, it can sometimes be easy to assume the scale of the problem far outreaches the change that one's research can achieve. The manner in which research can serve to address issues of severe poverty, illiteracy, health issues and publishers' financial concerns starts to seem like an absolute impossibility. Even so, I believe that any change that can be brought about through research, regardless of how small, should never be underestimated. When reviewing the results of the study, i.e. the positive interaction with books, the enjoyment of joint reading, the joint creation of stories through shared knowledge and the manner in which the wordless genre allow the readers to think for themselves, one should seriously consider the derivative and secondary positive effects that all these small, yet notable changes could cumulatively have. When approached from this standpoint, wordless picture books in South Africa could prove to be more than just a serious literary genre. They could serve as an intervention in the creation of a culture of reading.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Ethical clearance form



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19 July 2011

Tel.: 021 - 808-9183
Enquiries: Sidney Engelbrecht
Email: sidney@sun.ac.za

Reference No. 561/2011

Ms A Le Roux
Department of Visual Arts
University of Stellenbosch
STELLENBOSCH
7602

Ms A Le Roux

LETTER OF ETHICS CLEARANCE

With regards to your application, I would like to inform you that the project, *The production and use of wordless picture books in parent-child reading: an exploratory study within a South Africa context*, has been approved on condition that:

1. The researcher/s remain within the procedures and protocols indicated in the proposal;
2. The researcher/s stay within the boundaries of applicable national legislation, institutional guidelines, and applicable standards of scientific rigor that are followed within this field of study and that
3. Any substantive changes to this research project should be brought to the attention of the Ethics Committee with a view to obtain ethical clearance for it.

We wish you success with your research activities.

Best regards



Sidney Engelbrecht

MR SF ENGELBRECHT

Secretary: Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanora)



Afdeling Navorsingsontwikkeling • Division for Research Development

Privaatsak/Private Bag X1 • Matieland 7602 • Suid-Afrika/South Africa
Tel: +27 21 808 9184 • Faks/Fax: +27 21 808 4537

www.sun.ac.za/research

APPENDIX B: Permission letter from the Ikhaya Trust Centre

Appendix F. **Permission letter from Ikhaya**



Ikhaya Trust Centre
118a Masithandane Street
Post Net Suite #780 | Private Bag X5051
Kayamandi | Stellenbosch | 7599
Tel: + 27 21 889 8774 | Fax: +27 86 653 61
info@ikhayatrust.org.za
www.ikhayatrust.org.za

28 March 2011

To whom it may concern

This is to confirm that Adrie le Roux have met with Mpumi Mrubata (Manager) and Adele Botha (Literacy developer and trainer) about her proposed study and possibility of conducting research at the centre. She has been granted permission to conduct it at the Greater Stellenbosch Development Trust.

We are looking forward to be part of her study.

Kind Regards



Adele Botha
(Literacy trainer and developer)

APPENDIX C: Information on research for participants

NAME AND CONTACT NUMBER OF RESEARCHER:

Adrie le Roux, Student at the University of Stellenbosch, Tel: 071 283 8414 or via the Ikhaya Trust Centre at 021 889 8774. Email: adrie_leroux@yahoo.com

TITLE OF RESEARCH: The production and use of wordless picture books in parent-child reading: an exploratory study within a South African context.

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

- a) To investigate and create picture books without words to help parents and children read together

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

Aim: The aim of the research is to produce economically viable (inexpensive) wordless picture books and explore how they can be used in a joint reading programme for children and parents / care-givers.

Objectives:

- v. To conceptualise and contextualise wordless picture books as a medium
- vi. To design, illustrate and produce wordless picture books based on stories collected from the local community in Kayamandi.
- vii. To conduct an empirical study on use of the wordless picture books in a joint reading programme between children and their parents / primary care-giver.
- viii. To reach conclusions and make recommendations regarding the use of wordless picture books to stimulate joint reading between parents and their children

ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Participation in the research is voluntary. You do not have to participate in this study, and you can withdraw from it at any point. Your decision as to whether or not to participate in this study will have no negative consequences or influence on your present or future status at the Ikhaya Trust Centre. Your identity and any information provided will be kept confidential by the researcher and facilitators at the Ikhaya Trust.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT

