

**The development of reading at a township school: an Action
Research study**

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I hereby declare that this thesis, submitted to meet the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at the University of the Free State, is my own independent work and that it has not been submitted previously at any other university or faculty. I hereby concede copyright to the University of the Free State.

Jeanne Suzette van der Westhuizen

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Abstract

Key words: reading development; secondary school reading; culture of reading; language empowerment; sustainability.

Reading in South African schools is rated amongst the worst in the world. Many children come from backgrounds where reading is uncommon. Since reading is the key to the mastery of other subjects and a predictor of future success, there is mounting disquiet about learners' reading ability. Accordingly, the principal of a secondary township school requested help with reading development. This project aimed to design a programme of reading intervention that would lead to on-going, sustainable second language reading development, with the focus on improving the educators' skills to teach reading. Because the chosen methodology was action research, the teachers were included as participants and co-researchers. An additional aim was to reflect critically on the interventions in order to ensure more generalised understanding of an educational problem. The results of this study will have value in that they will facilitate a closer understanding of reading development in one township school as an example of a general educational problem.

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* the same diagram but numbered differently to match the chapters

List of abbreviations used in the text

AR	Action research
CBI	Content-based instruction
DoE	Department of Education
HOD	Head of department
IEA	International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
LF	Learning facilitator
MEC	Member of the Executive Council
OBE	Outcomes-based education
OHP	Overhead projector
PTEEP	Placement Test in English for Educational Purposes
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
SACMEQ	Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
sapa	South African Press Association
SAPA	South African Principals' Association
SGB	School governing body
SL	second language
SMT	School management team
SSR	Sustained silent reading
TESOL	Teaching English to speakers of other languages
UFS	University of the Free State

Note:

For ethical reasons, the pseudonym, *Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School*, was chosen as a pseudonym for the school where the project was run.

Because action research is not a main stream methodology, the author would like to indicate that the description of the action research cycles in chapter 5 has been written in the first person, in accordance with the conventions of action research. This form might be unfamiliar to a reader who is accustomed to the written style of main stream research. In so doing, a compromise position has been adopted.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Life is not a problem to be solved, but a reality to be experienced
- Søren Kierkegaard

1.1 Orientation and background to the study

Until South Africa abandoned its policy of oppression based on race and ethnic origin in 1994, language had been closely allied to the divisions brought about by apartheid and language was used as one of the tools to separate people physically and socially (by granting each group a geographical allocation) and psychologically (by allocating connotations of inferiority or superiority to different groups) (Kapp, 2006:30). No black African language was assigned any status and the only official languages were English and Afrikaans.

The nascent South Africa entrenched the language rights of 11 official languages with equal status in its new Bill of Rights in 1996; and the Department of Education (DoE) advocated home language instruction the following year. Nonetheless, the status of these languages is not perceived as being equal, and many parents want their children to be educated in English. According to Kapp (2006:32-33), Xhosa children in the Western Cape 'associate English with social mobility' into 'white' suburbia and away from the poverty and violence of the townships. English is also the key to the modern western civilized world of science, technology and knowledge symbolised by Silicon Valley and the United States of America. The national and provincial education departments' endeavours to develop and implement policies to remedy past inequality and to provide fair education to all learners resulted in a period of adjustment: in primary schools there has been a significant shuffle in the size, racial and linguistic composition of the classes. Accordingly, a large number of children learn to read in a language that is not their mother tongue.

This contributes to the current growing concern about the reading ability of school-leavers in the whole of South Africa (Yeld, 2001:10). On 21 July 2008, the

Mpumalanga Education Department expressed its concern about the level of reading in the province and launched a new reading strategy to improve the reading level at primary schools. The Education MEC was quoted as follows (Mogakane, 2008:[1]): ‘I do not want to sound like a doomsday prophetess, but the reality of the matter is that we are facing a bleak and sad reality that “the African child cannot read at an appropriate level”’. She added that only 40% of Grade 6 pupils came from homes that had between one and ten books while 30% came from homes without books at all; that few pupils had access to libraries and that almost 70% of pupils did not read newspapers. Fleisch (2007:7) reports the results of the Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality’s (SACMEQ) assessment of Grade 6 learners’ reading levels per province in South Africa as follows:

Table 1: SACMEQ, Reading Mastery in Grade 6, 2005

Provinces	Learners achieving minimum level	Learners achieving desirable level
Eastern Cape	18,5%	5,1%
Free State	16,3%	3,2%
Gauteng	65,9%	43,2%
Kwazulu Natal	43,9%	22,1%
Mpumalanga	12,9%	3,7%
Northern Cape	30,3%	8,7%
Limpopo	15,5%	5,9%
North West	10,4%	0,6%
Western Cape	84,2%	56,8%
South Africa	35,1%	18,4%

In 2006 an international test, The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), was conducted by Boston College (in the United States of America) to

evaluate 215 000 fourth-graders' reading literacy levels in both literary and informational text. It rated South Africa's performance amongst the worst in the world (alongside those of Morocco, Kuwait, Qatar, Indonesia, Iran, Trinidad and Tobago, Macedonia, Georgia and Romania). (Kashti, 2007:[1]). The PIRLS was one of the largest and most rigorous studies ever undertaken of young children's reading skills. The study was conducted under the auspices of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) - the organisation also responsible for the international surveys of achievement in mathematics and science - and involved 150,000 children aged 9-10 years old in 35 countries (Twist, Sainsbury, Woodthorpe & Whetton, 2003:[1]). A report in News24 on 29 November 2007 confirmed South African learners' poor performance in another, more recent, PIRLS that had been released during that week (sapa, 2007:[1]). It revealed that:

Almost 80% of SA pupils in grades 4 and 5 did not reach the lowest international benchmark in contrast to only 6% in the rest of the countries tested.

While almost half of the learners tested in English and Afrikaans attained the lowest benchmark, between 86% and 96% of children writing in the other nine official languages did not manage to attain even this.

On 12 February 2008, News 24 (sapa, 2008[1]) reported that the South African Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor had criticised recent findings by The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, saying that the subject had not been researched thoroughly and that the questions were not specific enough. Nevertheless, the minister's repeated calls for reading and literacy indicate her awareness of the weight of the problem. For example, in her speech when launching the 2006 Readathon campaign (Pandor, 2006[1]), the minister maintained that 'we need to excite young people, to convince them that reading changes their lives positively' and referred to 'a national reading strategy' which 'would lead to a massive improvement in reading abilities of our young pupils'. In addition, the education minister also reminds us that, 'Various studies (largely American), suggest that a child from a professional family is likely to have heard 45 million words by his or her fourth birthday. A child from a working class background will have heard 26 million and a child from a deprived background will have heard only 13 million... it is not the toys

in a house that matter, but the words in a child's head'. (Pandor: 2007:1). From this we conclude that early reading programmes and access to books are vital.

Coleman (2003:2) points out that the poor standard of literacy in South African schools is also demonstrated by the number of language 'bridging' or support courses deemed necessary (in some cases, even compulsory) at South African universities. The University of the Free State offers several such courses with the aim of 'addressing the low language proficiency' of its first year students (van Wyk & Greyling, 2008:205). Passing a course in language proficiency is a prerequisite for a degree. Similarly the University of Pretoria offers a language bridging course because '[i]t is expected of every new undergraduate student who wishes to register at the University to complete a language proficiency test. Based on the results of this test, the student will be enrolled in language development courses that have to be passed before the degree will be awarded'. (UP website). Similarly, the University of Cape Town applies a language proficiency admissions test, the Placement Test in English for Educational Purposes (PTEEP) (Kapp: 2003:4).

Kapp (2004: 247) positioned the role of English 'in the South African Higher Education context' as follows: 'the fact [is] that in South Africa now and in the foreseeable future English (which is a second or third language for students from working-class backgrounds) is likely to remain the language of learning and teaching in most higher education institutions'. She also points out the contradiction that in many black working-class secondary schools in South Africa, English is 'taught as a second language subject, but is the official medium of instruction'. In practice we see that, despite constitutional guarantees about the equal status of all eleven official languages in South Africa, English is functionally the major dominant language in formal public contexts in South Africa.

1.2 Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School: background of context

Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School boasts highly successful and well-qualified 'Old Wags', including provincial MECs, national soccer stars, doctors, lawyers and business people. Enrolment is currently close to 1000 learners (of which roughly 475 are boys and 550 are girls) and has a teaching staff of about 35. Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School was originally established as a coloured school teaching via the

medium of Afrikaans only. However, since black learners have been admitted, the learners receive instruction via the media of English and Afrikaans, with the home languages of the learners being predominantly Afrikaans and SeSotho. The current demographics reflect 447 black and 624 coloured learners. Many of the black learners travel long distances (up to 15km) from other townships and informal settlements camps to attend school. Many learners feeding into Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School attended seSotho, seTswana or even isiXhosa primary schools (with some having moved from one medium of instruction to another at primary school level). Clearly this has profound implications for the language proficiency at the school, where they now have to choose between the available media of either English or Afrikaans, with preference usually being given to English (see above), although the school is still officially an Afrikaans school.

The school is situated in a poverty-stricken area and many parents/caregivers are unemployed. Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School has experienced a low pass rate at matriculation level over a period of years (fluctuating between 54.6% and 69% over the past five years) and has been identified by the Free State Department of Education as an underperforming school. The principal attributes this partly to learners' low reading proficiency and the lack of a culture of reading and approached the University of the Free State for assistance. At a joint meeting of community leaders and university stakeholders, the principal of Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School requested help with reading development at his school. Because the university is committed to Community Service Learning as a sustainable method of learning and research within the immediate community where real-life problems occur, this request was acceded to and this project conceived.

1.3 Problem identification

The attrition rate at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School is high. Improving the reading proficiency of the learners may lead to an improvement of the matriculation results as 'in academic settings the most common way for students to learn new information is through reading' (Grabe & Stoller, 2002:19). Thus, if learners become more

proficient, they are equipped with a life-skill which may assist them to access learning and hence further their personal development.

The main aim of the research is to design a programme of reading intervention that will lead to on-going, sustainable reading development at the school. The intervention will focus on second language (SL) reading development as all the learners at the school are SL speakers of English. The approach to reading development at the school will provide learners with strategies and SL-specific resources to deal with English texts across the curriculum. The focus of the research will be on improving the teaching skills of the teachers to teach reading as this will ensure sustainability after the completion of the study. Thus, to improve the reading proficiency of learners, a programme of intervention will be implemented that includes the teachers as participants and co-researchers while improving their teaching skills.

An additional aim of the project is to reflect critically on the intervention in order to ensure a more generalised understanding of an educational problem. The results of this study will have additional value in that they will facilitate a closer understanding of reading development in one township school as an example of a general educational problem. Valuable guidelines for teaching and learning may be drawn from this study.

The proposed research methodology is action research (AR), which is qualitative in nature. AR moves in cycles and is particularly adept at solving problems and effecting change in real-life social settings, such as that at the institution targeted in this research. Initially the action researcher engages with the real life situation in order to gather existing data and make primary observations. In so doing, the issue is defined. Based on this, the action or intervention is planned and acted upon. The following steps in AR are seminal: planning, observation, analysis and reflection on the action or intervention attempted. The researcher records the observation and problems encountered during the intervention before re-engaging with the real world

situation, redefining the issue, and in so doing refining and solving the problems and starting a new cycle. It would seem that the freedom and suppleness afforded by such methodology is most suitable for the complexity of a school which presents the researcher with a knot of complex social, interpersonal, economic and even racial issues to be unravelled.

1.4 Pilot exploration

A pilot exploration of the problem took the form of a focus-group interview with teachers whose daily contact with the pupils would direct the study; and the researcher compiled a reading proficiency test (based on texts taken from their English prescribed book of short stories and a prescribed Geography textbook) which was written by all the grade 8 learners at the school.

The teachers identified the following reading problems during the focus-group interview:

- Learners are not motivated to read and read reluctantly - rather than read any text, learners ask the teacher to tell them what the text contains.
- Learners are unable to read written instructions on test and examination papers.
- They read with no comprehension.
- Learners have very little background and general knowledge.
- Reading material in the library and in their prescribed books is not interesting and relevant to the learners. They are only interested in reading about their immediate surrounds/ world/ milieu and not in current affairs or anything beyond their range.
- The learners do not read fluently.
- Their vocabulary is inadequate.
- Learners do not value reading and a culture of reading is totally absent.
- The learners' functional literacy level is low and they enter the high school in grade 8 with sub-standard reading skills.

The dilemma was analysed and divided into two categories: matters pertaining to the educational/school system and those relating to the learners themselves.

The following problems relating to the conditions in the education/school system were mentioned by the teachers:

- There are very big classes of 45 – 50 learners. Consequently, the classes are difficult to manage. It is more difficult to maintain discipline and teach effectively. It is thus very difficult to give any individual attention and identify individual problems.
- The Learning Facilitators (LFs) who represent the Provincial Education Department are uncooperative and do not heed the observations of the teachers.
- The powers of the teachers are limited. They are disempowered by their perceived lack of authority, problems with discipline, a lack of funds for reading material and not enough relevant reading material.
- The prescribed texts are not relevant to the learners. (This is both a learners' problem and a problem within the system)
- The departmental intervention teams require a large amount of paperwork from the teachers. The DoE seems to feel that plenty of paperwork is evidence of teachers' doing their job. This is time consuming for busy teachers. The teachers feel that the DoE is results based.
- The learners do not see the fruit of their labours (*i.e.* they work but do not achieve success).
- The constant demands of the DoE for the teachers to attend workshops prevent them from teaching and hinder progress in the classroom. Teachers maintained that many of these workshops are given at very short notice.

A short questionnaire to establish the *status quo* of reading strategies before intervention, was distributed. Some teachers worked in pairs and the replies were anonymous in order for the project to be perceived as being non-threatening to the teachers. While they successfully identified important aspects (such as 'plenty of practice and opportunities to read from books and magazines,' and 'comprehension

questions,’ ‘read magazines for pronunciation. Read short stories and explain vocabulary’), in general the replies were vague. Although the questionnaire was an inaccurate way of establishing how these teachers teach, it was also intended to initiate self-examination by the teachers of their individual teaching methods. What did emerge were their frustrations with large classes (and the consequent lack of time and opportunity for individual attention) and, in particular, their lack of knowledge of how to deal with remedial cases. Many learners, it seems, cannot read at all. There is no doubt that an illiterate learner is disruptive and undisciplined. The perception emerging from the responses to the interviews and the vague answers to the questions on teaching was that the teachers’ morale was very low. This awareness was bolstered by the teachers’ lack of discipline and a cynical and fatalistic attitude towards their teaching task. It became clear that the task ahead would embrace problems with the staff as well as with the children.

In order to try and address the teaching problems at the school, a meeting with the staff was convened in order to compile a ‘wish list’ of what teaching aids would be useful to them. The teachers requested the following:

- dictionaries;
- overhead projectors;
- screens;
- maps; and
- alphabet charts.

The results of the reading proficiency test confirmed the teachers’ observations in that the results were poor on all items tested (vocabulary, general knowledge, textual references and comprehension). The lack of any reading culture amongst the learners is reflected in the community and their home environments. An explorative questionnaire (appendix IV:1) completed by the grade 8 learners in 2007 revealed that few (if any) learners had more than ten books at home. Other revelations were that:

- few learners could distinguish between books and magazines;

- many of the learners could not read or understand the questions being put to them;
- many answers were unintelligible;
- many learners feared ridicule;
- the learners' aims and goals in life were not at all in touch with attainable reality: most learners wanted to become doctors, many lawyers, social workers and business people;
- many learners misread or did not understand the instructions/ questions;
- many learners were desperate for spectacles; and
- several learners pleaded for help.

In addition, the library is poorly equipped, unfriendly (is dirty, has old books and iron bars at the door) and understaffed. The librarian is on duty once a week and, when interviewed, confirmed the lack of interest in reading among the learners and, ironically, complained that the theft of books was a real problem. Likewise, the classrooms are untidy, dirty and bare with little evidence of anything that might stimulate interest in or around any subject being taught at school.

The situation, if left unaddressed, would simply perpetuate attrition at the school and result in school leavers' being educationally destitute.

1.4 Rationale for the study

The foundation for the research into how to improve learners' reading is the headmaster's astute perception that the high matriculation failure rate was a result of the learners' poor reading skills and his consequent appeal to the Community Service Department at the University of the Free State for aid. Initial testing confirmed his awareness that the level of reading is poor, and literature on the value of reading validates the headmaster's understanding that reading is the key to academic success. For example, it is clear from the work of Grabe and Stoller (2002:19) that 'in academic settings ... the most common way for students to learn new information is through reading'. Thus, if learners become more proficient, they are equipped with a

life-skill which may assist them to access learning and hence further their personal development.

The seriousness of the problem is underscored by Labov (2007:18) in similar studies done in the United States among learners of the inner-city schools: ‘The failure of schools in low-income neighbourhoods to teach children to read is the most serious social problem of the United States today, and is the root cause for increasing rates of unemployment, violent crime, incarceration and homelessness’ (2007:18). Against the similar social and economic setting of a township school such as Wag-’n-bietjie Secondary School, exploration into the improvement of reading is most pertinent, particularly when the research is supported by a sound theoretical base and is also granted the extra empirical dimension and the freedom afforded by AR as the research methodology. The study is expected to make a contribution to knowledge independently of the orientation of the findings because it offers insights into how to approach other such institutions with full knowledge of the unexpected successes, failures and pitfalls.

1.6 Main aims and specific objectives

The main aims of the research are to:

- provide the teachers with the necessary skills and techniques to implement good reading practices in their classrooms (in all subjects) in order to improve the reading of weak readers (this refers to learners who can read, but read poorly, as opposed to illiterate learners, referred to in the next paragraph);
- train teachers to teach the illiterate learners to read;
- ensure that practices implemented are sustainable;
- develop a culture of reading at the school;
- reflect critically on each step of the implementation;
- replan the process based on the results of reflection;
- facilitate the professional growth of teachers;
- implement appropriate methods and techniques based on insights gained from a literature review; and
- engage teachers as participants in the research.

From the above it is clear that the focus of the research will be on improving the teaching skills of the teachers to teach reading as this will ensure sustainability after the completion of the study. Thus, to improve the reading proficiency of learners, a programme of intervention will be implemented that includes the teachers as participants and co-researchers while improving their teaching skills. The additional aim is to reflect critically on the interventions in order to ensure a more generalised understanding of an educational problem (Burns, 1999). The results of this study will have additional value in that it will facilitate a closer understanding of reading development in one township school as an example of a general educational problem.

1.7 Research methodology

As the name implies, AR involves two elements which Dick (2002:[1]) highlights, maintaining that it has ‘dual aims of action (that is, change) and research (that is, understanding)’. He explains that, ‘Action and understanding inform each other’ (2002:[3]): in other words, the purpose of AR is, ‘to research action, and to action (that is, to act on) research’ incorporating the important element of participation.

AR is the chosen methodology for this study as it allows for participant researchers and facilitates staff development (Burns: 1999; Kerfoot & Winberg; 1997; Henning: 2005) where it ‘seeks to remove the gap between the deciders and the doers’ (Dick: 2002: [2]) - in this case, the researcher being the decider and the teachers, the ‘doers’. In particular, AR ‘focuses on finding a solution to a local problem in a local setting’ (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005: 108), and this focus is indeed most apposite in this project where it focuses on the particular situation at Wag-’n-bietjie Secondary School with the ambition of extrapolating the wisdom, experience and insights thus acquired for use in a similar situation elsewhere.

The cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting provide the researchers with momentum to implement change and to reflect critically on the process (Wallace 1998:12). Through the AR cycles, the researcher and teacher hope to ‘become aware of what is really happening’ (Grabe & Stoller 2002:157) in the classrooms and attempt problem-solving as the project progresses. AR provides a tool for systematic

inquiry and simultaneous problem-solving based on structured reflection (Kerfoot & Winberg 1997:26).

The planning phase of the first cycle includes a literature review; a focus-group interview with the grade 8 teachers; taking down of a language proficiency test with the grade 8 learners; and the taking down of a questionnaire by all grade 8 learners to gain biographical background information on the target group. The implementation phase includes training of teachers and the implementation of a sustained, silent reading programme on the timetable for learners.

AR by its nature spurs educational change and staff development in that it is decision-driven and not hypothesis-driven and therefore facilitates quality problem-solving and decision-making (Krathwohl 1998:601; Kember & Gow 1992:301). It is a supple and adaptable methodology well-suited to a school setting.

What follows is a short explanation of some of the key terms as they are used in this context.

1.8 Clarification of concepts

The following comments are offered on certain concepts as used within the framework of this dissertation. They are: township, reading development and secondary school.

Township In South Africa, the designation *township* refers to the urban residential areas that were reserved for blacks, coloureds and Indians under apartheid. These areas were often undeveloped and built on the periphery of towns and cities. Although the term harks back to the apartheid era in South Africa, it is not used pejoratively today and most South African towns and cities will have at least one township associated with them and they are often viewed as just one of the many suburbs that an urban area might have. There are often informal settlements (squatter camps) on the outskirts of the townships. The learners at Wag-‘n-bietjie Secondary School all live in townships or informal settlements.

Reading development The understanding of what constitutes reading development may have different meaning in different contexts. In the terms of this dissertation, reading development entails training the teachers to teach the content of any subject using a reading-based teaching methodology. The eradication of illiteracy with the aid of a specialised language programme was another aspect of reading development that warranted attention. Furthermore, the cultivation of a love of reading was considered a fundamental aspect of reading development as spontaneous reading develops fluency, comprehension, vocabulary and develops background knowledge.

Secondary school The school where this project was run consists of grade 8 to grade 12 learners, ranging in age from 12 to 19 years of age. It is important to note that no single primary school feeds this school and consequently Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School accepts learners from schools with varying academic standards, and with different home languages.

The next section will outline the layout of this document, giving a brief overview so that the progress of the project and the arrangement of the dissertation may be followed with greater ease.

1.9 Conceptual framework

Chapter 1 sets the study within the broader South African context and describes the particular social situation of the school where the project takes place. The rationale for the study - the poor reading levels linked to a low grade 12 pass rate - are investigated and identified. This chapter focuses on the need to address the reading problems by training and empowering the teaching body. Moreover, the researcher defends the choice of AR as the most appropriate research methodology for this endeavour.

Chapter 2 introduces the theoretical background on the subject of reading and reading development that will feed the research. Hereafter, factors to be considered in order to develop reading are presented.

The interventions chosen to develop reading at Wag-‘n-bietjie Secondary School, are described in chapter 3 and reasons are provided for their choice.

Chapter 4 explains the preference for AR as the preferred methodology, based on the aims and objectives of the project that were described in chapter 1. The underpinning assumptions that delineate AR are described, as are the desired outcomes. In addition, AR is contextualised within the research tradition by contrasting it briefly with other research methods. Data gathering methods are also explained.

Chapter 5 describes the actual project as it progresses over two AR cycles, once the research problem has been described and the research questions posed. The planning, acting, observing and reflecting phases of the AR cycles are described in detail. In accordance with established AR practice, chapter 5 has been written in the first person.

The final chapter (chapter 6) is concerned with results, findings and conclusions and recommendations of the project. It provides a blueprint for a similar study and also describes the limitations and the mistakes made and plots the way ahead for Wag-‘n-bietjie Secondary School. Suggestions for new research that might be directed by this research dissertation are also presented.

CHAPTER 2

READING DEVELOPMENT

No matter how busy you may think you are, you must find time for reading, or surrender yourself to self-chosen ignorance
- Confucius

2.1 Theoretical background

2.1.1 Definition of reading

Writing during the late 1980s, Goodman (1988:11) maintained that the reason why there was so little progress in the development of more effective methods for the teaching of reading was the general ignorance of the reading process itself. He maintained that most reading strategies were aimed at manipulating the behaviour of both the teacher and the learner with the reading process itself being regarded as a mystery. Goodman cited two popular - but opposing - views of what constituted reading, and warned that *both of these attitudes are unproductive* and might, in fact, hinder the successful teaching of reading:

1. Reading is what reading is and everybody knows that; usually this translates to 'reading is matching sounds to letters'.
2. 'Nobody knows how reading works'. This view usually leads to a next premise; therefore, in instruction, whatever 'works' is its own justification.

Instead, Goodman (1988:12) defines reading as 'a psycholinguistic process in that it starts with a linguistic surface representation encoded by a writer and ends with meaning which the reader constructs' where syntactic, semantic and pragmatic knowledge is involved in this decoding process. In other words, Goodman emphasises the interaction between the printed word and knowledge of the mechanics of the language during the reading process. He sees it as a cognitive process.

Grabe and Stoller (2001:188; also Urquhart & Weir 1998:14) agree with Goodman about the misconceptions described above, and accept general comprehension as an aim of successful reading, and that 'matching sounds to letters' to form words does

not presuppose any understanding of what is being read. Urquhart and Weir (1998:34) add that reading ability should supersede 'pure' language skills and encompass the readers' background knowledge of the world and their 'pragmatic knowledge and skills'.

These definitions are in line with the more recent definitions by Grabe and Stoller (2001:188; 2002:9-10) which shape and refine the initial descriptions of reading by adding that the reader should be able to 'draw information from a text and combine it with information and expectations that the reader already has' (2001:188). In other words, good general knowledge and a wide field of experience of the world are factors that are vitally important as the learner progresses towards the senior grades at school where texts increasingly demand general or background knowledge.

Similarly, in a later publication, Grabe and Stoller (2002:9) describe reading as 'the ability to draw meaning from a printed page and interpret this information appropriately'. However, they are quick to stipulate that this initial designation of reading is deficient for the following reasons (Grabe & Stoller 2002:9-10):

- The definition does not indicate that there are many ways of reading and different purposes for reading and that each requires a different combination of skills and strategies.
- It ignores the many ways of measuring the fluency of the readers and the skills, processes and knowledge that combine in order for comprehension to take place.
- The definition does not clarify the cognitive processes that function within a time limit. It is necessary to understand how time restraints affect the reader's fluency and comprehension.
- Finally, the initial delineation does not mention that the second language (SL) reader's proficiency affects his ability to understand and interpret a text.

These explanations make it plain that reading is an immensely intricate process and that these are factors to be heeded, yet each researcher's definition has emphasised the interaction between the reader and the text - with the ultimate goal being comprehension. In order to achieve the interaction between the reader and the text,

Carrell (1988:1) believes that second language reading should no longer be regarded as the passive process that it has been in the past, with the text ‘controlling the reader’ (Goodman, 1994: 1061). It is important to see reading as an active or rather an interactive process. Goodman (1988:16) also endorses this top-down approach which sees the reader as an active participant (as opposed to a passive decoder) in reading as a process that involves making and confirming predictions based on the reader’s background knowledge of different aspects of language. The top-down approach is also characterised by the idea that ‘reading is a reconstruction of meaning, based on a skilful sampling of the text ...the crucial role of prior knowledge ... in prediction, and the necessity for reading at a reasonable rate in larger, more meaningful chunks’ (Eskey, 1986:12): in other words, it is concept-driven. Serafini’s definitive statements (2003:9) contribute to those above: reading is ‘a sanctioned interpretation by an external authority rather than a truth hidden in the text’. However, it must be mentioned that Eskey (1986:13) points out that the top-down approach neglects the ‘lower-level cognitive skills that I have categorised as simple *identification* skills’ which refer to the basic recognition of single words and phrases, in favour of the ‘*interpretative* skills’. In other words, aspects of the bottom-up approach should be incorporated into the teaching of reading too. According to the bottom-up model, reading is ‘a precise process [involving] exact, detailed, sequential perception and identification of letters, words, spelling patterns and larger language units’ – in other words, it is text driven. These are the cognitive skills referred to above. While learners are busy ‘decoding’ in this way, it ignores assisting readers to realise that they also bring knowledge to the page, and the role of predictions, prior knowledge and the processing of information during comprehension. With the new insights into what constitutes the reading process, this model has, fortunately, been superseded; yet the value of the bottom-up model is not defunct. It can be regarded as complementary to the top-down approach.

The view that the reader plays a central role in the construction of meaning, drawing upon prior knowledge and experience to attend selectively to specific aspects of a text is known as the transactional model of reading (Serafini, 2003:9). The ‘transaction’ takes place between the reader and the text in which the reader interprets a personal meaning of the text: it is thus not only cognitive, but subjective. (This is also referred to as the reader’s schema and is discussed more fully in section 2.3.2). In other

words, reading (with comprehension) does not reside in the text; it does not consist of ‘matching sounds to letters’ as mentioned above neither is it predetermined, ‘waiting to be discovered by competent readers’ - but depends on the reader and what knowledge and experience s/he brings to the text, his/her attitudes and cultural, social, political and cultural values, be they in the widest or narrowest sense. This is expressed very lucidly by Serafini (2003:9):

...reading is not a set of decontextualized cognitive skills that can be universally transmitted via commercial reading exercises [this refers to the bottom-up approach]. Rather, reading is a social practice that is constrained, mediated, and shaped by the social forces inherent in a particular community of readers. Meaning does not just generically arise in neutral contexts; it is grounded in the social, political, cultural, and historical contexts of the reading event. Readers are individuals in society, unable to escape from the contexts in which they live and read, but capable of rendering unique interpretations as they transact with particular texts at particular times. (Bracketed comment by the researcher)

These words depict reading as being cognitive and personal with a more abstract component, with even an affective aspect creeping into the definition. One becomes aware that background limits and controls the reader and even imposes paradigms.

Consequently, children who have been exposed to literature are more able to make the necessary connections between what they read and the world; they are more articulate and familiar with linguistic patterns; are more self aware and aesthetically discerning. This touches the core of problem at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School: most learners come from poor homes where there are few books, if any; and where there is no culture of reading. The lack of a reading culture is partly due to poverty, partly to the fact that many parents are themselves illiterate and partly due to the fact that the black literary tradition is oral. The words in chapter 1, quoted by the Minister of Education (Pandor, 2007:[1]), are pertinent here: ‘Various studies (largely American), suggest that a child from a professional family is likely to have heard 45 million words by his or her fourth birthday. A child from a working class background will have heard 26 million and a child from a deprived background will have heard only 13 million... it is not the toys in a house that matter, but the words in a child’s head’. We conclude

that early reading programmes and access to books are vital and that the learners in this study are severely disadvantaged. They need opportunities to learn language by reading as extensively and intensively as possible. Extensive reading will be addressed by creating a culture of reading in the school and the introduction of a programme of sustained silent reading (SSR) while the content-based instruction will attend to teaching intensive reading. These will be discussed later in chapter 3.

2.2 Developing reading

It is noteworthy that refined definitions of reading are comparatively new phenomena: in this chapter, 2.1.1 referred to Goodman's relatively recent observation (1988:11) that reading was a mystery and that nobody really knew what the process of reading involved. Grabe and Stoller (2001:187) also mention that consideration of the serious merit of reading has been relatively recent and state that, it is only 'in the past 15 years that reading is the most important language skill for second language readers'. As recently as 1988, Eskey (1988:93) acknowledges that 'During the past fifteen years or so, we have witnessed something like a revolution in the way that researchers understand and describe the process of reading'.

The chronological development of the different models of reading is of great consequence to the teaching of reading today because it implies an advancement in the understanding of reading and thus that many teachers are ill-equipped to teach reading, having been qualified during an era when both the significance and the process of reading were poorly understood, and tertiary training curriculums did not admit them. Van Pletzen (2006:107) endorses this change in the theory of reading: 'theorists of the past four decades or so have shifted to a very different perspective of reading as a meaning-making process which involves the reader cognitively, psychologically and socially in transactions with texts'. In addition to their lack of knowledge about reading theory, teachers will also not have been trained in the necessary techniques to integrate language and reading into all subjects in the school curriculum; neither will they fully appreciate the value of developing the learners' background and general knowledge. Serafini (2003:3) adds the insight that:

Regardless of whether teachers can explicitly articulate their theoretical perspectives, their beliefs play a dominant role in the resources they choose, the

instructional practices they employ, and the environment they create in their classrooms.

He explains that:

Each theoretical perspective supports a particular set of reading practices or pedagogies. These practices vary according to the amount of time allocated to reading instruction and reading of self-selected texts, the way that reading is defined, the epistemological assumptions about where knowledge is located and whether it is “found” or “constructed,” and the emphasis placed on the role of the text, the reader, and the context in the reading process (2003:3).

This directs the aims of this research and also underscores the call for training and guidance in the required techniques (which are discussed below) - with the need for improved reading at Wag-’n-bietjie Secondary School having been established and described in chapter 1.

The role of the teacher, according to Ruddell (1994: 281-282), is to ‘orchestrate instruction and meaning negotiation of the text, the source of authority, and sociocultural understandings’. Yet, the racial and social-economic diversity among teachers at Wag-’n-bietjie Secondary School currently alienates them from the learners. The staff consists of 9 black, 5 white and 21 coloured teachers, some of whom are culturally, economically, educationally, geographically and socially divorced from the black and coloured learners they teach. In order that the teachers teach reading appropriately, they should not only be aware of the latest language development premises but should surely also have a good idea of how to use the social, educational and cultural backgrounds of their charges in reading development – for these are what the learners bring with them to the text. Serafini (2003:9) endorses this observation:

In order to make the shift from a modernist perspective to a transactional or critical perspective, teachers must begin to interrogate the theoretical assumptions that support their reading instructional practices. As literacy teachers we should shift the focus from trying to find the right method for teaching children how to read, to determining whether the reading practices and experiences constructed in classrooms are addressing the broad repertoire of

practices required in today's society. Because of this, reading education has to go beyond scientific considerations to include the social, political, and cultural dimensions, if our students are to become the kinds of readers we want in a democratic society.

In paragraphs 2.1.1 and 2.1.2, researchers' ideas and definitions of the reading process have been examined. An amalgam of their definitions can inform strategies to improve the teaching of reading and guide the teachers in their application. Similarly, an analysis of the factors to be considered in order to develop reading can light our way.

2.3 Factors to be considered in order to develop reading

The emphasis in section 2.2 moves steadily from the view of the reading process as a 'mystery' where the teachers should use any technique that works, to definitions which involve the interaction of the reader as a whole person with the text. It has already been mentioned that this way of thinking unlocks a new door where the social, economic, psychological and cultural backgrounds of the readers become significant. Because these aspects are personal attributes and because they are quite abstract (as opposed to 'matching sounds to letters', for example), they are inevitably more difficult for a teacher to address and also less obvious in terms of the teacher's awareness of factors that should be considered in order to develop reading (particularly at the current school with the profile of diversity depicted above). They will be discussed below.

2.3.1 Characteristics of a good reader

Grabe and Stoller (2001:188) assert that in order to understand reading, it is valuable to examine the attributes of fluent readers. They identify ten features that result in effortless reading. So, we discover that a fluent reader:

- reads rapidly;
- recognises words quickly and automatically;
- has a large vocabulary;
- integrates information in the text with their own knowledge;
- identifies the purpose of the text;

- understands the text sufficiently;
- changes his/her purpose to read strategically;
- uses techniques and strategies to control comprehension;
- identifies and restores poor comprehension; and
- reads critically and is able to assess the information.

Aebersold and Field (1997:16) contribute to this list. In addition to the above, they suggest that a good reader uses textual features such as titles and subheadings to predict the content.

An awareness of the skills attributed to fluent readers not only contributes to the definition of reading that has been attempted above but also dissects the reading process so that astute teachers know what they are striving for in the development of reading. Van Pletzen (2006: 105-106) observes that, while the teaching of writing is relatively common, little attention is given to reading and mentions the ‘vagueness ... about what exactly particular reading tasks should achieve’. She refers to the fact that the reading process is relatively ‘invisible’ to both students and teachers.

2.3.2 Socio-cultural and emotive factors influencing English Second Language readers

Paragraph 2.2 referred to the vastly differing social, cultural, linguistic and economic backgrounds at the school hosting this research project. As indicated, these differences divide not only the learners (whose home languages are predominantly Afrikaans, and seSotho and their medium of instruction either English or Afrikaans, and all of whom are second language readers of English.) but also the teachers who are either English, Afrikaans, seSotho or Xhosa speakers and belong to black, white or coloured cultural groups. Often these teachers have to teach in their second languages. Ruddell (1994:282) points out that the teacher’s existing beliefs and knowledge give rise to affective and cognitive aspects of his/her teaching. He explains that the affective aspects of teachers influence their motivation to connect with learners, their dispositions and their ‘sociocultural values and beliefs’, while their cognitive dimension is responsible for the teachers’ knowledge of the content of the subjects that they teach; their methodologies and how and when to assist the learners construct meaning. Ruddell’s persuasion justifies and explains the

complexity of the situation at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary school: not only are there huge individual differences in terms of the affective beliefs, cognitive abilities and training but different assumptions are made in terms of the different racial groups (by both staff and learners) and so stereotyping could also be a trap.

Eskey (1986:4-5) reminds us that the second language reader inevitably belongs to a culture with ideas about reading that might be very different from our own. He cites the example of the contrast between a Western culture which prizes rapid silent reading and a critical approach, and an Eastern culture where reading is done aloud, the texts are often religious in nature and may not be criticised. At Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School, many learners are from a black culture with a strong oral tradition. For this and other reasons described elsewhere, the learners come from a literary void and have no reading culture; and so a reading culture has to be grown. Eskey (1986:4-5) suggests that teachers should be aware of these differences, should avoid making assumptions that might hinder reading in the English cultural context (of which the teachers themselves may be unaware) and that they be prepared to develop new attitudes and overturn old prejudices. One should also be aware that second language learners are further disadvantaged by several factors which should be considered during the teaching of reading. Grabe and Stoller (2001:189; also Aebersold & Field, 1997:23-32) suggest that the following differences between first language and second language learners are significant. In the comments in brackets after each point the researcher links the characteristics of second language readers to those of good readers which were listed above. In general, second language learners:

- have weaker linguistic skills and a poorer vocabulary than first language learners (will not be able to read rapidly, recognise words quickly and automatically; have a large vocabulary);
- lack the 'intuitive foundation' in the structure of the second language (will not be able to read rapidly; identify and restore poor comprehension; understand the text sufficiently; integrate information in the text with their own knowledge; identify the purpose of the text);
- do not have the cultural knowledge and references to understand what is implicit in a text (will not be able to read rapidly; integrate information in the

text with their own knowledge; read critically and be able to assess the information; identify and restore poor comprehension);

- do not always understand the organisation of the texts and how the information is presented (will not be able to read rapidly; identify the purpose of the text).
- are motivated differently from first language learners (this may have positive or negative implications)
- have very different social and cultural backgrounds which create many variables in terms of matters such as the value placed on the written as opposed to the spoken word (referred to by Eskey above); the emphasis placed on unquestioning acceptance of the truth of religious texts, often resulting in a culture of memorising texts (will not be able to read critically and be able to assess the information; integrate information in the text with their own knowledge).