TEL. NUMBER OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

APPENDIX D: Interview schedule: interview after each reading session

INTERVIEW: SEMI-STRUCTURED INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS	
Person/s interviewed	
Date	
Place	
Duration	
PURPOSE OF RESEARCH: to explore the use of economically viable <i>wordless</i> picture books as an intervention to facilitate joint reading between children and parents / primary care-givers.	
PURPOSE OF THIS INTERVIEW: Obtain perceptions of parents / primary care-givers and their children who participated in the research, after each reading session.	
ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY: All the participants in the research will be fully briefed and their participation will be voluntary. I will not use the names of the participants to keep their identities confidential. The information from the participants will be kept confidential and any personal information will not be shared with other participants.	
INTERVIEW CONTENT	
Introduction	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain objectives of the interview and what topic areas will be addressed • Explanation the potential value of the research as to how the information will be used for the benefit of the Ikhaya Trust Centre and communities • Give an indication of the expected length of the interview 	
List of topics regarding project	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How was it for you to find a story • Please shortly share the story with me • What type of ending did your story have? Was it happy/sad? Please tell me about it? • Tell me how the pictures helped you to find a story? • Which one of you (parent or child) created the biggest part of the story? 	
Closing	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summarise the main issues discussed • Discuss the next course of action to be taken such as a possible follow-up interview • Encourage participants to reflect on what they have said and to contact the researcher if they want to edit any of their comments made during the interviews. • Thank the participant for his or her time 	

APPENDIX E: Interview schedule: interview after programme has concluded

INTERVIEW: SEMI-STRUCTURED INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS	
Person/s interviewed	
Date	
Place	
Duration	
PURPOSE OF RESEARCH: To explore the use of economically viable <i>wordless</i> picture books as an intervention to facilitate joint reading between children and parents / primary care-givers.	
PURPOSE OF THIS INTERVIEW: Obtain perceptions of parents / primary care-givers and their children who participated in the research after the programme has been concluded.	
ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY: To explore the use of economically viable <i>wordless</i> picture books as an intervention to facilitate joint reading between children and parents / primary care-givers.	
INTERVIEW CONTENT	
Introduction	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain objectives of the interview and what topic areas will be addressed • Explanation the potential value of the research as to how the information will be used for the benefit of the Ikhaya Trust Centre and communities • Give an indication of the expected length of the interview 	
List of topics regarding project	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did you find using the picture books to create a story? • Please tell me which book was your favourite and why? • Do you think this is an activity that you can do at home? Please tell me more. • Overall impression of the programme • Would you take part in a programme like this again? 	
Closing	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summarise the main issues discussed • Discuss the next course of action to be taken such as a possible follow-up interview • Encourage participants to reflect on what they have said and to contact the researcher if they want to edit any of their comments made during the interviews. • Thank the participant for his or her time 	

APPENDIX F: Informed consent form



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jou kennisvenoot • your knowledge partner

STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Consent form for Participants at the Ikhaya Trust Centre, parents or primary caregivers of child participants in the research.

Title of study: The production and use of wordless picture books in parent-child reading: an exploratory study within a South African context.

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Adrie le Roux, for a M(Phil) in Illustration at the Visual Arts Department at Stellenbosch University.

1. Parents

You, as the parent of a child between the age of 6 and 9 years old, have been selected as a possible participant in this study

2. Primary Caregivers

You, as the primary care-giver of a child between the age of 6 and 9 years old, have been selected as a possible participant in this study

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

To explore the use of economically viable *wordless* picture books as an intervention to facilitate joint reading between children and parents / primary care-givers. Joint parent-child reading is a method of motivating a culture of reading at the earliest stage.

2. PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

To talk about picture story books with your child at the Ikhaya Trust Centre in Kayamandi. You will invited to come to the centre twice a week to spend time with your child 30-45 minutes The books will be provided, and you and your child will sit in a private room.

After each session at the centre, the researcher will talk to you and your child to find out what you thought about the session. If needed, a translator will also be there. The researcher will ask you about what you thought of the use of the picture books and the storytelling with your child. These interviews will take about 10-15 minutes. At the end of the programme, the researcher will have one longer interview with you. This will take about 30 minutes. Interviews will be at the Ikhaya Trust Centre, in a private room.

3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

I do not see any risk to you or your child. If you or your child has any discomfort because of the research, a counselling session will be arranged for you and/or your child.

4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

You may not directly benefit from the study. The research may help the Ikhaya Trust Centre and/or other parents and children with reading in the future

5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

You will not receive payment or gifts for participating.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is gotten in connection with this study and that can be identified with you as participant will stay confidential and will be made known only with your permission or as required by law. You can ask to look at the notes or listen to your voice recordings at any stage. If you want to edit any of this information you will be allowed to.

Your confidentiality will be protected by keeping all written notes and voice recordings safe in a locked cupboard in my house. I am the only person who has access to the keys for the cupboard. I will also not use you or your child's names in the study, to protect your identity.

If a translator is used, he/she will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement. He/she will also be given instructions to always fully translate what you have said, and to not leave out any information.

Results will be reported in an MPhil Thesis at the University of Stellenbosch. A summary of the results will be made given to the management of the Ikhaya Trust Center, in order for them to see if they want to continue with the programme. If you are interested, you will be told about the findings of the research.

If you contribute to the research, you will be given information of how the research will be done. You are free to stop taking part in the research or reading sessions without any negative consequences, or any effect on you or your child's relationships with the researcher or anyone at the Ikhaya Trust Centre.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can decide whether to take part in this study or not. If you do volunteer, you may also leave the study at any time without a negative effect on you or your child. You and your child may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain part of the study. The investigator may withdraw you and your child from this research if conditions arise which warrant doing so.

8. IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact the researcher, **Adrie le Roux**, through the Ikhaya Trust Centre at 021 889 8774 or adrie.leroux@yahoo.com or 071 283 8414

Or

Adele Botha (the literacy facilitator and trainer) at the Ikhaya Trust on 021 889 8774.

The Trust Centre's address is: 118a Masithandane Street, Kayamandi, Stellenbosch, 7599

9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You and your child may withdraw your permission at any time and stop participation in the study without penalty. You and your child are not giving up any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Ms Meléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za or 021 808 4622) at the Division for Research Development.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE
--

Participants (English speaking)

The information above was described to me by **Adrie le Roux** in English and I am in command of this language. I was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to my satisfaction. I am willing to voluntarily participate and give permission for my child to participate in the research.

Participants (Xhosa speaking)

The information above was described to me in **Xhosa** by _____, a facilitator at the Ikhaya Trust Centre. I am in command of this languages or it was satisfactorily translated to me. I was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to my satisfaction. I have been given a copy of this form.

I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study **AND** also give permission for my child / the child to who I am a primary-caregiver to participate in this study.

I have been given a copy of this form.

Please fill in the following:

Name of Participant

Name of Parent / Legal Representative (if applicable)

Signature of Participant / Parent or Legal Representative

Date

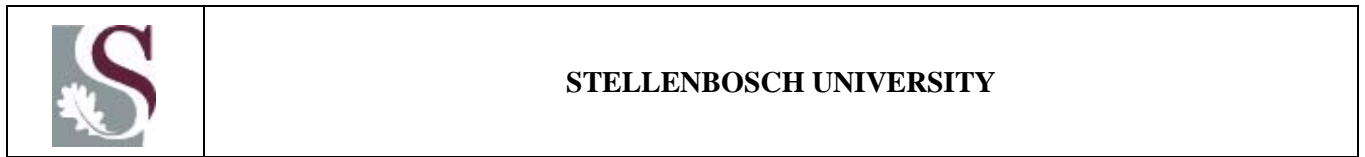
SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to _____ [name of the participant] and/or [his/her] representative _____ [name of the representative]. [He/she] was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in English and no translator was used.

Signature of Investigator

Date

APPENDIX G: Child Assent Form



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LEAFLET AND ASSENT FORM



TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT: *Using picture books to read with my family*

RESEARCHERS NAME(S): Adrie le Roux

ADDRESS: via the Ikhaya Trust Centre, 118a Masithandane Street

CONTACT NUMBER: 021 889 8774 (Ikhaya Trust Centre) or 071 283 8414 (personal)

What is RESEARCH?

Research is something we do to find new facts about the way things (and people) work. We use research projects or studies to help us find out more about how to help people.

What is this research project all about?

This research wants to find out how you and your parent feel about spending time together to look at picture books.

Why have I been invited to take part in this research project?

You are between the age of 6 and 9, and are starting to read books at school. I would like to know how you feel about the books and stories that I am going to use for our study.

Who is doing the research?

My name is Adrie le Roux. I am studying at the University of Stellenbosch, and I am doing this research to find out how I can make pictures for books that you and your parent can use, and tell stories about.

What will happen to me in this study?

You will come to the centre twice a week for 30-45 minutes. You will be given a picture book to look and tell a story about and with your parent. After each time, I will ask you and your parent some questions about the books and what stories you told. These questions are not a test; I just want to find out what you think.

Can anything bad happen to me?