Urquhart and Weir (1998:33) quote E.B. Bernhardt who differentiates between literate and non-literate SL learners. This distinction reveals that SL learners may not constitute a homogenous group (this has been indicated in the case at hand) and that the following variables should be taken into account:

- Some SL learners may be literate in their first language (FL) while others may not. The way in which other, previously acquired, languages (other than the FL) were learned may influence the acquisition of English;
- The 'linguistic relationship' between the FL and SL may be close or distant: it would be easier for a French speaking learner to acquire English than a Tswana speaker. For example, the famous language teacher, Michel Thomas, (2006: CD 1 track 2; CD2 track 2) maintains that an English FL speaker learning Spanish already has a Spanish vocabulary of several thousand words because of the linguistic proximity of the languages;
- Cultural relationships will influence how easily a language is acquired: learners from Western Europe share cultural knowledge that would be lacking in learners from a vastly different culture, e.g. rural African culture. (This is in agreement with the observation by Grabe and Stoller (2001:189) above); and

- English as a second language may even use a different alphabet from languages such as Greek or Arabic. Although this might be inapplicable to the situation at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School, it is important to consider the difficulties of English spelling. Drucker (2003:24) observes that English has 'many irregular sound-letter correspondences' which, while not quite a different alphabet, the many obscure links between the phonics and the alphabet, it makes SL reading difficult.

In addition to the list above, Cummins, Brown and Sayers (2007:12-13) stipulate poverty as an important (but ignored) issue in literacy with learners in underprivileged communities scoring significantly lower in their reading proficiency.

Eskey (1986:19) underlines the problem of confidence that affects many second language readers. He points out that the over-careful and extra-slow reading engaged in by an unconfident reader will preclude comprehension and promote frustration and a negative attitude. He suggests that such a reader should abandon this cautious approach and be encouraged to read 'the probable meaning of the text'. This implies that the teacher's role is a sensitive one and that the learner needs to be gently nudged to take the 'risks' that a fluent reader does. Many responses to the researcher's explorative questionnaire to establish the learners' home backgrounds, included responses such as being too shy to read in front on their peers.

As mentioned above, a group of second language readers is not necessarily a homogenous one. It has been indicated that this is true of Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School where both the learners and the teachers often work in their second (or indeed, even their third) languages. Because of the lack of uniformity in terms of language, it appears to the researcher that, particularly amongst the teachers, the problem of a lack of confidence does not really exist and the teachers interact informally in many languages. This is not true of the learners and it seems that there is a racial divide in terms of language, with the black learners favouring English (not their home language) and the coloured learners, Afrikaans (their home language). In addition, it seems that the coloured learners are more likely to speak English than the black learners are likely to speak Afrikaans. This could be ascribed to confidence and/or a subtle form of racism, or their feelings towards the other language, its people and their culture (discussed below).

What follows is brief commentary on how the factors listed above pertain to the situation at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School. They will be discussed in the same order as in the bulleted list above.

It is clear from the tests and interviews with the teachers that many learners are illiterate in their first language. Many black learners attended more than one primary school and received tuition in schools via different languages, resulting in confusion about the phonics of each language. This is less common among the coloured learners. The 'linguistic relationship' between Afrikaans and English is closer than between English and Sotho and other black languages, with English and Afrikaans sharing a strong Germanic background. Moreover, the cultural relationship between English and black languages is more remote than between English and Afrikaans. This implies that the black learners should be at a greater disadvantage in terms of reading than the coloured children. However, most of the coloured children are culturally deprived and so this heritage requires development so that texts can be interpreted with some form of background knowledge.

2.3.3 A reader's schema

A reader's 'schema' refers to his/her store of knowledge which is required to process the new incoming information. In other words, it is an abstract knowledge structure on the basis of which comprehension takes place, and has been mentioned briefly earlier in this chapter. The reader's schema draws on his/her past experience in order to recognise how specific knowledge relates to a particular case, and, in so doing, comprehension takes place (Anderson & Pearson, 1988:47). Day and Bamford (1998:14) explain that the readers' schema 'describes how readers might organize and access knowledge', and that they require 'more than just a random collection of vocabulary knowledge, world knowledge, linguistic knowledge, and so on in order to construct meaning'. According to Anderson and Pearson (1988:37) comprehension may be defined as the interaction between existing and incoming information. This means that without sufficient background knowledge, comprehension is compromised. It is important to remember that sufficient contextualisation is also an aspect of background knowledge (Bransford, Stein & Shelton, 1984:28-29). Anderson and Pearson define full comprehension as occurring when a reader 'has

found a mental “home” for the information in the text’ (1988:37), with this ‘mental home’ being dependent on the reader’s schema.

These insights have a powerful value for the project being undertaken - but in the particular case being researched, they present many snags. Particularly in the light of the learners’ inability to read, their reluctance and their cultural poverty in terms of reading, learners have to be teased into reading with easy texts that are as familiar as possible. It is indeed difficult to find easy texts for high school learners that are within their frame of reference that are not too babyish. The chosen interventions also strive to bring a sense of enjoyment of reading to the learners, and broaden their general knowledge. This is problematic as they have no books at home and the school library is inoperative. Training of staff to teach is hampered by poor teacher attendance of training sessions and a lack of interest.

Perhaps this apparent lack of interest is a result of the *teachers’* schema. As mentioned elsewhere, the diversity is great; stereotyping easy and basic assumptions may be false. Paradigms have to be shifted – on the part of the teachers and indeed of the researcher too. All these hindrances must be overcome during the project in order to make an impression on the reading levels of the scholars and to ensure sustainability once the project has run its course.

2.3.4 Attitude and motivation

In line with the lack of interest on the part of the teachers that has been touched on above, Day and Bamford (1998:21; also Grabe & Stoller, 2001:199) lament the ‘relatively little concern’ that they discern for attitude and motivation in reading in a second language on behalf of the learners and point out that the ‘affective dimension’ is very important here (*i.e.* not merely the cognitive aspect of the learner). It would appear that, for this project, the problem of attitude and motivation is twofold: at Wag-’n-bietjie Secondary School both the teachers and the learners are in need of this powerful instrument. Condy’s research (2008:610) was stimulated by the perception that ‘the quality of the principal, the level of teacher commitment and the extent of community involvement’ were the ‘most powerful factors’ that shape how a school is

run. It appears that, in the case at hand it is necessary to motivate the teachers first in order for them to inspire the learners.

Ruddell (1994:286) identifies six different factors that provide intrinsic motivation for reading:

- successful problem solving;
- the prestige of reading successfully and the accompanying sense of empowerment;
- the development of an aesthetic sensibility;
- the possibility of escapism – the development of the imagination;
- intellectual curiosity that encourages the child to explore new ideas; and
- self-understanding in terms of personal goals and self development.

He maintains that teacher and parent expectations and the fear of failure complete the picture but are extrinsic motivating features. In a book-poor environment such as that being researched at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School, these six points are not as self-evident as in book-rich circumstances where many of the joys listed are imbibed from toddlerhood – and the teachers should behave accordingly by exposing scholars to the experiences described.

A fascinating study conducted by Ruddell (1994:281-295) examines the differences between teachers that were perceived to have been 'influential' or 'noninfluential' by past pupils. The results of this enquiry reveal that influential teachers 'relied on internal reader motivation during 89% of teaching, with the emphasis falling on problem resolution, whereas noninfluential teachers draw on external motivation (61% of the time) with teacher expectations weighing heaviest'. The researcher fears that the teachers at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School are so demotivated that they draw strongly on extrinsic motivation.

Day and Bamford (1998:22) differentiate between *attitude* and *motivation*. They specify that the nature of attitude is evaluative – referring to whether one regards something with favour or disfavour. They reveal that attitudes may be changed and 'are not set in concrete'. Nonetheless, they warn that this is a tough task which is subject to variables such as how strong an attitude is, other attitudes and the source of

the attitude. Understanding the source of the attitude (good or bad) towards reading is the first step teachers should take.

Learners' attitudes towards second language reading are fed from four sources (Day & Bamford, 1998:23-26):

- Their attitude towards first language reading.

The more positive their first language reading experience, the more positive their view of reading in a second language is. At Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School there are few learners who read in their first language and so this clouds the possibility of a positive attitude towards reading in English.

- Their previous encounters with learning to read another language.

Positive experiences breed a positive attitude. A benefit of the diversity at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School is that many learners are bilingual or even multilingual and interact easily with speakers of other languages.

- Their feelings towards the other language, its people and their culture.

This is a highly emotive issue. Language is part of the culture of a group of people and often people's attitudes are born from recent history. For example, black people in South Africa perceived Afrikaans as the 'language of the oppressor' before 1994; and Afrikaans-speaking white South Africans saw English as the language of their oppressors after the South African War. The legacy of violence lingers.

- The teaching environment, including the children's peers' attitudes and the level of support the learners receive.

Because reading in a second language is generally regarded as being difficult and learners are reluctant and apprehensive about reading, the enthusiasm, the teacher's stance and the atmosphere in the classroom contribute to the attitude of the learners. Furthermore, a positive environment contributes to a more relaxed atmosphere which reduces the tension children experience in their encounters with a 'foreign' language. It thus lowers what Krashen refers to as the 'affective filter' (Krashen & Terrell, 1983:37-39) and makes the lessons more productive. The 'affective filter' embodies the view that a number of 'affective variables' play a facilitative, but non-causal, role in second language acquisition. These variables are: motivation, self-confidence and anxiety. Low motivation and self-confidence

and high levels of anxiety can combine to 'raise' the affective filter that forms a mental block that prevents comprehensible input from being used for language acquisition. According to Krashen and Terrell (1983:37-39), learners with the 'lower filter' will progress further and faster, will seek and receive more input, respond with more confidence and interact better. Teachers should be sensitive to the likelihood that the 'affective filter' rises in adolescence. This impedes the teenagers' progress in second language acquisition. Teachers should be equipped with teaching techniques in order to make the reading experience less threatening and easier, such as the use of visual and other aids might assist in relaxing the learners. A valuable skill for the teacher is to be trained in pre-teaching methods such as establishing and building background knowledge, pre-teaching vocabulary and using practices such as predicting and activating previous knowledge before the learners tackle the text. Teachers also play a valuable role by modelling reading and making stimulating material available in the classroom. In this way they can attempt to change attitudes towards reading. This aspect of developing second language reading needs attention at the host school.

As mentioned before, Day and Bamford (1998:27) argue that attitude and motivation are not exactly the same, despite having much in common. These researchers claim that '... motivation is what makes people do (or *not* do) something'. They also refer to the factors of 'expectancy + value' that make people do something and add that people 'tend [...] to undertake tasks that they value, and tend [...] to avoid those things that have little value for them, even though they reasonably expect that they could do them'. If one applies this approach to reading, it implies that the learners will not read a book unless they expect to be able to do so with understanding. It is thus vital that teachers instil a great value for reading in the hope that this will outweigh the anticipated difficulties. One of the fundamental problems at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School is that the teachers themselves do not hold reading in high regard. (This is described in chapter 5). It becomes clear that such a paradigm shift in the staff would have to be effected for the project to be successful.

Four variable factors motivate the student to read in a second language (Day & Bamford (1998:28): 'materials, reading ability, attitudes, and sociocultural environment', with the first two - materials and reading ability - being regarded as

primary. Without these the learner lacks the motivation to decide to read. Fortunately it seems that attitudes and sociocultural environment can be developed by positive attitudes and appropriate materials (1998:29). According to Condy (2008:610), 'literacy achievement depends crucially on the nature and quality of instruction that learners receive in the classroom'. As has been mentioned already, her research was stimulated by the perception that 'the quality of the principal, the level of teacher commitment and the extent of community involvement' were the 'most powerful factors' that shape how a school is run (and implicitly this impinges on the reading abilities of learners in general and the research currently being undertaken, in particular).

Grabe and Stoller (2001:199-200) declare that there are many ways to motivate learners to read in the classroom:

- Teachers should argue the value of reading and explain the reasons for different reading activities.
- Teachers should establish the readers' interests and also share their interests with the learners.
- Classroom activities should be correlated with the learners' goals.
- All reading tasks should be pre-taught to inspire interest.
- Teachers should build up the learners' general and background knowledge.
- They should adapt the selected reading texts to the readers' abilities.
- Teachers should try to develop a 'community of learners' who support each other in complex assignments.
- Teachers must strive to achieve 'flow' amongst the readers. 'Flow' describes optimal experience when the learners' skills match their abilities, with built-in challenges. Grabe and Stoller (2001:200) give an example of flow as unbroken concentration and the loss of a sense of time during an exercise.

As indicated, Ruddell (1994:294) identifies the use of intrinsic motivation by 'influential teachers' and their use of 'higher order' questions that 'encourage reader response and transaction with the text' and which promote not only motivation but comprehension. It follows that the link between motivation and comprehension is

very close and that the motivational style of the teachers at the school in question needs to be addressed in order to address comprehension concurrently.

2.3.5 Developing comprehension

The preceding discussions have touched on many aspects of comprehension already. Anderson and Pearson's definition (1988:37) of comprehension as the interaction between existing and incoming information has been cited. The functions of sufficient background knowledge and the role of the reader's schema to enable full comprehension (which, according to Anderson and Pearson (1988:37), occurs when a reader 'has found a mental "home" for the information in the text') have also been traced briefly. Although these definitions are in line with one another, they do not consider the skills, processes and knowledge that combine in order for comprehension to take place. In the light of the fact that the goal of reading is comprehension, how does the teacher facilitate comprehension and know that it is taking place? This is indeed a thorny issue.

Congruent with the necessity of adequate background knowledge in order to grasp the meaning of text, Ediger (2001:158) identifies the "Socio-Psycholinguistic (meaning-emphasis) approaches" to achieving and developing full comprehension of what has been read. As examples, Ediger offers three approaches:

1. The language-experience approach is based on the assumption that if learners are given familiar material to read, it will teach them to read. This approach has two advantages: the reader moves from the familiar to the unfamiliar and, when the readers' schemata (world knowledge) are similar to those in the text, they will be able to make more sense of the text. In addition, familiar material will surely help to foster a culture of reading at a school.

2. The literature-based approach uses children's literature to focus on "meaning, interest and enjoyment, while addressing individual children's needs in teaching them to read" (2001:158). The children select their own books and read them on their own or with others.

3. The whole language approach is described as “a philosophy of learning” (2001:159-160) in which the exponents teach reading while they teach the other aspects of language and even the factual aspects of other subjects in the curriculum. This approach emphasises the use of authentic texts and has personal, social and academic benefits. Learners acquire literacy as they deal with print in their environments. This is an aspect of content-based instruction which as a chosen methodology for this study, is described in chapter 3 (3.3).

As has been mentioned previously, Eskey (1986:19) points out that the over-careful and extra-slow reading engaged in by an unconfident reader will preclude comprehension and promotes frustration and a negative attitude. He suggests that such a reader should abandon this cautious approach and be encouraged to read ‘the probable meaning of the text’.

Grabe and Stoller (2002:188) declare that ‘all researchers recognize that the actual ability to comprehend texts comes about through reading, and doing a great deal of it, as the core of reading instruction’ They (2001: 188) also mention that experts agree that comprehension is developed through extensive reading - an opinion borne out by the empirical research conducted by Coleman (2003:94-95) at a disadvantaged school in South Africa.

Being able to read as widely as possible implies understanding of the skills, processes and knowledge that combine in order for comprehension to take place. Second language readers need to be grounded in the mechanics of the grammar of the language in order to be able to read. This is the bottom-up model referred to above. In particular, learners need a wide vocabulary in order to gain linguistic, background and topical knowledge.

According to Day and Bamford (1998:16), learners should develop a large ‘sight vocabulary’ (*i.e.* words they recognise automatically in print because of their familiarity). This has been identified in 2.3.1 as a characteristic of a good reader. Day and Bamford (1998:17) agree with Grabe and Stoller (2002:188) that the best way to achieve this is by reading as much as possible and indicate that learners ‘learn large numbers of words in their first language by guessing their meaning in context

while they read'. Day & Bamford (1998:18) relate that, despite less research in terms of how this applies to second language readers, indications are that they will acquire vocabulary by reading at the level *i minus 1* (*cf.* The Input Hypothesis described by Krashen & Terrell, 1983:32-37) as widely and as much as possible. This increases exponentially as the second language learner's reading improves.

Having established the process of reading, this chapter yields to the descriptions in chapter 3 of the methods chosen to try and improve reading at the school concerned. While the next chapter (chapter 4) continues with this chapter's theoretical aspect, the practical application of the selected reading techniques has to be considered because they will have to be applied within an established system where the practical application will go against the established grain.

CHAPTER 3
DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVENTIONS SELECTED TO DEVELOP
READING AT WAG-'N-BIETJIE SECONDARY SCHOOL

Never mistake motion for action.
- Ernest Hemingway

3.1 Introduction

In Chapter 1 the focus of the research was outlined. One of the aims was to improve teachers' skills in terms of teaching reading. It was hoped that by training them, the project would be sustainable when the researcher withdrew after the completion of the study. Accordingly, a programme of intervention was implemented that included the teachers as participants and co-researchers. In order to do so, it was necessary to select methodologies and interventions that would address the problems described in chapter 1 and that would tackle essential components such as vocabulary, comprehension, developing strategic reading and SL instructional approaches based on the aspects of reading explained in chapter 2. And so, the interventions below were chosen to help address the four reading goals of the project:

- to improve the reading of the learners who can read;
- to teach the children who were found to be totally illiterate to read;
- to train and empower the teachers so that the project will be sustainable; and
- to create and grow a culture of reading at the school.

The four interventions that were selected for implementation at the school are described below and their selection substantiated.

3.2 Sustained silent reading and extensive reading

3.2.1 Definition, characteristics, purposes and advantages of sustained silent reading and extensive reading

Sustained silent reading (SSR) is founded on the idea that an important way of improving reading comprehension is by reading (Grabe & Stoller, 2001:198; Day & Bamford, 1998:123; Aebersold & Field, 1997:43). It is crucial to remember that a lack of reading comprehension was one of the problems identified by the staff in their initial questionnaires about the reading problems at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School. This opinion was validated by test results which confirmed that the general level of comprehension was poor. SSR also stimulates an interest in reading and this was also identified by teachers as problem, *viz.* lack of interest.

SSR takes place in a school period that has been set aside for the purpose. During this time the learners read their own books for pleasure with no testing or book report involved. Teachers are expected to model reading by reading themselves and are expected to reflect their delight and wonder in their reading. They should not give any instruction or evaluation because reading should be free and spontaneous, with the purpose being general rather than detailed comprehension and the laborious use of dictionaries. In this way learners also learn to infer meaning and use contextual clues and transference from their first language to solve the riddle of new vocabulary. In addition they are exposed to correct language usage and their general knowledge is improved.

Grabe and Stoller (2001:198) declaim that, 'The sustained silent reading of level-appropriate texts is the single best overall activity that students can engage in to improve their reading abilities, though it is not sufficient by itself for an effective reading program. The point is simple. One does not become a good reader unless one reads a lot'. They emphasise the importance of a range of multiple level books with high interest value and also that SSR be seen as a project requiring long-term commitment, enthusiasm and perseverance on the part of the teacher in particular.