Nothing bad will happen to you. This is meant to be fun. If you want to stop taking part in the research at any time, you can. You can tell your parent or me whenever you want to stop. No one will be mad at you, and you won't be in any trouble if you do.

Can anything good happen to me?

We want you to have fun.

Will anyone know I am in the study?

No one except me, your parent/caretaker and the staff at the Ikhaya centre will know that you are in the study. I will not use your name or your family's name in my paper, and will keep any information that you do not want shared safe.

Who can I talk to about the study?

You can talk to me, Adrie or to Ms Botha or Ms Mrubata at the Ikhaya Trust centre. Our telephone number is 021 889 8774. You can talk to us any time if you want to know more about the study.

What if I do not want to do this?

You can choose to take part or not to take part in the study. You can tell us or your parent if you don't want to take part. You can stop being in the study at anytime, without getting into trouble.

Do you understand this research study and are you willing to take part in it?

YES

NO

Has the researcher answered all your questions?

YES

NO

Do you understand that you can pull out of the study at any time?

YES

NO

Signature of Child

Date

FIGURES

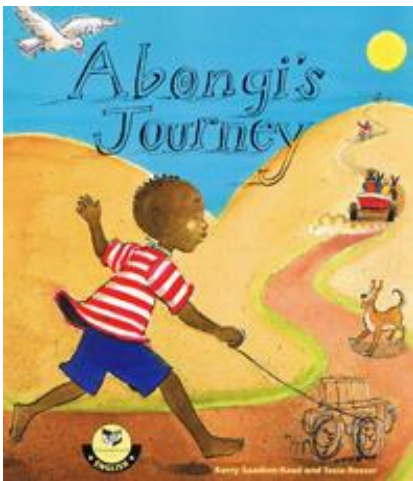


Figure 1.1 (left) Cover illustration of Tasia Rosser in Kerry Saadien-Raad, *Abongi's journey*, 2004. Collection: private.



Figure 1.2 (right) Cover illustration of Suzy Lee, *Wave*, 2008. Collection: private.

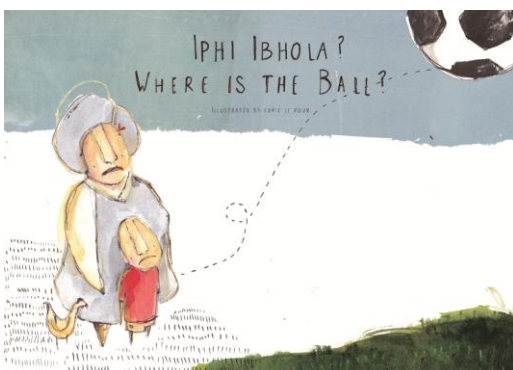


Figure 1.3 (above left) Cover illustration of Adrie le Roux, *Iphi ibhola?*, 2011. Acrylic, charcoal and collage. 18 x 13cm. Collection: Artist's collection.

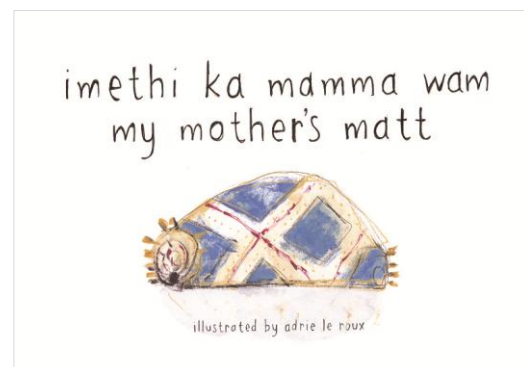


Figure 1.4 (above right) Cover illustration of Adrie le Roux, *My mother's matt*, 2011. Acrylic and charcoal. 20 x 13.5cm. Collection: artist's collection.



Figure 2.1 (a) (above) Shaun Tan. *Flock* (1997). Illustration from *The arrival*, 1997. Pencil on paper. Collection: Gericke Library, Stellenbosch University. (b). (above right) Shaun Tan. *Dinner*, 1997. See above detail.

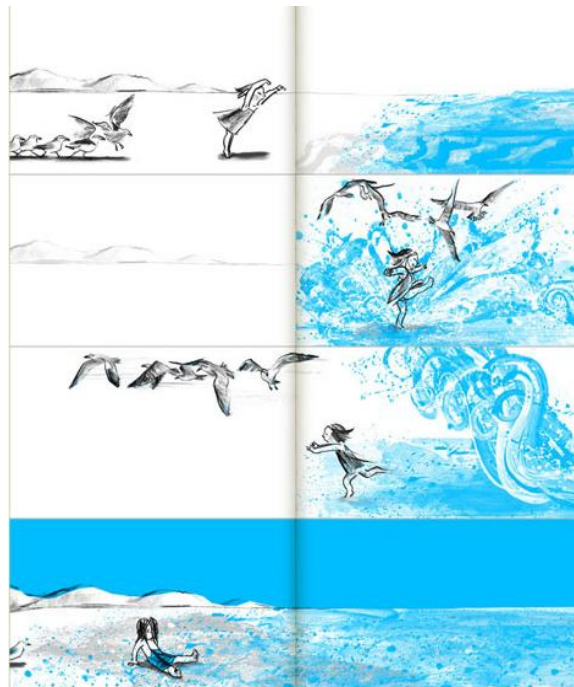


Figure 2.2 (above) Double page illustrations of Suzy Lee, *Wave*, 2008. Collection: Private.



Figure 2.3 (above) Double page illustration of Suzy Lee, *Wave*, 2008. Collection: private.



Figure 2.4 (above) Double page illustration of Suzy Lee, *Wave*, 2008. Collection: private.

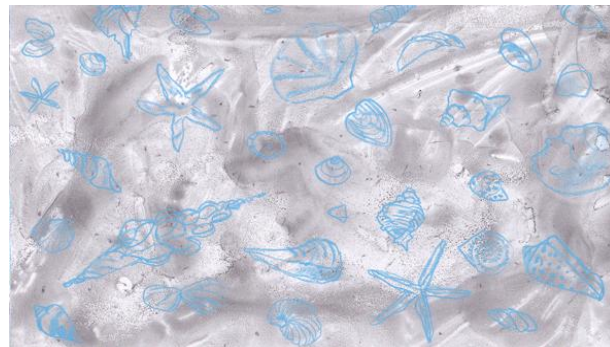


Figure 2.5 (above) End paper illustrations of Suzy Lee, *Wave* (2008). Collection: private.



Figure 2.6 (above) End paper illustration of Adrie le Roux, *My mother's matt*, 2011. Acrylic and charcoal. 40 x 13.5 cm. Collection: Artist's collection.



Figure 2.7 (above) Illustration of Adrie le Roux, *Iphi Ibola*, 2011. Acrylic, charcoal and collage. 26 x 13 cm. Collection: artist's collection.

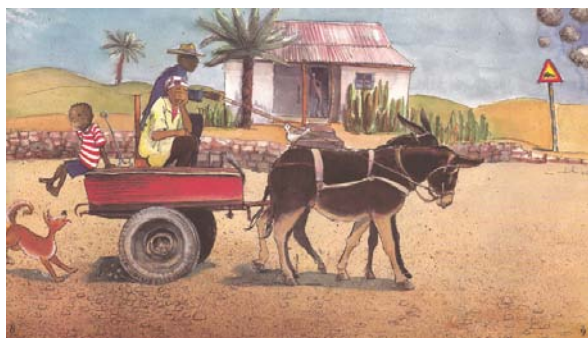
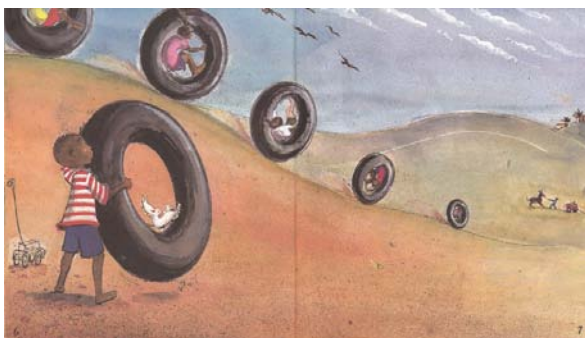


Figure 2.8 (a) (above left) Illustration of Tasia Rosser in Kerry Saadien-Raad, *Abongi's journey*, 2004. Collection: private. (b) (above right) Illustration of Tasia Rosser in Kerry Saadien-Raad, *Abongi's journey*, 2004. See above information.



Figure 2.9 (above) Illustration of Tasia Rosser in Kerry Saadien-Raad, *Abongi's journey*, 2004. Collection: private



Figure 2.10 (a) (above top) Illustration of Adrie le Roux, *My mother's matt*, 2011. Acrylic and charcoal. 40 x 13.5 cm. Collection: artist's collection. (b) (above bottom) Illustration of Adrie le Roux, *My mother's matt*, 2011. See above information.