The advantages of SSR are as follows:

- improved comprehension;
- improved fluency;
- increased vocabulary;
- enhanced general knowledge;
- improved understanding of textual conventions, layout and grammatical structure;
- increased insight into the strengths and weaknesses of readers have been reported by teachers observing SSR, according to Day and Bamford (1998:43, 129); and
- the establishment of a ‘reading community’ (Day & Bamford 1998:128) and a love of reading.

Consequent to all these advantages listed, increased motivation is another major benefit. Day and Bamford (1998:129) warn that the teachers should not, under any circumstances, regard this time as an opportunity for them to fulfil their administrative duties. They maintain that this undervalues reading which is exactly what SSR strives not to do. (This is borne out by the research of Elley and Mangubhai whose results showed that the reading of learners whose teachers did not value or model reading improved less than those who had enthusiastic teachers: *cf.* 3.2.3, below). For the same reason, neither should learners be permitted to complete homework or school assignments during this period. Particularly the first warning pertains to the teachers at Wag-’n-bietjie Secondary School. Rather, it is hoped that, because the teacher is shown to enjoy reading (and s/he indeed needs to market this concept in every class) and because reading involves a free choice of reading matter that is unrelated to the drudgery of school books, a positive attitude towards reading may be cultivated in addition to the benefit of improved comprehension. Indeed, all the listed benefits of SSR are congruent with the aims of the current research project. The gravity of the teacher’s role in promoting and modelling reading so that SSR does not degenerate into a spiritless random engagement with text is stressed by Nation’s observation (1997:[6]) that: ‘Benefits from silent reading inevitably favour the avid

reader. Those who acquire more vocabulary this way are those who read well and read often. This is not good news for reluctant readers’.

In some ways extensive reading may be viewed as an overflow from sustained silent reading. If the inclination to read is cultivated within the classroom, the learners should need but a nudge to tip them into extensive reading at home, which is described below.

Citing Kelly, Day and Bamford (1998:5) mention that Harold Palmer is believed to have been the first to use the phrase *extensive reading* as in 1917 - with the concept having been conveyed (as *abundant reading*) as long ago as 1900. It seems that Palmer emphasised reading as many books as possible as quickly as possible, with the primary purpose of extracting meaning and enjoyment rather than consciously and deliberately considering the use of language. Day and Bamford (1998:5) point out that, consequent to Palmer’s work, a connotation of extensive reading is ‘real-world reading but for a pedagogical purpose’. Other aspects of extensive reading are that the reading should be for enjoyment and to encourage the habit of reading. In the process, learners will improve their general knowledge, their knowledge of language structure, their vocabulary and develop ‘automaticity’, self-confidence and motivation (1998:6). Thus, the pedagogical purpose is subtle and (apparently) secondary.

According to Grabe and Stoller (2002:144) – who cite the results of two studies to support their claim – extensive reading ‘can make a major difference in student reading development over time’. Nevertheless, they do caution that the results are not immediate and that such programmes are often abandoned before the results are quantifiable.

‘The characteristics of an extensive reading approach’ are described by Day and Bamford (1998:7-8) as follows:

- Learners should read as much as possible and should be encouraged to read at home.

- An assortment of diverse reading material should be available in order to cater for different interests and different styles of reading.
- Learners may read what they will and may change reading material if they find that they are not interested in it.
- The aim of the reading should be for pleasure and for information, based on the learner's interests.
- 'Reading is its own reward'. No exercises should be based on the reading.
- The reading material should be within the linguistic ability of the particular class of learners. Dictionaries are disruptive in this type of reading.
- Learners read individually, silently and at their own rate.
- The role of teachers is to explain the goals of the programme, guide and keep record of what has been read.
- The teachers should model reading by reading him/herself, and thereby illustrating what a good reader does and the benefits of reading.

Eskey (1986:20) is emphatic in his support of extensive reading: he maintains, '...there is one pedagogical constant, and that is the quantity of reading'. He continues, '...the more ... material that the student reads, the better – and the more quickly his reading skills will develop. The latter point cannot be emphasized too strongly. There is no way that a reader can develop better comprehension skills, and a greater confidence in his skills, without doing a lot of reading...'

3.2.2 The role of extensive reading in developing fluency among SL readers

Day and Bamford (1998:16) explain that fluency in second language reading depends on the following elements, which will be discussed below: 'a large sight vocabulary; a wide general vocabulary; and knowledge of the target language, the world, and text types'.

'Sight vocabulary' refers to words that have been read and repeated so often that they are immediately and automatically recognised and understood when viewed in print.

Referring to the ideal of Krashen (*cf.* The Input Hypothesis described by Krashen & Terrell, 1983:32-37), that input should be slightly challenging for language acquisition to take place, Day and Bamford (1998:16) make the salient point that, in contrast, the input level for the development of sight vocabulary should be at level slightly *below* that of the learner's level of comprehension (*i minus 1*, where *i* refers to the learner's level of learning, and *minus 1* suggests that the input be at an easier level). In this way, automaticity should flow from familiarity. Grabe and Stoller (2002:78) suggest that learners should be able to distinguish the '2,000 to 3,000 most common words as an essential foundation for word recognition automatically and then focus on vocabulary that is appropriate to specific topics and fields of study'. This suggestion links up neatly with the techniques proposed in content-based education, discussed below, and shows not only the differences between content-based instruction and extensive reading, but how the techniques complement each other.

There is no doubt that the greater the learners' vocabularies, the better they read. The importance of learners' general vocabularies is borne out by studies by Grabe and Stoller (2002:147) that reveal the 'strong connection between reading and vocabulary in both L1 and L2 contexts'. Yet, of the greatest consequence in this study is their finding that 'vocabulary knowledge ha[s] a greater influence on L2 than on L1 reading'. Day and Bamford (1998:17) maintain that, while first language readers learn new words by guessing their meaning in context (incidental learning), it is unclear whether second language readers gather new vocabulary as effectively in this way. (Research in this field is insufficient.) Nevertheless, what does appear to be true is the value of 'masses of varied and interesting *i minus 1* material can increase their general vocabulary knowledge'. Aebersold and Field (1997:43) moot the interesting suggestion that learners read several texts on the same broad topic. While not in the true spirit of the spontaneity of extensive reading, this add-on idea will certainly improve vocabulary and general knowledge: these will be expanded by means of reinforcement, the repetition and the new thrust or angle of varying texts on the same topic.

With the same irony contained in the fact that a reader needs vocabulary in order to read and, by reading, increases his/her vocabulary, we find that knowledge is necessary for reading and reading for knowledge. (Aebersold and Field's suggestion will resolve this dichotomy). Knowledge (of language and general knowledge) is necessary for fluency because comprehension depends on knowledge (Day & Bamford, 1998:18). This is discussed in 2.3.3 above. It is clear that teachers should enrich the learners with the greatest possible variety of texts containing as much information as possible.

3.2.3 Extensive reading: the *Book Flood* method

Mention has been made that the main obstacle to second language reading is the learners reluctance to read. Day and Bamford (1998: 22) remind us that, while attitude indicates someone's personal proclivity towards something, teachers should work with the knowledge that attitudes can be changed – albeit with difficulty. They suggest that teachers should examine the sources of the learners' attitudes towards SL reading and identify the following factors that influence their attitude to reading (1998:23):

- their first language reading attitudes;
- their previous experience of learning to read another language;
- their attitudes towards the culture and people represented by the new language; and
- the classroom environment, including the attitudes of the teacher and their peers.

Stoller (1986:65) endorses the idea of an extensive reading programme outside the classroom to promote the enjoyment of reading and because learners require a vast amount of reading that would be impossible within the school timetable. She supports the idea of learners' selecting their own books from a library and maintains that an extensive reading programme 'builds confidence and personal satisfaction'. Reciprocally, the satisfaction and confidence should motivate the learners to read more.

Stoller's beliefs (1986:65) are bolstered by the positive results of one of the well-recognised extensive reading stories in the world - the *Book Flood* approach, which was initiated in Fiji in 1980, and described by Elley and Mangubhai (1981a; 1981b; Elley,1997). The term *Book Flood* was coined to describe the concept that, by exposing learners to as vast an amount of literature as possible, they will acquire and learn language more quickly and effectively than by using traditional methods. Subsequent to the initial *Book Flood* in Fiji by Mangubhai in 1980, the method has been tested in Singapore (1985-1989) and in South Africa where READ, a book-based literacy programme, in South Africa was started by Hugo (Elley, 1997:15-16).

Similar to learners in Fiji and Singapore, learners at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School study English as their second language within a culture that does not expose them to much English outside school. In addition, like those in Fiji, the teachers at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School are not native speakers of English and consequently model poor English to their learners. Books, in contrast, offer learners perfect English patterning (Elley & Mangubhai, 1981a:24). By providing the learners with plenty of reading matter, and instructing the teachers in the technique, the books replaced the normal English curriculum. It is important to note that the books chosen were 'carefully selected, high-interest, illustrated story books, and the pupils were encouraged to read them every day' (Elley & Mangubhai, 1981b:15).

When the results of this *Book Flood* were measured against those of a control group of schools (which continued to teach the traditional curriculum), it was found that learners who had followed the *Book Flood* approach performed twice as well as the control groups after a period of only eight months in tests which assessed reading, writing, listening comprehension, speaking and use of English grammar – all aspects that were identified as being problematic at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School. Other aspects (writing, word recognition and oral) also improved - more slowly, but steadily (Elley & Mangubhai, 1981b:15). Elley describes the follow-up testing which revealed a steady improvement of the learners who were subject to the *Book Flood* approach and also an increasing gap between them and the control groups. (Elley & Mangubhai, 1981b:20) In the Fiji Intermediate examination, (taken by all Fijian pupils), *Book Flood* groups had a pass rate in English of 75%, while the control

groups' pass rate was only 37%, which is the norm for the rural schools. In addition the BF groups progressed more in mathematics and general studies. Most importantly in the long term, the learners enjoyed reading and the approach offers high levels of intrinsic motivation (Nation, 1997:[2]).

The effect of the greater exposure to reading was irrefutable, with the added advantages that it entailed no extra time on English on the school timetable, and was popular with both the learners and the teachers. Nevertheless, Elley & Mangubhai (1981b:16) warn that the method is not without a disclaimer: the classes of teachers who did not follow the recommended method meticulously, or in whose classes the learners read only erratically, showed little improvement. Elley concludes with the proviso: 'Having the books in the classrooms was not enough. They had to be used regularly'. (Elley & Mangubhai, 1981b:16).

In conclusion, let us consider Eskey's words (1986:21) that the 'major implication ...for the teacher of second language reading is ...that the point of the reading class must be reading – not the reinforcement of oral skills, not grammatical or discourse analysis ...'. We are reminded that the goal of the extensive reading class is, 'the development of a genuine reading habit'. However, Nation (1997:13-16) reminds us that the demonstrated benefits of the *Book Flood* approach extend to the improvement of grammar, oral and writing skills that Eskey refutes as being part of a reading class. Obviously, Eskey is referring to formal teaching – during extensive reading, incidental learning bolsters and minimises formal instruction. When extensive reading evolves into reading outside the classroom, it is the product of a culture of reading, the creation of which is one of the purposes of this project.

In the following subsection, the discussion on extensive reading is extended to consider the advantages of reading aloud in an attempt to make books more accessible to readers who have no books at home.

3.2.4 Reading aloud and read-along as extensive reading

According to Elley (1997:[6]), ‘Benefits from silent reading favour the avid reader’. Consequently he recommends reading aloud as a complementary ‘practice that is not confined to eager readers’. Reading aloud is ‘a major source of vocabulary’, and maintains that other gains are the involvement of the reluctant reader, improved general knowledge and ‘other linguistic and literary benefits’. Elley authenticates his claim that listening to stories increases the vocabulary of SL learners by means of the incidental learning of words that are repeated in the story, even when there has been no pre-teaching of vocabulary (1997:[6-10]). He also postulates that listening to ‘high-interest meaningful text’ improves their syntax (1997:[15]). Trelease (1982:2) concurs and maintains that ‘reading aloud strengthens children’s reading, writing and speaking skills – and thus the entire civilizing process’. In these words Trelease moves one step further: from the specific academic advantages of reading and language (which are indispensable to all subjects within the school curriculum) to the abstract view of literacy as a hallmark of a civilised being.

Trelease (1982:1) argues that reading aloud to children serves many functions: ‘to reassure, to entertain, to inform or explain, to arouse curiosity, and to inspire’. His words make clear just how valuable a tool reading is. An analysis of the functions listed above indicates the emotional (‘to reassure, to entertain’), educational (‘inform or explain’) and inspirational (‘arouse curiosity, and to inspire’) facets of development that reading addresses. Inherent in these aspects is the development of a broad general knowledge that this project has earmarked as lacking at Wag-’n-bietjie Secondary School. In support of the computable value of reading aloud, Trelease (1982:11) cites the case of a study of children in Harlem who were read to for twenty minutes a day for a year and scored ‘significantly higher in vocabulary and reading comprehension’ than the control group.

The researcher perceives the pitfall that reading aloud may lead to an audience of passive, sleepy learners. However, she feels that reading aloud for pleasure should be attempted as a motivational tool that can be used to cultivate interest (cf. Trelease, 1982: 11); the comment that ‘Fun and successful reading go hand in hand’ and Elley’s

(1997:[15]) prescription of ‘high-interest meaningful text’). Few learners at Wag-’n-bietjie Secondary School were read to as children and so the researcher contends that reading aloud is the key to the door of the garden where the culture of reading grows.

The following section describes content-based instruction (CBI), which strives to make second language text more accessible by co-teaching the subject matter and the second language skills necessary for understanding. When one considers that fluency is acquired during extensive reading and accuracy during CBI, it is satisfying to consider how well the different methodologies in language teaching feed each other.

3.3 Content-based instruction

Snow (2001:304) points out that the theoretical foundation of content-based instruction (CBI) has been solidly laid and cites the works of many famous linguists whose work support the theories underlying CBI to support her claim (*cf.* also Brinton, Snow & Wesche, 1989:3). (Examples of well-respected linguists she mentions are: Krashen, who believed that language was acquired via ‘comprehensible input’; Swain, who sought extended opportunities in order to develop communicative language skills; and Vygotsky, who advocated a socio-cultural approach). Snow (2001:309) indicates that, in 1989, Brinton *et al.* anticipated and pioneered the latest form of CBI, which is a fusion of former CBI prototypes.

Brinton (2009:1) maintains that ‘content-based instruction’ (CBI) is part of a movement that is taking the educational world by storm. She explains that the trend (which encompasses CBI) aims at developing what she terms ‘use-oriented’ second and foreign language skills. CBI is defined as, ‘*concurrent learning* of a specific content and related language use skills in a *context driven* curriculum, *i.e.* with the selection and the sequence of language elements determined by the content...’. Compatible with this outline, Brinton *et al.* (1989:2) and Snow (2001:303) narrow content-based instruction to ‘... the integration of particular content with language teaching aims’: in other words, during content-based instruction, academic subject matter and the second language skills necessary to understand and internalise it, are taught together - with the aim of developing second language skills in such a way that

the learner is able effectively to use the language that has been taught in this way. In CBI, stress is placed on understanding that during language acquisition incidental learning of new knowledge takes place. This occurs when the learner is given a text with ‘rich target data’ and then focuses on the meaning of the text: learners thus learn two things together – content knowledge and improved language competence (Brinton, 2009:1).

Brinton (2009:2) and Brinton *et al.* (1989:3) lay bare the rationale underlying the methodology of CBI as follows:

- the random distinction between language and content is removed;
- the lesson is built on the knowledge that the learner already has of the subject matter;
- the fact that needs and interests of the learners are accommodated should lead to increased motivation to acquire the second language;
- the eventual use the learner has for the second or foreign language is catered for – this means that the forms and functions of the language that the learner really needs are targeted;
- CBI is based on ‘contextualised *use* rather than on fragmented examples of correct sentence-level *usage* (*cf.* Bransford *et al.*, 1984:28-29 for context as background knowledge);
- authentic materials and tasks give CBI credibility and ground it;
- optimal conditions for second language acquisition are provided by exposing the learners to ‘meaningful, cognitively demanding language’;
- learners’ skills are accommodated on different pedagogical levels.

The CBI philosophy rests on the beliefs that ‘languages are learned within a larger framework of communication’ where learners receive rich comprehensible input and learn within a significant context where the content of the work is ongoing (Brinton, 2009:2).

Brinton *et al.* (1989:3) explain how comprehension is improved by means of CBI and add that during CBI the input must be understandable (*cf.* Krashen, 1983:32-37) but must also contain new aspects of language to be acquired:

... comprehension is accomplished with the help of clues from the situational and verbal contexts. These interact with the learner's imperfect knowledge of the language, and with his or her world knowledge and expectations. The associations of form and meaning which are required for successful comprehension feed into the a developing stock of formal, functional, and semantic relationships as the learner acquires new elements of the language.

This extremely dense and insightful citation addresses in a few sentences many of the issues mentioned in this dissertation: the importance of the activation of background knowledge, deductive reasoning and the value of predicting as a pre-reading activity. Moreover it refers to how vocabulary, comprehension, grammatical structures and general knowledge may be acquired and developed - all of these have been identified as being problems to be addressed at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School.

The above paragraph reveals CBI as the ideal methodology for this project: CBI tackles the exact reading problems identified by the teachers and in the testing of the learners (*cf.* chapter 5). What is more, CBI would bring teachers up to date with the latest pedagogical methodology (teacher empowerment and upgrading), and CBI would also stimulate them to become aware that teaching is a dynamic career. In truth the training and empowerment of the teachers are some of the aims of the task at the school. Teachers must become sentient to the notion that they cannot rely on strategies they learned at university 30 years ago - they should be ready to extend their skills and continue to do so. It follows that developing the teachers profits the learners. Flowing from this would be increased job satisfaction and better morale for the staff - and academic victory for the learners. And this can be achieved via content-based instruction.

Moving from the discussion on CBI, the researcher describes how and why *Reeducate* was chosen to address the problems of illiteracy at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School.

3.4 *Readucate*

It became clear from the initial testing of learners and from the interviews with the teachers that the problem of improving reading at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School was far thornier than had been anticipated: it seems that a high percentage of learners cannot read (or can hardly read) at all. Prof. Greyling's report on the test results may be read in appendix II (3.3). In brief, at least 50% of grade 8 learners, 40% of the grade 9s and 19.5% of grade 10s were identified as being 'at risk' on a grade 8 reading test. Plainly, the strategies planned to improve reading would have to include relief for the learners compromised in this way. To complicate matters, high school teachers have neither the knowledge nor the training to teach basic reading. For these reasons, it was decided to train several teachers using a course designed to teach children and adults to read. Initially nine teachers were trained, followed by the training of ten six months later. The teachers were trained by a *Readucate* instructor, with the first ten candidates' training being paid by an anonymous sponsor.

The wisdom of choosing *Readucate* was founded on the success rate of the programme of *The Readucate Trust*. In this, its current form, *Readucate* has been doing good work since 1991. (It had existed in other guises since the early 1960s). *Readucate* is 'An educational and literacy non-profit Section 18a AA BEE rated non-governmental organisation' (Freinkel, 2009) that addresses adult and child literacy and also operates in prisons where the illiteracy rate is high. *Readucate*'s objective is to create 'self-sustainable development programmes in language, reading, communication and life skills' (Freinkel, 2009). Because their approach is 'multidimensional', involving a 'multi-method, multi-skill, multi-inter-sensory, multi-generational, multi-emotional' methodology which addresses reading, writing, spelling, dictation, comprehension, language, pronunciation, vocabulary practice, memory training, cognitive skills and confidence building, *Readucate* appears most apposite for a school such as this. According to Mrs Edna Freinkel, the *Readucate* methods suit, *i.a.* school children requiring remediation, SL learners of English and adults with reading and spelling problems. The value of the course is underlined by some of the results which Mrs, Freinkel cites as:

- better reading and communication;

- improved academic performance;
- easier class discipline and motivation;
- the fostering of a lifelong love of reading;
- the building of confidence in teachers and learners;
- the frequent promotion of *Readucate* instructors;
- the reduction of school dropouts; and
- the prevention of crime.

All of these results described by *Readucate* are in line with the aims of this reading research project. In addition, *Readucate*'s aim 'to make every lesson a reading lesson' is in line with the methodology of content-based instruction described above.

The success of *Readucate* (Freinkel, 2009) is attested by numerous accolades and awards (*cf.* appendix III):

- 2004: President Thabo Mbeki presented Edna Freinkel with a national award: Counsellor of the Order of the Baobab;
- Associate member International Academy for Research in Learning Disabilities (USA);
- 2003: *NICRO Prisoner Regeneration Award* for contributing to a safer South Africa;
- 2002: Finalist in Mail and Guardian 'Investing in the Future';
- 2002: *Paul Harris Award* presented to Edna Freinkel by Edenvale Rotary Club; and
- 1998: Northern Cape Arts and Culture Medal in category 'Literature and Libraries'.

If our teachers and pupils could be as diligent as those at schools like Forfosa Higher Primary School where there was a '10% improvement in competency in one term' (*cf.* appendix III), there should be no reason why Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School should not emulate their success.

3.4.1 Journaling

For the sake of completeness, it is appropriate that the researcher describe the introduction of learner journaling as a corollary to the incorporation of the *Readucate* programme into the school day during cycle 2. This change of timeslot meant in practice that the non-*Readucate* learners would have nothing to do during this time. It was considered appropriate to introduce them to the writing of learner journals. From a practical point of view, given the profile of the teachers (*cf.* chapter 5), journaling would not add any extra burden to the teachers and has the following language benefits (Davis, 1999:[1]):

- Fluency practice. It helps to get the words flowing. Teachers cannot improve their writing until the learners produce words and sentences. The more the better: journaling is about quantity.
- Journaling is non-threatening. Because it is informal writing, learners are less afraid of making mistakes. Because they are more relaxed and have fewer fixed ideas about what a journal should be, they often write better in their journals than in formal essays.
- Self-expression. Learners write about what interests them instead of topics chosen by the teacher. This is liberating and motivating.
- Practising English. Learners can practise what they have learned (vocabulary and language).

The idea is that the journal is personal and gives the learner complete freedom of expression. The teacher is not expected to mark or correct it and should not read it unless invited to do so.

Obviously, this intervention is not an important aspect of the aim to improve reading at the school. Nevertheless writing a journal has value because reading and writing cannot be compartmentalised. Although it is an incidental, intervention, it should be mentioned in order to paint a complete picture of the project being undertaken.

The previous sections described formal ways in which to improve reading. The following section on the creation of a culture of learning is less formal and less tangible. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the formal methodologies will make text

easier for the learners to access which will also help to cultivate and grow a culture of reading.

3.5 Creating a culture of reading in the school

The desire for a visible culture of reading aspires to developing an ethos within the school which treasures reading and consequently where reading is a way of life and books are cherished and always at hand. Culture is the by-product of consistent behaviour over a period of time. It takes effort and consistency and a belief in what is being touted. Culture is created the way a garden is created - by establishing the correct environment for growth, and by feeding the good plants and weeding out the bad. It can only be nurtured by people who care. Setting the right standards and leading by example will provide the platform for encouraging a stable and ongoing culture.

Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School is without a reading culture. Responses to questionnaires completed by grade 8 learners revealed that scarcely any home had more than a few books (*cf.* appendix IV:1). Even more alarming was the realisation from the interpretation of the data that few learners could distinguish between books and magazines. Hardly any learners, if any, had been read to by their parents – indeed, many parents were themselves illiterate. The school library was malfunctioning and, apparently, being reformatted. When interviewed, one of the incumbent teachers complained that the library could not function properly because theft was rife.

The development of a culture of reading in the school will buttress the goals of upgrading reading and play a supportive role in all interventions described in this section by developing a body of learners who are enthusiastic, critical and skilled readers. The creation of a culture of reading is described in chapter 5.

This chapter examined the interventions that were selected to improve reading at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School. In order for these to be applied in the most

effective way, AR was chosen as the most pertinent research methodology. Accordingly, the next chapter will examine AR as a research methodology in order to validate why it was selected from the array of other qualitative methodologies as the one most suited to deal with the requirements of a project such as this – despite the fact that it is often regarded as being on the periphery of the range of other more conventional mainstream research tools.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY: ACTION RESEARCH

*It is common sense to take a method and try it. If it fails, admit it frankly
and try another. But above all, try something.*

- F.D. Roosevelt

4.1 Choice of methodology based on the aims and objectives of the project

As described in chapter 1, the aims of this project are to devise a programme of reading interventions that will lead to ongoing, sustainable reading development, with the spotlight falling on improving the methodologies, skills and techniques of the teachers while, at the same time, involving the staff as participants and co-researchers.

AR is the chosen qualitative methodology for this study as it allows for participant researchers and facilitates staff development (Burns, 1999; Kerfoot & Winberg, 1997; Henning, 2005). In particular, AR ‘focuses on finding a solution to a local problem in a local setting’ (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005: 108; Edge, 2001:3), an application which fulfils both conditions (a particular problem within a singular setting) for this project at Wag-’n-bietjie Secondary School. Action research, ‘seeks to remove the gap between the deciders and the doers’ (Dick: 2002) - in this case, the researcher being the decider and the teachers, the ‘doers’. Certainly, trimming the disparity between researcher and teacher is at the heart of the success of this particular project: without the enthusiasm and ‘buy-in’ of the staff, not only the knowledge but the practical application of developing reading at the school will be lost. The differences and discrepancies between the researcher and the teachers have to be solved by the development of mutual trust and a communal sense of purpose.

The AR cycles of planning, implementing, observing and reflecting (described in more detail below) provide the researchers with momentum to implement the required changes and to reflect critically on the process (Wallace, 1998:12). Through these cycles, the researcher and teacher hope to ‘become aware of what is really happening’ (Grabe & Stoller, 2002: 157) in the classrooms at the school and pertinent problem-

solving can be attempted as the project progresses. AR provides a tool for systematic inquiry and simultaneous problem-solving based on structured reflection (Kerfoot & Winberg, 1997:26). By its nature, AR spurs educational change and staff development in that it is decision-driven (and it is hoped that the teachers will participate in the decision-making) rather than hypothesis-driven and consequently facilitates quality problem-solving and decision-making (Krathwohl, 1998:601; Kember & Gow, 1992:301). In AR, the participants (teachers and the researcher, with the support of Dr van Wyk who attended meetings and addressed and guided the teachers) in a focused effort to implement change reflect on their experiences in order to improve practice for themselves or the organization.

4.2 Delineating AR

As the name implies, AR involves two elements: these are highlighted by Dick (1999:[1]), who maintains that it has ‘dual aims of action (that is, change) and research (that is, understanding)’. He explains that, ‘Action and understanding inform each other’ (1999:[3]): in other words, the purpose of AR is, ‘to research action, and to action (that is, to act on) research’. An important aspect of AR making it relevant to the project at hand is that it is participative. This tells us that the teachers should be led to ask themselves: ‘What am I doing? What do I need to improve? How do I improve it? (McNiff & Whitehead 2006:7) and in so doing they themselves learn while they are teaching. This aspect is discussed in the practical implementation of the AR cycles in chapter 5.

AR is cyclical in nature which makes it a flexible methodology. Consequently it is valuable in situations that deal with the subtleties and intricacies of human nature and people’s sensibilities. In other words, AR allows for a change of tack following the success or otherwise of an action. It requires introspection on the part of the researcher and that she should develop an intimate rapport with the teachers as her colleagues – and they should learn to become introspective and self-critical too. It seems that the relationship between researcher and teacher; and also the relationships among colleagues might benefit by the symbiotic nature of AR – which, it is hoped, will leech into the school and enrich and benefit the establishment as a whole.

According to McNiff and Whitehead (2006:8), AR should be a ‘disciplined, systematic process’, the steps being as described below and also as represented in the diagram following the brief outline:

- establish what is happening in a real world situation;
- identify an issue/concern;
- plan how to address it;
- enact your solution;
- monitor the action by gathering data;
- evaluate the success by reflecting and evaluating what has changed;
- test the validity of any learning taking place;
- adjust the practice, based on results;
- repeat the process.

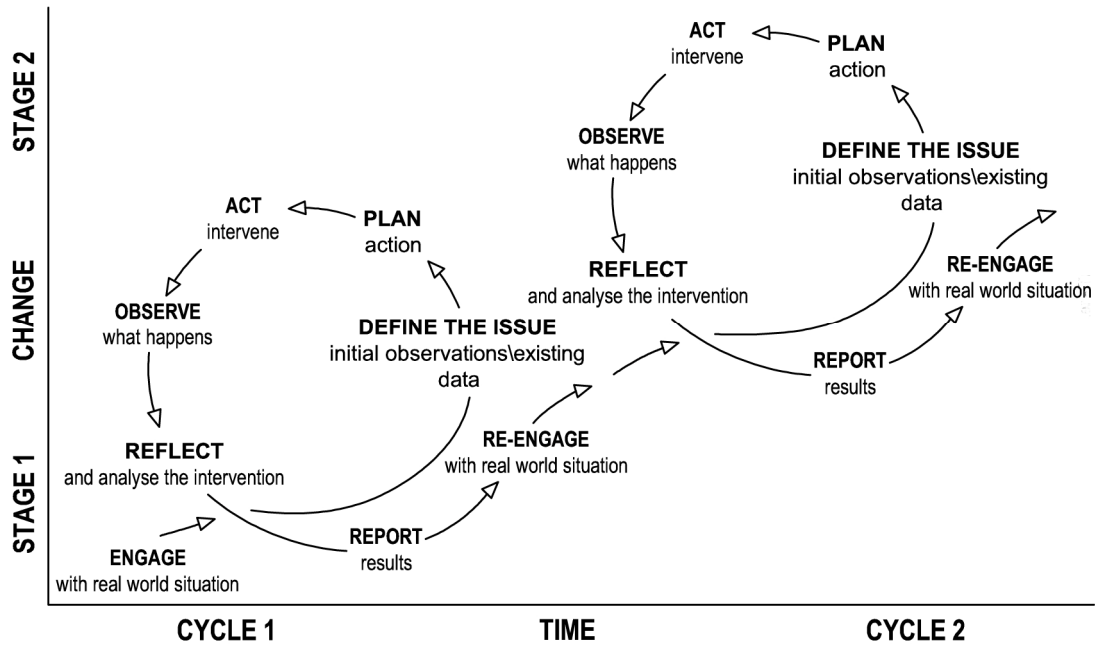
Edge (2001:3) describes the same process and his description has been quoted in order to support that of McNiff and Whitehead and also to consider AR through the lenses of a different pair of spectacles. Edge sees it as, ‘a succession of stages, beginning with

- *action* in the sense that one is in the middle of action;
- *observation* of what is happening, leading to a more specific focus of interest;
- *reflection* on the focus which has been identified;
- *planning* that forms the basis for future;
- *action* to improve the situation; and
- *observation* in order to evaluate the changes made’

The cyclic movement described is associated with gradual and persistent improvement. The graphic representation of AR depicted below is intended to illustrate the cyclic nature of AR and how the process proceeds chronologically. The

time axis is measured against the axis of change implying the improvement referred to above.

Figure 4.2 Schematic representation of AR.



(Adapted from: RMIT University educational media website)

4.2.1 Underpinning assumptions

McNiff and Whitehead (2006:23) set out the underpinning assumptions of AR in four sections and these will be discussed in the order listed below:

4.2.1.1 Ontological assumptions (our view of ourselves in our relationships with others).

4.2.1.2 Epistemological assumptions (how we understand knowledge and how we acquire it).

4.2.1.3 Methodological assumptions (the way in which the research is carried out).

4.2.1.4 Social purposes of AR (the reasons for doing the research within its social contexts).

4.2.1.1 Ontological assumptions

McNiff and Whitehead (2006:23) explain that ontology means ‘the study of being’ and maintain that AR is not only suffused with values and is ‘morally committed’, but

that the research should take place within a social context. Similarly, Burns (1999:24; also Edge, 2001:3) specifies that the main focus of AR is ‘on concrete and practical issues of immediate concern to particular social groups or communities’. McNiff and Whitehead (2006:25) offer the insight that the social context does not refer merely to the obvious physical community of people, but indeed the ‘mental world’ where we evaluate our ideas in relation to those of others. Supporting the above arguments and expanding them further, Edge (2001:4) counsels that, ‘improvements to the quality of action available cannot be seen only in utilitarian, procedural terms but must make reference to the broader fields of conceptual argument and social justice’. Here Edge contrasts mundane practice and practical methodology (‘utilitarian, procedural’) with philosophy, morality and ideology (‘conceptual argument and social justice’) and thus moves from the concrete and banal to the abstract and elevated.

Accordingly, it may be said that the researcher is a participant rather than a spectator and conveys her philosophy of life, her moral perceptions and the wealth of her ethical consciousness and conscience to the project. Should the researcher toy with or treat her research as an experiment on other people, her ethical conduct would be questionable – indeed, such distance would preclude her role as being that of a participant. If one accepts McNiff and Whitehead’s comments (2006:23) that AR is suffused with values and is ‘morally committed’, the researcher is compelled to identify what she perceives these values to be. Indeed, this is spelled out by McNiff and Whitehead (2006:23) who encourage the researcher to ‘begin by articulating your values and asking whether you are being true to them’. And so, the researcher would like to stipulate the following as broad moral guidelines and express the belief that a teacher should:

- be fair and impartial;
- consider other people’s interests;
- not interfere with another’s freedom;
- respect his/her fellow man; and
- work hard and honestly.

Flowing from these are the qualities of honesty, courage, politeness, punctuality, kindness, perseverance, integrity, loyalty, thoughtfulness, lawfulness, tolerance, respect for others' privacy, self-respect. At school level one could encourage learners to work hard, take turns, be trustworthy, obey the school rules and not to create a mess, be selfish, be dishonest, be noisy, be lazy or damage property.

However, an action researcher is never alone: abiding by these values and all decisions tacitly involves other people - harking back to the collaboration between researcher and teachers. Unlike a positivist approach which strives for a detachment, AR is 'done by people who are trying to live in the values and commitments that inspire their lives' (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006:23). The commitment to research based on personal values within a social setting implies respect for the differences and similarities between individuals and the communities from which they emanate. In other words, action researchers operate under a moral spotlight and are accountable for their choices – and their view is usually subjective. Yet, as cited previously, Burns (1999:24) specifies that the main focus of AR is 'on concrete and practical issues of immediate concern to particular social groups or communities' and the issue at stake for this project is the improvement of reading within the Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School community. The implication is that the 'concrete and practical issues' that mark the development of reading have to be suffused with moral and ethical values.

These stipulations translate into the impenetrability of the social and moral setting of Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School where the teachers belong to differing cultural and racial groups with differing socio-economic backgrounds begetting different ontological assumptions and very differing 'mental world[s]' (quoted in the above paragraph). The teaching staff consists of three different racial groups, many of whom are of an age that recalls the time of forced segregation in which they grew up. Inevitably traditional racial and cultural stereotyping and suspicions linger. (Mismatched cultural assumptions occurred often during this project: particularly in terms of differing perceptions of time, urgency and what was considered polite.) While there are about five white staff members, there are no native speakers of

English in a school with an English stream (and language teaching always implies the teaching of the culture and world view of its native speakers). As an adjunct to this diversity, the researcher and her supervisor were perceived as interlopers from the academic realm. Words written on a 'thank-you' note to the researcher upheld this sensitivity by proclaiming (fortunately with a positive spin), '...you never made us feel inferior in any way ...'. Bearing in mind the observation that an action researcher is never alone, how does one interact with people when no basic assumptions can be made about each individual's philosophy of life?

The learners too come from differing backgrounds: socio-culturally they are black and coloured but with varying educational and economic backgrounds within this cultural divide. The school was traditionally a coloured school and the researcher observed - from comments made by several different people on different occasions - covert resentment of the 'intrusion' of the black learners who pass several 'black' high schools en route to Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School and thus, it was perceived they 'oust' many of the local children from a school where they belong.

Indeed, Edge (2001:1) endorses this perception of AR taking place in diversity and expands our definition of AR by articulating that, '...action researchers live and act between and across some very well-established social, philosophical, and educational demarcation lines'. Clearly, many barriers needed to be breached.

Of course we do not live in a perfect world. In the extant situation, the moral and cultural diversity will have to be regarded as a challenge and opportunity rather than a threat. Worthy of note is the levelling emphasis placed by Cummins, Brown and Sayers (2007:232) on choice which is seen as one of the forces of change:

In short, individual teachers are never powerless, although they frequently work in conditions that are oppressive both for them and their students...They determine for themselves the social and educational goals they want to achieve for their students. They are responsible for the role definitions they adopt in relation to culturally diverse students and communities.

McNiff and Whitehead (2006:23) echo these sentiments with vigour: ‘Cruelty is as much a value as kindness. It is up to you to decide which values you want to live by and be accountable for’. These are indeed powerful words. They should be spoken to all teachers as a reminder of the active role they need to assume and the moral responsibility their vocation exacts of them.

The subsection above referred to controversial, abstract and personal aspects of teaching. In contrast, the next subsection sails on calmer waters: epistemology.

4.2.1.2 Epistemological assumptions

Epistemology refers to the theory of knowledge and, in particular, the acquisition of knowledge, its validity and scope. We should remind ourselves that epistemology cannot be separated from ontology, as knowledge cannot be isolated from values (nor can it be separated from methodology or social values). Henning points out that ‘Knowledge is constructed in the act of critique in a dialectical process of deconstructing and reconstructing the world’ (2005:23), thus linking knowledge to our moral, critical sense.

McNiff & Whitehead (2006:26), emphasise that, during AR, the researcher studies herself in the sense that there should be continuing self-questioning such as, “‘What am I doing? How do I improve it?’ rather than, ‘What are they doing? How do they improve it?’”. They remind researchers that they should hold themselves accountable for their actions. In performing this self examination, the researcher should avoid imposing her ideas on others and also be prepared to accept that she can make mistakes. (This is complicated by the diversity at Wag-’n-bietjie Secondary School, described in the section ontological assumptions). It becomes clear that to the action researcher, ‘knowledge is uncertain’ McNiff & Whitehead (2006:27). These authors explain this statement as follows:

- There is no one answer. Knowledge is uncertain and ambiguous. A question may generate multiple answers.

- Knowledge is created, not discovered. This is usually a process of trial and error. Provisional answers and the process itself are always open to critique.
- Any answer is tentative, and open to modification. Answers are often incommensurable and cannot be resolved. People just have to live with the dissonance and do the best they can.

In the light of the provisional, unfixed nature of knowledge described here, it is a challenge to get both researchers and staff to accept that neither their knowledge nor their teaching methodologies are cast in stone - AR must teach them to question and adapt. While it may seem desirable on first sight to view the fields of knowledge and methodology as supple and dynamic, freedom implies responsibility. Challenging ideas which have become fixed, in order to change or modify them, is another hurdle to be vaulted. That this is as true for the teachers' set ideas as for the researcher's, underscores the value of collaboration: teachers and the researcher should be able to question each others' ideas in pursuit of the best method. This truth must dominate the reflective section of the AR cycle.