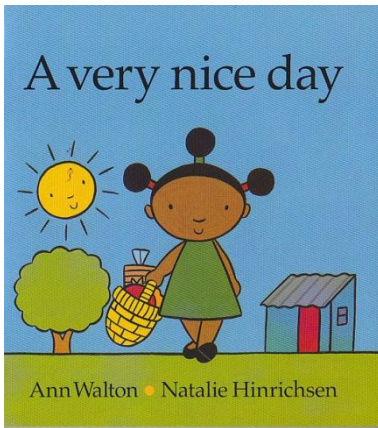


Figure 2.11 (above left) Cover illustration of Natalie Hinrichsen in Anne Walton, *A very nice day*, 2006. Collection: private.

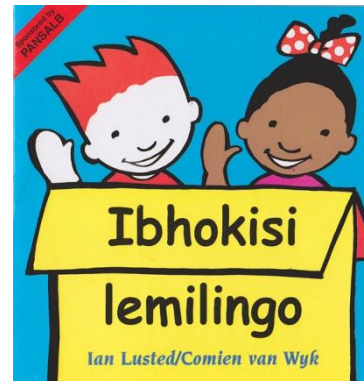


Figure 2.12 (above right) Cover illustration from Ian Lusted & Comien van Wyk's *Ibhokisi lemilingo*, 2002. Collection: private.

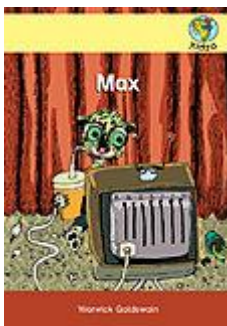


Figure 2.13 (above left) Cover illustration of Warwick Goldswain in Hillary Atkinson, *Max*, 2010. Collection: e-bookshop

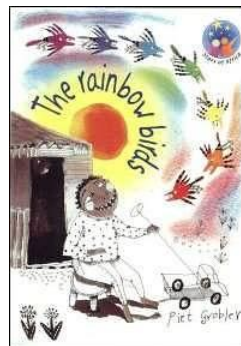


Figure 2.14 (above middle) Cover illustration of Piet Grobler, *The Rainbow Birds*, 2001. Collection: private.

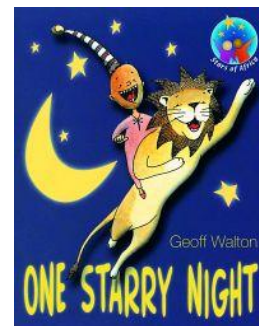


Figure 2.15 (above right) Cover illustration of Geoff Walton, *One Starry Night*, 2005. Collection: private.

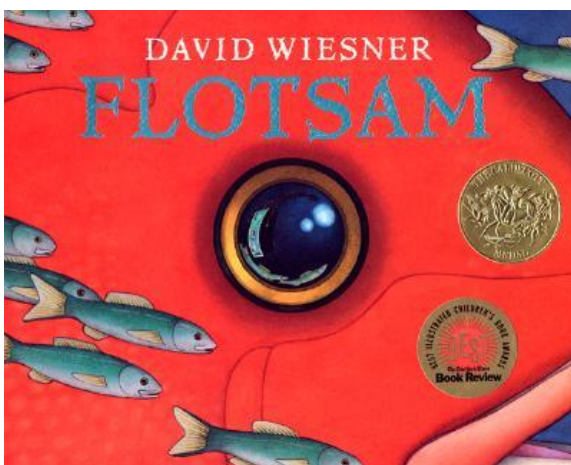


Figure 2.16 (above left) Cover illustration of David Wiesner, *Flotsam*, 2010. Collection: private.

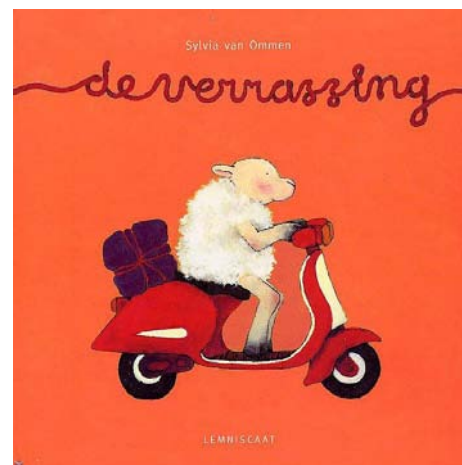


Figure 2.17 (above right) Cover illustration of Sylvia van Ommen, *Die verrassing*, 2003. Collection: private.