It seems that Mc Niff and Whitehead's words could have been written expressly for this project when the torturous nature of knowledge is applied to AR at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School against the complicated background of the ontological values described above.

Both of the previous subsections, the ontological and epistemological assumptions, are incomplete without a consideration of methodological assumptions, reviewed below.

4.2.1.3 Methodological assumptions

Henning (2005:36) hitches the methodological assumptions (the way in which the research is carried out) to our ontological (our view of ourselves in our relationships with others) and epistemological assumptions (how we understand knowledge and how we come to acquire it) by declaring that the '...decision-making actions ... are dependent on the knowledge and the philosophy of the researcher, because a

methodology is the epistemological home of an inquiry'. Yet McNiff and Whitehead (2006:25) remind us that: 'The core idea of transformative capacity enables us to incorporate the insights of others and transform them as we create our theories of practice'. This points to the creative collaboration of teachers and researcher in constructing new methodologies pertinent to their social and special circumstances. The creation of new knowledge is one of the aims of this AR project. Indeed, Edge (2001:4) emphasises the importance of the link of AR with rational argument. In other words, AR must avoid becoming wishy-washy and be grounded in sound educational theory. The novelty is that the route is no longer 'outside-in' (knowledge being imposed from outside) but 'inside-out' (knowledge being generated from within). He stresses that, 'Local understandings are primary, and it is in the articulation of these understandings that actual educational practice can be theorised (the contribution theory) and improved (the contribution to practice)'. Edge stipulates that AR should strive for an uninterrupted connection between 'improved practice and authentic theory' and identifies a good teacher as one who theorises practice rather than practises theory (2001:6). The gap between theory and practice narrows.

So, while the researcher's methodology will be rooted in his/her system of values and knowledge, the main purpose of AR is for the researcher to see him/herself as an 'agent' and to ask questions. (In this context, the researcher as agent is someone who acquires the knowledge and has the interest to adopt and implement a new project, driving it forward despite internal resistance to change). The initial question is followed up by a 'developmental process' (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006:32) involving cycles of planning, implementing, observing and reflecting in order to improve a situation. Henning points out that the methodology employed involves the crucial concepts of, 'participation, involvement, collaboration and engagement'. (2005:24), and, in criticising the framework for a study described in her book, reminds us that one should not '...employ action research to solve problems rather than to reflect on problems' (2005:25). This astute observation comforts us with the realistic understanding that problems will never fully disappear and so the team of ARer and teachers never complete their cycles of enhancement of themselves and of their methodologies.

All of the above sections have dealt with abstract academic aspects of AR. The following subsection seats AR where it belongs: in society – particularly apposite in the case of AR in an educational situation.

4.2.1.4 Social purposes of AR

The power of AR is at its best when ‘driven by a sense of social action...and with the aim of the emancipation of the participants’ (Henning, 2005:47). It can be successfully performed within schools, within the family and community at large. The researcher strives to improve the way in which communities operate by getting their members to contemplate what they are doing and are held responsible for their actions. Because AR has always been ‘regarded as people taking action to improve their personal and social situations’ (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006:12), it would seem too that the fluidity that characterises modern societies and communities would be well accommodated by the supple approach offered by AR. Referring to AR in the broadest possible context, these authors go so far as to suggest that: ‘Some see its potential for promoting a more productive and peaceful world order’. (2006:12). In terms of social justice, Edge (2001:4) sees the empowerment of individual teachers as a part of the whole. He envisages the whole as, ‘a vision of a more just society of fully empowered citizens living fulfilled lives according to their own freely embraced values’. Yet he is rational in his realisation that this utopia remains a mirage and that the most fundamental concepts of empowerment are beyond the reach of many.

The diversity amongst the teachers and learners discussed in 4.2.1.1 (ontological assumptions) are not confined to that subsection alone and spill over into the social purposes of AR. AR has upliftment as one of its goals yet this school is hampered by a lack of parental involvement. Cummins *et al* (2007:242) mention that this lack of involvement on the part of parents is universally acknowledged as a problem. They suggest that it could be that parents of children at a poor or in a culturally diverse school feel intimidated by a system that they do not understand; or that the battle waged by parents working long hours for minimum wages results in the inability to attend.

4.2.2 Desired outcomes of AR

The goals of AR have been discussed in the preceding paragraphs, and will be briefly mentioned here for the sake of cohesion.

Edge (2001:5) reminds us that the outcomes we strive for can be identified in many ways, ‘- not just a certain number of ways, but in the multiple, overlapping ways in which thought and action do interact’. He separates them into the following orientations. (Note: the headings below in italics are Edge’s, and the examples or explanation the researcher’s, guided by Edge’s observations):

- *Means oriented*: What methods do we use to try to improve reading at Wag’n-bietjie Secondary School?
- *Ends oriented*: Why do we want to improve the reading?
- *Theory oriented*: During the project, how do we explain what is happening and link it to existing theory in order to contribute to the present theory?
- *Institution oriented*: How much does the reading programme (by means of its goals, practice and subject matter) contribute to an educational programme that is meaningful to the learners within their social setting?
- *Society oriented*: How is the reading programme (seen holistically) promoting values I hold dear?
- *Teacher oriented*: How do the researcher and teacher develop, both professionally and personally by means of this programme?

4.3 Traditional research versus AR

For the sake of completeness, what follows is a brief comparison between the traditional (quantitative research) and its alternative, qualitative research (AR). This is done in order to place AR within the research tradition and also to put the finishing touches to the explanation of why AR was chosen for this project.

AR is a division of qualitative research, a term which encompasses several approaches to research, some of which differ considerably from others. However, all forms of qualitative research have two common elements (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:133): they deal with authentic phenomena that occur in the ‘real world’; they are ‘lived experiences’ (which mean that each person’s experiences should be

considered against a changing background) and they study the phenomena in their complexity. Qualitative researchers do not try to simplify what they observe but prefer to recognise that the subject of their study has many facets and many layers – and this is what they strive to portray (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005: 133). The advantage of qualitative research is that the researcher discovers matters that are not always obvious.

Leedy and Ormrod (2005:96) draw the attention to the differences between quantitative and qualitative approaches as follows:

- The reasons for quantitative research are to test theory, verify and authenticate while those of qualitative research are to explore, interpret and create theory.
- The process of quantitative research has fixed guidelines, known variables and is relatively context-free and objective as opposed to qualitative research which is holistic, with unknown variables and where the researcher has to develop his/ her own methods, is context bound and subjective.
- In quantitative research, data are gathered as numbers, measurements and figures; the sample is large and representative and is measured by standardised instruments. Qualitative research, in contrast, relies on textual and or image-based data with a small informative sample that is measured by loosely structured or non- standardised observations and interviews.
- The analysis of data in quantitative research is based on objective, statistical analysis and deductive reasoning while qualitative research establishes the meaning by searching for themes and categories while acknowledging that the analysis is subjective and potentially biased. Qualitative research uses inductive reasoning.
- Quantitative research results are communicated in numbers, statistics, and averages in a formal voice and a scientific style - as opposed to words, stories, individual perceptions giving a personal voice in a literary style in qualitative research.

While it is clear from the above that, ‘you use different forms of research to achieve different goals’ (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006:23), the differences between qualitative and quantitative research also emerge: unlike quantitative research, which counts, weighs and measures, qualitative research documents and analyses data by means of observation, documentary studies and interviews, seeking a pattern and a reason for the phenomena, and the data are examined in order to reach a conclusion that will satisfy the original research problem. It is thus clear that the main difference between qualitative and quantitative research is the analytical process and that, in qualitative research, the analytical instrument is the researcher (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:96).

4.4 Collecting data

It seems from the discussion thus far that AR offers an approach that is theoretically compatible with the study of complexity in education (Phelps, 2005:38). Through the ways in which data are collected and analysed, the researcher has to ensure that the findings made during the research are trustworthy. Reliability in AR means that the researcher feels confident that his/ her findings and claims are valid. Validity can be achieved by using multiple data collection methodologies to corroborate the findings; involving other teachers/colleagues in the data collection and analysis; conducting the research over a long period of time; and corroborating the findings with similar studies in published research literature.

Leedy and Ormrod (2005:143) elate their readers with the news that, ‘In qualitative [action] research, the potential sources of data are limited only by the researcher’s open-mindedness’ (The brackets in the text were inserted by the researcher). This gives the researcher a free rein and great flexibility - but the bad news is that the ‘...data collection ... takes a great deal of time’. Action researchers employ several ways of keeping data and this requires meticulous record keeping and organisation. It is noteworthy that action researchers seek what the aforementioned authors call ‘an *emerging design*’ (2005:143) and so initial data often influence the choice of how data are collected later in the project. The pattern that the researcher perceives to be emerging from the data fashions the value of the project because it is here that new knowledge is generated.

4.4.2 Methods used to collect data

The following methods were used in order to gather the data required for the project at hand: questionnaires, interviews, journal, minutes of meetings, testing and observation.

Questionnaires

Collecting data by means of questionnaires has both advantages and disadvantages. On the plus side, questionnaires can be handed out to many people at once and collected later. They have the additional advantage that they can be completed with anonymity, which hints at greater candour than might be the case in a personal interview, particularly if the question is of a personal or sensitive nature (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:185).

The perceived down-side of questionnaires is that, by being too structured, important aspects of a subject that might have come to light in an interview or more open-ended discussion could be left out. Besides, the return rate of questionnaires is notoriously low and this skews the result. Leedy and Ormrod (2005:185) remind us that the responses to a questionnaire 'will reflect their reading and writing skills and, perhaps, their misinterpretation of one or more questions'. The reading and writing skills might put a positive or negative spin on the information being supplied: a good writer could hide his/ her opinion under a heap of words, while a poor writer may be unable to express his/ her information fully. This is an aspect that deserves consideration in this project because none of the teachers' home languages is English.

Questionnaires were used fairly widely in this research study with varying perceptions of their accuracy and success in terms of the data being provided in this way. This method also served the exploratory nature of the research.

Interviews

Interviews yield much valuable information and have the advantage that, because they are conducted one on one, greater intimacy and trust can develop between the interviewer and the interviewee. It follows that an interview should be well-suited to qualitative research as it is a subjective instrument, befitting the discussion of people's beliefs, perspectives, feelings, motives and the reasons for behaving in a

certain way. This leads to the perception that semi-structured, open-ended interviews with few questions are best for our purpose (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:146). Leedy and Ormrod (2005:147) recount that a telling difference between a qualitative research interview and normal conversation is the fact that, in an interview, the researcher wants to gather certain information without revealing his/ her own viewpoint. This makes the ‘conversation’ (which often deals with intimate thoughts and feelings) lopsided. As a result, the interviewer has to be tactful, sympathetic and warm, while keeping his/ her feelings private. Because an interview is inevitably subjective, the interviewer should regard the data as perceptions, rather than fact.

Interviews were conducted with both teachers and learners on several occasions during the course of this project. In addition to the intended interviews, questionnaires often had to be followed up by interviews on occasions when the researcher discerned that questionnaires had been misinterpreted or answered in a slipshod manner. This assisted in the validation of the data thus accumulated.

Journaling

Maintaining a journal is a powerful method for AR because the writing process enables the researcher to keep a record of how, why and when interventions have been revised or transformed. In other words, one of the targets of keeping a journal is to develop a valuable data capturing device.

However, journaling has another more profound value in AR: As flagged above, epistemology is the theory of knowledge and is concerned, in particular, with the origin of knowledge, its validity and scope. Journaling presents the act of reflection as an important thinking tool in teaching effectiveness and professional development: when the writer reflects on what is happening in his/ her research project by rereading the personal thoughts, daily experiences, observations and evolving insights, the act of reflection becomes an important thinking instrument with which to examine teaching effectiveness and professional development. The patterns that surface take the researcher one level up from mere observation, yielding ‘thick’ interpreted knowledge rather than data that is ‘thin’ and undeveloped. (‘Thick’ and ‘thin’ data are described below under validation). In so doing, journaling contributes to the validity of the research. And so, if one agrees with Phelps (2005:38), who contends that ‘knowledge

is created by the transformation of experience through observation and reflection', it becomes patent that journaling is a fine vehicle for the development of such knowledge. Phelps also sings the praises of the value of journaling in situations of 'complexity' (2005:39). She explains that reflection is a 'non-linear approach' to learning and asserts that, 'journals embrace non-linearity, enabling intermingled documentation of ideas and experiences from the past, the present and the imagined future'. For the researcher to have kept a journal during the AR project thus manifests itself as a method that fosters emergent knowledge and is most pertinent in the project at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School.

Minutes of meetings

In the same way that journaling enables the researcher to keep a database of the progress of the project, and also provide a written record, which on rereading helps to steer the researcher's acuity into what knowledge is being gained, the minutes of meetings perform the same function, but on a different level. During this project, minutes are mainly of meetings held with the school management team (SMT) and, much more seldom, with the staff as a whole. In the current project the minutes enable the researcher to detect patterns of behaviour impeding or facilitating the project. Progress, particularly manifest in changes in behaviour became clear when reflecting on past minutes.

Testing

While testing as a data-gathering technique is generally considered to live within the fences of quantitative research, in this research project testing has been used to establish the level of the learners' reading. Test results confirmed which readers needed special attention and what the reading level of the class was. The same learners were retested to assess their progress when the project had run its course. Of the test selection, Prof Greyling was consulted and validated the level of testing as follows (*cf.* appendix II:3.3):

A literacy test, designed on the basis of test specifications which are consistent with the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), and current testing practices were used to assess learners' proficiency in English. The test was pitched at Grade 8 level, and for the Grade 8 cohort, we obtained reliability indices (*i.e.* alpha coefficients) ranging from 0.83 to 0.88. The test

is at the beginning stages of the development process; so, we intend to work towards improving its reliability and validity. We are nonetheless confident that the current test provides relatively reliable information about the target group of Grade 8, 9 and 10 learners.

Observation

In order to evaluate progress and seek new solutions, the action researcher deliberately makes ongoing observations as a participant in the project. Leedy and Ormrod (2005:145) describe the observations in qualitative research (AR) as being deliberately unstructured and ‘free-flowing’, with the researcher’s focus swinging from one matter to another, as new questions arise. These authors cite flexibility as the main advantage of observation – and the disadvantages as myriad. The researcher must know what to look for and why; she has to record the observations (where? when? how?); and much time is often squandered. Moreover, the very presence of the researcher will alter what is being unfolded. Leedy and Ormrod (2005:146) sound a shrill warning: *‘It is essential that you do not confuse your actual observations with your interpretations of them, for two reasons’* (Leedy and Ormrod’s italics). They elucidate that the researcher has to be as objective as possible in record keeping; and they point out that interpretations are likely to change during the course of the study. This seems to indicate that the researcher’s objectivity will feed the reinterpretation of what has been observed.

4.4.2 Validation

Through the ways in which data are collected and analysed, the researcher has to ensure that the findings made during the research are trustworthy. Reliability in AR means that the researcher feels confident that her findings and claims are valid. Validity can be achieved by using multiple data collection methodologies to corroborate the findings; involving other teachers/colleagues in the data collection and analysis; conducting the research over a long period of time; and corroborating the findings with similar studies in published research literature (Yamagata-Lynch :[3]).

Dick (1999:[1]) observes that in AR, rigour develops from the cycles and action that define it. He specifies that, ‘Data collection and interpretation tend to co-occur; later

cycles can therefore test both data and interpretations from earlier cycles. Most cycles contain action, each action a test of the assumptions which underlie it'. In this we see new merit in AR that has been implicit but not fully articulated: AR validates itself, to a certain extent. Unfortunately, the rigour inherent in AR is usually only clear to its participants and not the wider audience. For this reason, AR should bring other sources for validation. As examples, Dick cites the use of several methodologies, several data-collecting processes, the comparison of data and their interpretation to data from other sources (1999:[1]).

Leedy and Ormrod (2005:100) list the following common strategies employed by ARers for data gathering in order to lend validity to their research.

- *Extensive time in the field.* The researcher has spent three years studying the particular situation, forming faltering opinions and seeking to support or deny these opinions by means of reflection on the data gathering techniques discussed in the previous subsection.
- *Thick description.* The researcher examines the data in order to construct the greater picture by means of interpreting the raw empirical information (the 'thin' description) in terms of qualitative research (the 'thick' description) (Henning, 2004:6). For example, the results of an interview would be considered 'thin' if the researcher reported only what he/she had heard in the interview because no interpretation or insight was offered and the information obtained was not linked to any other information as would occur in the case of a 'thick' interpretation. This 'thick' description is the defining factor in progressive qualitative research. It is clear that, as the research progresses, the description will become increasingly 'thick', and as the research becomes increasingly 'thicker', the clearer the voice of the interviewee. Throughout the research project the researcher strove to interpret the data gathered.
- *Feedback from others.* The researcher seeks information and the advice and opinion of colleagues to determine whether or not they agree with her interpretation of the data and conclusions drawn from it (also see McNiff & Whitehead, 2006:157-161). In addition to conversations and written feedback

from the teachers, the researcher was able to consult her supervisor who attended all the meetings at the school.

- *Respondent validation.* The researcher takes her conclusions back to the participants in the study and asks whether they agree with the conclusions. Dick (1999:[4]) suggests that validation is enhanced by a ‘maximum diversity’ in the sample of people taken, based on the assumption that a great diversity of people yield the greatest diversity of information which contributes to triangulation. In a neutral manner, the researcher tried to discuss as many aspects of the project with teachers who were perceived to be positive and also with those who were perceived to have a negative attitude.

During triangulation several sources of data are collected in order to seek common themes in order to direct the research question (Leedy & Ormrod 2005:99). They point out that, ‘Many separate pieces of information must all point to the same conclusion’. This convergence of information is at the heart of triangulation (2005:136). Henning (2004:103) emphasises that triangulation itself is insufficient and that different approaches to ‘working the data’ are as important. She sees the word *triangulation* as a metaphor that indicates that the truth is discovered when it is examined from different angles. This is indeed what has been endeavoured in this study.

4.5 Summary of the reasons for using AR as the chosen methodology

With the aim of developing a programme of sustainable reading interventions at Wag’n-bietjie Secondary School, AR was chosen as the best research methodology because it addresses particular problems in a specific local and social setting.

The AR cycles of planning, implementing, observing and reflecting provide the researchers with momentum to implement the required changes and to reflect critically on the process. Moreover, the cycles reveal AR as a supple methodology because it allows the researcher and her co-researchers to change and adapt their strategies in order to suit the course of the project.

Another purpose of AR which is congruent with the aims of this research project is social upliftment and empowerment: of both the staff and the learners. Besides the new teaching skills gained, the newly acquired ability of having become reflective and critical about their own teaching routines should yield productive, more optimistic and dedicated professionals. Alison Perkins (2001:14) conveys the power of AR most expressively:

The process ... has opened the door to the discovery of my own personal paradigm. The thought, "I love that idea!", can quickly be followed by the question "Why do I love the idea?" Reflection interrogates theory and practice. Introspection: what a powerful tool!

If the researcher and the teachers succeed in establishing a cooperative working relationship, the strength and pliancy of AR come into play: the teachers supply the insider knowledge about the social, cultural, economic, practical issues that affect their teaching that the researcher lacks and needs to factor into her expertise (the theoretical base that she brings to the project) on teaching reading. Theory and practice marry at last.

The next chapter which describes the functional application of AR at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School are well introduced by Heydenrych's words (2001:[10]), 'The life of practice - its spirit or soul - is not discovered by searching for theories, but by probing your own practice continuously and questioning the values governing practice'.

CHAPTER 5

THE ACTION RESEARCH CYCLES

The world is moved along, not only by the mighty shoves of its heroes, but also by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each honest worker.

- Helen Keller

5.1 Introduction

The words of Grabe and Stoller (2002:19) that, ‘in academic settings ... the most common way for students to learn new information is through reading’ were cited in chapter 1 to give weight to the value being accorded to reading in this study. These words direct us to the goal of the project: to develop reading at Wag-’n-bietjie Secondary School in order to improve the academic standard. The aim of making the project sustainable will be achieved by training the teachers. Because the school lies within a community where real-life problems occur, the obvious choice of methodology was AR (*cf.* chapter 4).

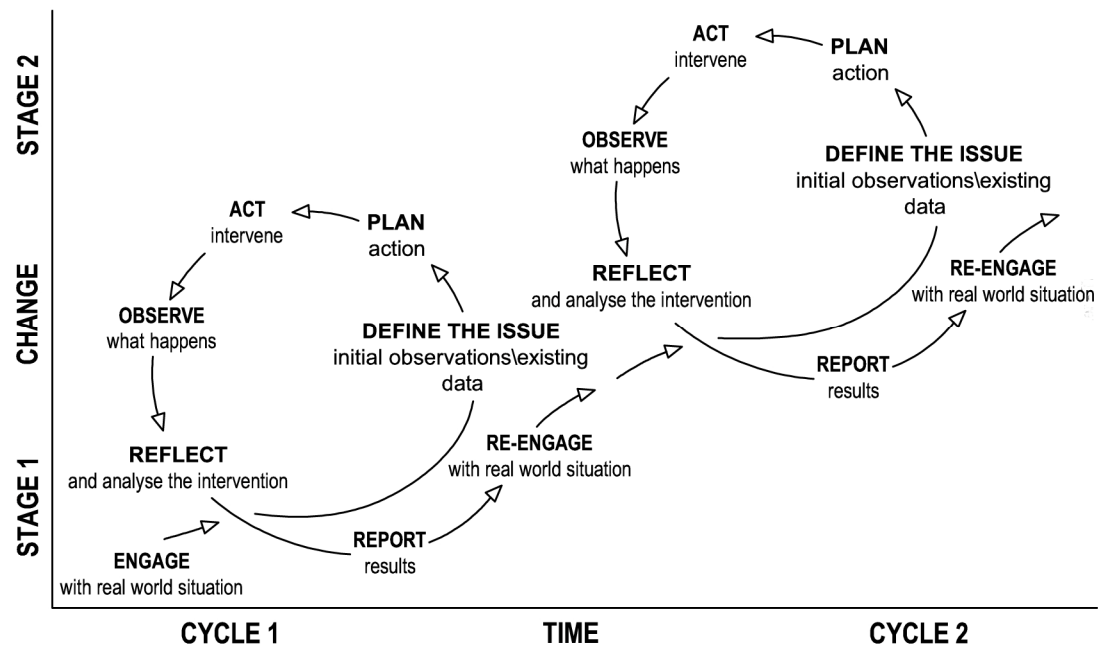
Accordingly, this chapter presents a comprehensive account of the cycles of AR, namely: planning, acting, observing and reflecting. Chapter 4 revealed that, with minor variations, each researcher’s description of the stages of AR is basically the same. This entails that I should:

- identify and assess the problem, recognise the other role players and spot possible constraints in order to plan how to address the problems;
- act on planning and then describe how the plan was executed;
- observe what occurred during the implementation of the plan; and
- reflect on how to improve the actions taken, based on the observations.

This sequence makes up a cycle of AR which is subsequently repeated with the purpose of constantly improving it. Several actions being performed at once may result in cycles within cycles moving at differing speeds. The diagram printed in chapter 4 has been copied here so that the graphic representation may contribute to

our visualisation of the progression of the cycles and because it provides a depiction of the upward spiral of the AR cycles.

Figure 5.1 Schematic representation of AR.



(From: RMIT University Educational media website)

Although different authors use different words to describe the various moments of an AR cycle, all essentially mean the same. For the sake of clarity, I would like to specify that, for the purpose of this tract, the AR cycles will be described in terms of the phases of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. This project consists of two complete AR cycles. Before they can be described, the research problem has to be identified as and defined as narrowly as possible.

5.2 Identification of the research problem

Leedy and Ormrod (2005:47) aptly describe the research problem as, ‘the heart of any research project’. Once stated, the research problem will be thoroughly delineated and explored.

As specified in the introduction to this study, Wag-’n-bietjie Secondary School is situated in a poverty-stricken area where many parents/caregivers are unemployed. The principal attributes the low matriculation pass rate to learners’ low reading proficiency and the lack of a culture of reading; and approached the University of the

Free State, requesting help with reading development at his school. Because the university is committed to Community Service Learning as a sustainable method of learning and research within the immediate community where real-life problems occur, the request was acceded to and this project conceived in the hope that valuable guidelines for teaching and learning under singular circumstances will ensue (*cf.* 'Engage with real world situation' in Figure.5.1 above).

Accordingly, I delineated the following research problem:

The research problem

The development of reading proficiency at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School within the framework of action research cycles in an endeavour to design a programme of reading interventions that will lead to on-going, sustainable reading development at the school. In order to make the project sustainable, teacher development, cooperation and training is a vital aspect of this AR project.

The identification of the research problem gave birth to the research questions dealt with in the next subsection.

5.2.1 The research questions

With the intention of a full understanding of the research problem, I examined it in great depth. The literature review pointed to the following research questions:

- How can the learners' background knowledge be increased? (Urquhart & Weir, 1998:34; Grabe & Stoller, 2001:188; 2002:9-10; Eskey, 1986:12).
- How can a culture of reading at the school be grown? (Stoller, 1986:65).
- How can the teachers be trained and their teaching practices changed in order to cultivate fluent readers? (Serafini, 2003:9; Van Pletzen, 2006:105-106).
- How can the problems of attitude and motivation amongst the learners be addressed? (Day & Bamford, 1998:21-22; Grabe & Stoller, 2001:199; Ruddell, 1994:286; Eskey, 1986:19).

- How can the problems of attitude and motivation amongst the teachers be addressed so that the project will run successfully after my withdrawal? (Day & Bamford, 1998:21-22; Grabe & Stoller, 2001:199; Ruddell, 1994:286).
- How can the teachers become involved as co-researchers so that the project becomes sustainable? (Day & Bamford, 1998:27).

In AR, the chosen action is informed by a preceding literature study, as seen in the discussions in chapter 2. The direct application of the literature to the action will be referred to below in 5.3.1.3.

5.3 Cycle 1

The following section introduces the planning of the first AR cycle by means of an exploratory examination.

5.3.1 Exploratory investigation of the research problem

The explorative stage of the research corresponds with ‘Define the issue’ on the schematic drawing above (Figure 5.1). It is intended to delve into the real life situation that presents itself as the research problem. In so doing, I strive to gain a greater grasp of the research context, in terms of the nature, scope and variety of the problems. I also make contact with the teachers whose role will be pivotal to the success of the reading project.

I perceived that it would be prudent to spend considerable time, and to use several differing data-gathering methods to scrutinise the status quo in its entirety. Particularly because this would be the first encounter with the school, this attitude would help me to understand and interpret the problems inherent in such a unique ‘real world situation’. Extensive data was gathered from the learners, the teachers and from a ‘School Indaba’ hosted by the alumni. All of this will feed the planning phase of the first cycle, in line with the research problem.

At this stage I employed various qualitative research methods (the learners’ tests were, however, measured quantitatively) - in so doing, I attempted to corroborate and validate the emerging perceptions, true to the AR method of triangulation to achieve

validation (Leedy & Ormrod 2005:99 and 136). In order to substantiate the research problem, I gathered and interpreted the following data:

- interviews with the teachers;
- questionnaires completed by the teachers;
- written report from the teachers;
- meetings with the teachers;
- discussions with the teachers;
- tests of the learners' reading ability;
- questionnaires about the learners' socio-economic and cultural backgrounds;
- examples of their writing;
- questionnaires about their perceptions of their problems;
- informal interviews with learners who fared badly in the reading test;
- *ad hoc* School Indaba sessions (critical reflective plenary sessions) conducted by the alumni, and the school governing body and attended by a representative of the DoE).

Flowing from the above (and bolstered by the literature review), I found implications for the choice of reading interventions to address the research problem.

For the sake of clarity, I would like to explain the layout of the discussion of the exploratory step (*cf.* 'Define the issue on Figure 5.1) which sets in motion the planning step of the first AR cycle. I will first discuss the information garnered from the initial meetings with the teachers (5.3.1.1) and make a few preliminary observations. I will then consider the results of the grade 8 reading tests and the questionnaires that reveal the learners' socio-economic circumstances and their perception of the problem (5.3.1.2). Thereafter, the threads of both sets of data (gathered from the teachers and learners) will be compared with those gathered at the School Indaba (5.3.1.3), and then drawn together to vindicate the planning as having been conceived as a consequence of the data gathered. In a separate section, the conclusions that have been drawn from the data will be measured against the literature study done in chapter 2.

5.3.1.1 Data gathered from the teachers: Meetings, discussion and written report on the problems

On 21 November 2006, a pilot meeting was held with the teachers to identify their perceived problems with the learners' reading skills and to establish a partnership (*cf.* appendix II: 1.1).

The meeting took the form of an informal, open discussion during which I introduced the project, explaining the collaborative nature of the research role and teachers were invited to express their views. They unanimously expressed their frustration and grave concern for the reading abilities of the learners. All agreed that they would welcome assistance to improve the level of reading in the school. The project has the full support of the school principal, seeing that he requested the assistance in the first place.

They were invited to list the problems anonymously, I analysed them and sub-divided them into two categories:

- learners' problems
- problems within the education/ school system.

The teachers identified the following problems with the learners:

- A reluctance to read. Rather than read any text, learners ask the teacher to tell them what the text contains. The learners do not even read the instructions on an assignment or test.
- A lack of fluency.
- A lack of comprehension of what they read.
- A lack of adequate vocabulary.
- Boredom. Learners are not interested in prescribed reading (e.g. *Maru* by Bessie Head). They are only interested in reading about their immediate surrounds/ world/ milieu and not in current affairs or anything beyond their range.
- Limited general knowledge.
- Learners do not value reading and a culture of reading is totally absent.

- The learners' functional literacy level is low and they enter the high school in grade 8 with sub-standard reading skills.
- Some learners cannot read at all.

The following problems were caused by the conditions in the education/school system:

- Very big classes of 45 – 50 learners. Consequently, the classes are difficult to manage. It is more difficult to maintain discipline and teach effectively. It is thus very difficult to give any individual attention and identifying individual problems.
- The Learning Facilitators from the Department of Education are not co-operative and do not heed observations of the teachers.
- The powers of the teachers are limited. They experience a lack of authority, problems with discipline, a lack of funds for reading material and not enough relevant reading material.
- Lack of relevance of prescribed texts. (Both a learners' problem and a problem within the system: see 5 above).

At a meeting held on 23 February 2007, the English language teachers added to the list of troubles with the education system. In an open discussion, teachers reported the following frustrations:

- The departmental intervention teams require a large amount of paperwork from the teachers.
- It appears to them that the Department of Education (DoE) believes that plenty of paperwork is evidence of teachers' doing their jobs. This is time consuming for busy teachers.
- The learners do not see the fruit of their labours, feeling that they work hard but do not progress.
- The Department of Education is results based.
- The learners have no dictionaries.

While the complaints about the school/ educational system cannot be dealt with here, they paint a picture of the factors that discourage the teachers. Despite these, the teachers seemed very keen to cooperate and relieved that help was available. They

were eloquent about the problems they encountered and seemed to be sincere in their concern for the well-being of the learners. However, the teachers have a daunting task and there was an underlying note of desperation in the discussions. It appears that they feel pressurised by the Department of Education (DoE) whose requests seem unreasonable to them. One also wonders whether the weak readers and the illiterate learners might contribute to the disciplinary problems at the school.

A short questionnaire was distributed to establish the existing reading strategies before intervention took place. Some teachers worked in pairs and the replies were anonymous in order for the project to be perceived as being non-threatening. The teachers described the strategies below:

- lots of reading from books and magazines;
- reading aloud in class;
- plenty of practice and opportunities to read;
- read magazines for pronunciation;
- comprehension questions;
- read short stories and explain vocabulary;
- lots of repetition; and
- pictures.

The aim of this questionnaire was to examine the status quo before intervention. Although the replies were generally vague, elusive, and did not create a positive impression about the teachers' knowledge of how to teach reading, I felt that it was a rather inaccurate (and even unfair) way of judging the methodologies being used. All the same, it is disturbing that not one teacher could give a neat, precise account of how s/he taught reading – and this from language teachers. This being so, the questionnaire was also intended to initiate a certain amount of self-examination and reflection by the teachers. In other words, 'I can't verbalise how to teach reading, let me consider how it should be done'. This was followed up by Dr van Wyk's offering of a short presentation on the value of background knowledge for reading, the reading process and developing reading methods and reading strategies (cf. the research questions in 5.2.1 above). The timing of explaining reading strategies after the teachers' self-examination was deliberately conceived: having examined themselves

and having found themselves lacking, the teachers were immediately presented with new information about how to proceed.

There seemed to be a problem with a high turnover of teachers. Only three of the teachers at this meeting were at the previous meeting. It would be imperative to train the teachers in methods for teaching reading. The staff morale was low as revealed in their frustration with the DoE and their complaints about the lack of dictionaries assumed a plaintive note.

The following subsection introduces the learners' reading abilities and their socio-economic backgrounds which, it is hoped, when considered together with the data gathered above and compared to the data gleaned from the School Indaba (below), will point the way ahead.

5.3.1.2 Data gathered from the learners: tests, questionnaire

Reading tests were written by the grade 8 learners. Several problems with the learners' reading ability had already been identified by the teachers at the meeting on 21 November 2006. In order to establish the scope of the problem, and based on discussions with the teachers on the reading problems, I decided to assess the following in the reading test:

- vocabulary;
- comprehension;
- general knowledge; and
- textual connectedness and textual referencing.

The tests were based on books prescribed in English and geography for grade 8 which seemed the appropriate level. Few learners passed and these results showed that the teachers' analyses of the problems had been accurate.

The following data became available from the testing:

- Results from vocabulary test were the most disastrous. The learners had been instructed to 'Find a word in the passage that best fits the meaning below. Write the word'. All the learners, with very few exceptions, wrote several

words and many of them did not appear in the text at all. No learners gained full marks in this section. It is clear that, firstly, they did not read the instructions carefully; and secondly, that the text was too difficult despite the text having come from their textbooks. It also seemed that their comprehension was affected by poor vocabulary.

- The responses to the comprehension test seemed to show a careless reading of the text, the 'scientific' text in particular. It appeared that the learners were reading without fully trying to follow the logic in the passage.
- General knowledge was poor: they did not know what the equator was (this could be the English terminology but they need to be able to work out a meaning contextually); they did not pick up that London is in England and that June is summer in England. They had similar difficulties with general knowledge about a car's engine (many said that a 3.3 litre engine referred to the size of boot or fuel tank).
- The learners were unable to reconstruct the text in the cloze procedure. This may mean that they cannot make deductions based on parts of speech or textual connectedness and referencing.

A questionnaire (*cf* appendix IV:1) to establish the socio-economic and cultural background was completed in order to gain insight into the lives of the children and examine aspects that might influence their reading. The following facts were gathered:

- few (if any) learners had more than ten books at home – this substantiates the words of the Education MEC of Mpumalanga quoted in the introduction to chapter 1;
- few learners could distinguish between books and magazines;
- many of the learners could not read or understand the questions being put to them;
- many answers were unintelligible;
- the educational level of the parents varied between no schooling and (rarely) grade 12;
- learners lived in extended families of between four and ten members;

- they seldom lived with both parents, not very often with one parent and often with a grandparent;
- many learners feared ridicule;
- the learners' aims and goals in life are not at all in touch with attainable reality: most learners want to become doctors, many lawyers, social workers and business people;
- many learners misread or did not understand the instructions/ questions;
- many learners are desperate for spectacles; and
- several learners pleaded for help.

The level of reading was very poor indeed and the test was too difficult despite the fact that it had been based on prescribed books. Other observations are described below.

- Teachers need to be made aware that they should not let readers read aloud to the class because it undermines the confidence of poor readers altogether.
- The learners all come from book-poor environments and some learners can barely write at all.
- Most learners requested help; some pleaded. It is thus clear that we need to be able to teach basic reading.
- The library is poorly equipped, unfriendly (is neglected, has old books and iron bars at the door), and understaffed. The librarian is on duty once a week and, when interviewed, confirmed the lack of interest in reading among the learners and, ironically, complained that the theft of books was a real problem.
- Likewise, most classrooms are untidy and bare with little evidence of anything that might stimulate interest in or around any subject being taught at school. When interviewed, one of the incumbent teachers complained that the library could not function properly because theft was rife.
- The lack of reading culture is palpable.

The state of play described above supports the alumni's concerns for their alma mater and was a reason for the School Indaba early in 2008.

5.3.1.3 Data gathered at the School Indaba

On 19 January 2008, I attended an *ad hoc* School Indaba convened by the alumni to address the poor matriculation results of 2007. The School Governing Body, members of the alumni, some staff members, a representative from the Department of Education and other interested parties attended.

The data collected is available in appendix II: 3.1. The session was conducted in the form of a critical reflective plenary session. The salient points have been cited below. I have deliberately quoted the transcript of the discussions verbatim in an attempt to allow the 'voice' of the attendees to be heard. This not only develops the reader's 'feel' for the people who use such emotive language and allows the reader to grasp the strength of their concerns for the school but also ensures that I have not skewed the interpretation (Tarentaal, 2008):

- The lack of accountability/ responsibility of learners has teachers crying for help.
- Teachers spoon-feed the learners too much.
- Learners lack vision (hope).
- Both learners and teachers show a lack of respect for one another.
- The literacy problem leads to the disengagement of the learners.
- Language barriers are a barrier to communication (reading, speaking, writing and listening). Some teachers refuse to change and become more accommodating and refuse to learn other languages. Teachers are segregated and work in different directions.
- Life values of teachers differ. Honesty does not appear to be a shared value when messages are relayed down the chain of command.
- The old school culture does not want to make way for a new all inclusive culture. There are also language and cultural differences.

- There is no unity in the school management team. The SMT themselves do not adhere to what has been agreed (set a poor example). The SMT is not giving direction as they are divided.
- Parents are not involved as expected.
- There is a lack of communication and/ or poor communication. Communication from the school management team is not always clear as there is no process or system to prevent miscommunication.
- There is a lack of direction and a lack of common vision. There is no willingness to execute any plan, starting with the SMT and trickling down the chain of command. The SMT's current plan is not focussed and poorly communicated hence there is doubt about its existence. The plan is too top-down with no buy-in from the bottom.
- There is a lack of growth and undesirable growth in the areas of academics, staff, unity, communication, interpersonal relationships. People are not receptive to new ideas.
- There is a lack of motivation and negative attitudes. Teachers and learners feel overwhelmed by socio-economic factors. The image of the school is very negative.
- There is a lack of discipline of both the teachers and the learners.

This distressing picture extends many of the observations and statements made by both the teachers and the learners and that were described in the preceding subsections. It supports my perceptions that staff training is required and my awareness that, in striving to improve the reading at the school, much wider issues, such as motivation, discipline, leadership and the management of change, will (or would) have to be attended to. This seems to be a potential minefield.

With the aforementioned insight into the school, it was fitting that I consult the literature lest I proceed with the planning stage of the first AR cycle too recklessly.

5.3.2 Substantiation of data by the literature review

Having gathered a fair amount of data from the initial encounters with the teachers, the alumni and attendees of the School Indaba and learners (*cf.* above), I needed to correlate the data with the current research and theory that was described in the literature review.

In chapter 2, I traced the development of the definition of reading in detail. This is summarised in the paragraph below so that the results of the explorative data can be hitched onto it more easily.

During the literature study, definitions of reading unfolded from the initial observation that it is a ‘cognitive process’ (Goodman, 1989:11), via the novel idea that it should encompass the readers’ background knowledge of the world and their ‘pragmatic knowledge and skills’ (Urquhart & Weir 1998:34) with the ultimate goal being comprehension (Grabe & Stoller, 2001:188). Carrell (1988:1) revealed that second language reading should no longer be regarded as the passive process as in the past, with the text ‘controlling the reader’ (Goodman, 1994:1061); rather, reading is seen as an active or rather an interactive process. The view that the reader plays a central role in the construction of meaning, drawing upon prior knowledge and experience to attend selectively to specific aspects of a text is known as the transactional model of reading (Serafini, 2003:9). The ‘transaction’ takes place between the reader and the text in which the reader interprets a personal meaning: it is thus not only cognitive, but subjective. (This is also referred to as the reader’s schema – *cf.* chapter 2). In other words, reading (with comprehension) does not reside in the text; it does not consist of ‘matching sounds to letters’, neither is it predetermined, ‘waiting to be discovered by competent readers’ - but depends on the reader and what knowledge and experience s/he brings to the text, his/her attitudes and cultural, social, political and cultural values, be they in the widest or narrowest sense. The idea of reading being cognitive and personal develops into a more abstract understanding, with even an affective aspect creeping into the definition.

The literature also described good readers’ characteristics (*cf.* chapter 2: 2.3.1), all of which were pinpointed as lacking in the data gathered from the teachers’ comments

and also the test results at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School. When summarised, the characteristics add up to: reading quickly with instant word recognition, a large vocabulary, being able to integrate information in the text with their own knowledge, being able to identify the purpose of the text and uses strategies and techniques to read for the purpose of the text, being able to identify and correct poor comprehension.

If the information contained in this summary is correlated with the data collected in the exploratory probe into the state of reading and teaching, one observes the following deficits which will drive the planning stage of the first cycle:

- the learners lack background knowledge, and possess none of the attributes of fluent readers, their comprehension is poor and their vocabulary is so meagre that it affects their understanding;
- the teachers' lack of knowledge of the latest methodologies for teaching reading;
- the teachers' dedication and work ethic will have to be addressed.

The reading methodology chosen will have to guide the teachers to teach in such a way that the learners play an active role in the reading process, where background knowledge is developed and existing knowledge unearthed and activated; where the characteristics of fluent readers are developed and where, in special cases a particular hiatus in the learners' knowledge appears, a 'bottom-up' teaching technique addresses the problem.

Moreover, the literature suggests (as do the data collected from the School Indaba) that teachers be sensitised to the cultural values embedded in themselves (as most probably the teacher will come from a different cultural background from that of his/her pupil) and also the values and cultural assumptions and frames of reference intrinsic in the text, the language of which is also unlikely to be the pupil's home language.

In addition to the above, an intervention strategy to address the lack of background knowledge will have to be implemented. Data gathered from both the teachers and

the learners' tests support the lack of general knowledge amongst the learners. The findings of the literature study are thus doubly damning: according to the data collected, the learners have no background knowledge and, without background knowledge they will read poorly.

Grabe and Stoller (2002:188) declare that 'all researchers recognise that the actual ability to comprehend texts comes about through reading, and doing a great deal of it, as the core of reading instruction'. They (2002:188) also mention that experts agree that comprehension is developed through extensive reading - an opinion borne out by the empirical research conducted by Coleman (2003:95) at a disadvantaged school in South Africa. This tells us that the reluctant learners at the school have to be teased or 'seduced' into the belief that reading is pleasurable so that they will do it. Hence, a culture of reading has to be grown.

Condy (2008:610) sounds the alarm bells: '... literacy achievement depends crucially on the nature and quality of instruction that learners receive in the classroom ... the quality of the principal, the level of teacher commitment and the extent of community involvement'. These she declaims as the 'most powerful factors' that shape how a school is run! The information collected from the attendees at the School Indaba casts a dark shadow over any hope of the successful implementation of the current reading project - it points to flawed teaching methods, low levels of teacher and learner commitment, intolerance and defective leadership from the SMT.

The planning stage of the AR cycle will be coupled to what has been discussed in this subsection.

5.3.3 Planning phase of cycle 1

The preceding section specifies exactly what needs to be addressed in order to achieve the goals of improved reading at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School. Accordingly, the interventions which have been described in detail in chapter 3 were chosen. With the purpose of smoothing the progress of their implementation, I must first put the planning phase of the AR cycle into operation. (This is described as 'Plan action' on the schematic representation, Figure 5.1, above). After the findings of the data gathered from both the teachers and the learners had been shared with the teachers,

written suggestions, requests and recommendations (forming part of the questionnaire about the problems at school) were invited. This was an attempt to involve the teachers' more intimate knowledge of the real situation at the school. None was on offer. And so I progressed towards the planning phase of the AR cycle, mindful of the fact that this was one of the first encounters with the teachers and in the hope that future collaboration would be forthcoming.

5.3.3.1 Planning phase of cycle 1: Determining the outcomes

Having discovered and identified the research problem and spelled out the aspects that need consideration, I am enjoined to make a detailed proposal of the way ahead. In order to maintain the focus of the project, let us review the goals as described in chapter 1:

- to provide the teachers with the necessary skills and techniques to implement good reading practices in their classrooms (in all subjects) in order to improve the reading of weak readers;
- to ensure that practices implemented are sustainable;
- to develop a culture of reading at the school;
- to reflect critically on each step of the implementation;
- to replan the process based on the results of reflection;
- to facilitate the professional growth of teachers;
- to motivate teachers and learners;
- to implement appropriate methods and techniques based on insights gained from the literature review; and
- to engage teachers as participants in the research.

The literature study indicated that the goals of the project required that the following be implemented and considered, and that I would strive to:

- develop extensive background knowledge;
- understand that reading is an interactive process that involves the readers' schema;
- realise that reading is always linked to the reader's knowledge and experience s/he brings to the text, his/her attitudes and cultural, social, political and cultural values, be they in the widest or narrowest sense;

- consider the characteristics of good readers in order to understand the problem;
- implement effective methodologies for the teaching of reading;
- be aware that cultural values are transferred in text; that cultural assumptions and frames of reference differ from culture to culture; and that teachers carry their cultural perspectives to their teaching and reading practices;
- apply in practice the knowledge that the best way to learn reading is by reading;
- realise that comprehension is grown by extensive reading;
- understand that SL readers differ from FL readers; and
- try and establish intrinsic motivation in the sense that learners will discover the value of reading.

With the outcomes of the course having been stipulated, I should consider the constraints that might hinder the process. It is important to consider the AR process from all angles to be in line with the injunction that requires AR to be performed by a reflective practitioner.

5.3.3.2 Planning phase of cycle 1: Determining the constraints

Pertinent to this stage of the study - when I am concerned with the phase of planning, based on the data gathered - is a brief consideration of the restrictions imposed by the 'real life' situation that presents itself.

Indeed, Burns (1999:46) makes a striking point when she warns that it would be imprudent to tackle AR at any school without heeding the constraints imposed by a school environment. She warns that the institutional nature of a school and other prevailing conditions make a school a difficult setting for research and mentions that teachers are reluctant participants because they are given no credit for research - nor does time allow for it. Unfortunately, research is relegated to the periphery of classroom activities and is sometimes seen as, 'even downright wrong' (Burns, 1999:46). Apart from a lack of time and resources, organisational problems when dealing with unexpected interruptions such as inspections, changes of timetable, sports days and examinations were problems encountered in the current research

project. Burns (1999:46 - 47) adds others, also extant at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School, to the list:

- disapproval and disinterest amongst the teachers;
- professional factors such as teachers' rights and the role of the unions;
- extra workload resulting from the research; and
- little local support for the research (from the parents, teachers, School Governing Body, alumni, the DoE).

In addition, the cultural variations and deprivation that have been mentioned in this discussion (*cf.* chapter 2) need to be tackled with an urgency that is not part of the institutional and cultural framework at the school if the vast gap of background knowledge is to be narrowed. That the cultural diversity caused problems was corroborated by the data captured at the School Indaba, *i.e.* that some teachers refuse to change and become more accommodating; that they also refuse to learn other languages; and that the old school culture does not want to make way for a new, all inclusive culture.

The data gathered from the School Indaba made ominous statements about the teaching staff: a high rate of staff absenteeism, a lack of discipline, dedication and involvement of the teachers are hindrances to the success of the project, as is the lack of leadership from the management team. Although the teachers initially seemed enthusiastic because the level of reading was so poor that it interrupted their instruction, retraining would make inroads on their time and, even more seriously, the energy and confidence required to effect a paradigm shift was lacking. I am ill-equipped to manage change because this is a specialised area beyond the scope of my field of study. The intrusion of factors beyond my field of expertise or beyond my range at the school was also mentioned at the end of 5.3.1.3 above (motivation, discipline, leadership and the management of change). Certainly, despite being beyond my control and outside my field of knowledge, these factors will encroach on the successful implementation of the reading project.

Data from the School Indaba and from the teachers indicated that the learners are ill-disciplined and have no sense of responsibility. Parents are uninvolved with the school which undermines the teachers. In addition, the problem of theft coupled with the lack of books aggravates the problem of teaching literacy - with theft and an unreliable staff presenting serious preclusions to handing out either magazines or books without strict control.

I perceived a constraint in being an interloper in a structure where I had no authority to implement any action or effect any changes. This was a source of personal frustration particularly when the solution to the problem was not only obvious but simple. It was difficult to discover the gamut of my boundaries from the principal, who had, in fact, requested this assistance. Unless I cross the threshold into the research setting armed with the awareness of problems that are bound to crop up, a rocky road may lie ahead. Yet, equipped with knowledge and wisdom, enthusiasm and optimism, a spirit of cooperation and flexibility, the battle may be fought successfully. I chose the following methods to tackle the reading problems.

5.3.3.3 Planning phase of cycle 1: Methods of intervention

Based on the reading problems diagnosed in the data gathered from several sources (the learners, the teachers and the School Indaba and the literature review), I selected the following methodologies: sustained silent reading and extensive reading; content-based instruction; *Readucate*; and various activities in order to advance a culture of reading at the school. These methodologies are merely mentioned here in order to introduce them neatly within the planning section of the first AR cycle. They have been described fully in chapter 3.

With these techniques having been selected, a meeting was held with the teachers in order to explain them and ask for any comment and suggestions. The teachers offered no suggestions but were enthusiastic about the project. Once consensus had been reached, the time had come to move into the next phase of the AR cycles, depicted as 'Act/ intervene' on the diagram (Figure 5.1).

5.3.4 Acting phase of cycle 1

Acting is the second step of the AR cycle, during which the chosen interventions are implemented. Inevitably, because different interventions are taking place, the action often consists of a series of small cycles, which move at different paces. In the paragraphs that follow, I describe how each of the interventions that have already been discussed has been implemented in the first cycle of AR.

5.3.4.1 Acting phase of cycle 1: Sustained Silent Reading

At a meeting with the language teachers on 23 February 2007, the concept and value of SSR was explained to the teachers, a list of 'rules' supplied to each teacher and, it was decided that, with the cooperation of the principal, a period would be set aside once a week during which the whole school would read. On 25 May 2007, when the reading period had not yet been slotted into the timetable as had been previously recommended and requested, this appeal was repeated. At last a school period was set aside on Fridays after break and the programme of SSR started at the beginning of the third term, at the end of July 2007.

The progress of the SSR will be monitored and discussed under the phase of observing and reflecting so that new actions may be taken to improve matters in the second cycle. And so, the implementation of CBI will be considered.

5.3.4.2 Acting phase of cycle 1: Content-based instruction

On 25 May 2007, at the end of a meeting with the staff, Dr van Wyk presented a brief introduction to important aspects of reading and demonstrated how to teach reading. The characteristics of a good reader were discussed (*cf.* chapter 2) in the literature and pre-reading techniques demonstrated. In response to the awareness that some teachers make the learners read out loud, I explained that most reading should be silent lest the poor readers be compromised. Dr van Wyk demonstrated word-building techniques that help with vocabulary building and explained how the teachers could build background knowledge using this method. The teachers completed a questionnaire on what they had learned (see appendix IV: 4).

This introductory demonstration was followed up by two CBI training courses (offered by Dr van Wyk) and a demonstration lesson presented by one of Dr van Wyk's education students reinforced the knowledge that was introduced to the teachers in this way. During these courses, handouts were given to the staff and examples of CBI lessons discussed. Dr van Wyk and I strove to involve and inspire the teachers with interesting demonstrations. I approached the teachers to prepare demonstrations of CBI classes to present to their peers in the hope of cultivating an awareness of and a desire for professional improvement and even kindle a spirit of comradeship. Although two teachers were standing by to give CBI demonstrations, they never materialised as, despite pleas, dates were never set.

The third aspect of the acting phase (that of *Readucate*) which aims to help the illiterate learners, follows.

5.3.4.3 Acting phase of cycle 1: *Readucate*

Initial reading tests indicated the need for literacy classes because many learners cannot read at all. Fortuitously, at the end of July 2007, Raubex Construction announced a generous donation towards the reading project at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School. Some of this money could be used to train teachers to teach literacy. Coincidentally, having heard of the reading project at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School, Mrs Edna Freinkel from *Readucate* received an anonymous sponsorship for the literacy training of ten teachers. Not only would the *Readucate* course solve the problem of illiteracy but it would empower the teachers (in line with the stated goals of the project) as it could be used to generate a private income too. The problem was who would receive the *Readucate* training. A group of eight teachers and I were identified and the first training session took place in October 2007, and a second group of eleven on 4 February 2008.

Because the initial identification of illiterate learners had been rather random, at the end of January 2008, all grade 8, 9 and 10 learners were tested using a new test to ascertain their levels of literacy. Learners were divided into classes and a trained

teacher allocated to instruct them in the newly acquired *Readucate* methods. Their progress will be described in the phase of observing (*cf.* chapter 3: 3.4 for the reasons for instituting *Readucate*).

5.3.4.4 Acting phase of cycle 1: Creating a culture of reading

In order to create a culture of reading at the school, it was decided to approach a professor specialising in marketing in the relevant department at the University of the Free State. A prospective student was identified to do this project as a master's degree on the marketing of reading at the school. However, the student disappeared and I was compelled to attempt the marketing of reading myself, and appealed to the teachers for assistance and support in this venture. My intention was to try and 'sell' reading as a rewarding, enriching and fun-filled activity that would have value for leisure and in the job market, and to try to reveal reading in a new light – unrelated to the drudgery of school books. Accordingly the following ideas were generated:

- a puppet show promoting reading was held in the hall in July 2008;
- a notice board was put up and the staff were encouraged to communicate via the written word on the notice board;
- a reading room was requested;
- magazines were collected;
- sets of 'read-along' books containing CDs were bought;
- a voluntary 'read aloud' was introduced at break on Fridays (*cf.* reading aloud in chapter 3);
- balloons were handed out and posters made by the learners to advertise reading;
- prizes were awarded to the learners who had attended the most 'read aloud' sessions; and
- 'Visagie', a toy singing donkey became the reading mascot.

Appeals were also made to the teachers to be as enthusiastic about reading as possible and the staff was invited to put forward suggestions. The tension between the reluctant response to this plea to the teachers and the enthusiasm of the learners'

responses dominates the discussion of how to establish a culture of reading into the next action, that of observing. Yet, before the observing phase of AR, a short subsection casts a glance at the situation of the teachers, and how I perceived the actions I should take in order to support and develop them.

5.3.4.5 Acting phase of cycle 1: The teaching staff

Because of the problems of low morale and factionalism that had been discussed at the School Indaba, I felt that action was called for in order to revitalise the teaching staff. This was important because the problems identified impinge on the efficacy of the reading methodologies being introduced. Consequently, the matter was raised at a meeting and the following proposals put forward:

- The teachers should come together in the staffroom for meetings as often as possible. This would open the lines of communication, help with discipline and develop a professional ethic.
- Dr van Wyk requested the SMT to improve staff discipline.
- Money would be spent on cutlery, crockery and linen so that a weekly tea could be instituted to make break time a pleasurable experience for the staff, and thus try to help improve their spirit and morale.
- The teachers' absenteeism should be monitored (on one occasion, 15 out of 37 teachers were absent). It was explained that many teachers had study leave to which they were entitled and that they were also entitled to a certain number of days' leave a year. Too much interference could incur problems with labour unions. This was one of the warnings mentioned by Burns (1999:46 - 47) in the section on constraints above.

The SMT agreed to address these issues with as much energy as possible. I was directed by the principal to address the teachers who were shirking their *Reeducate* duties, but after consultation with Adv. Smit, I understood that this would legally be beyond my mandate.

The following problems were documented *repeatedly* from the end of 2007 until the end of 2008. None was resolved:

- Punctuality at meetings of both teachers and SMT was a continuing problem.
- Communication with the school was poor (calls not returned, messages undelivered, not being informed of a change of plan, telephone and e-mails unanswered).
- Attendance of meetings was poor (of both teachers and SMT) despite the principal's request (that was acceded to) that I diarise all meetings on the school calendar a year in advance.
- The suggestion that the language programmes on the school's computer system be investigated and implemented was never followed up.
- The learner and staff discipline remained a problem.
- Collecting progress reports and questionnaires was not done.

Encouraged by suggestions made during the interview with Prof. Botes (*cf.* appendix II: 3.4), Dr van Wyk and I invited a volunteer from the staff to assist us in choosing crockery, cutlery, tablecloths and an urn for the staffroom so that, with the aid of colourful tablecloths and tea set, a compulsory Friday teatime get-together could help boost staff cohesion and morale. Up to this time, the teachers had each brought their own mugs and made tea or coffee individually using an urn that did not reach boiling point. Dr van Wyk and I inaugurated the new equipment with an offering of cake for the staff. The teachers were encouraged to collect money for communal supplies of tea and coffee and the occasional eats.

The descriptions above constitute the action phase of the first cycle which leads into the phase of observing.

5.3.5 Observing phase of cycle 1

The observation phase of the AR cycle (*cf.* Figure 5.1 'observe what happens') allows me to consider the unforeseen practical problems that creep in to the interventions

which have been ‘enacted’. What is observed drives the phase of reflecting, which will determine how the actions may be modified, corrected or improved – and so drive the planning of the second AR cycle in an upward spiral. As indicated previously, different interventions in AR might move at different speeds and require more or less adjustment than others. And so, the different interventions will be described separately as was done during the description of the action phase.

5.3.5.1 Observing phase of cycle 1: Sustained Silent Reading

SSR has taken six months to implement. The reason for such a long delay is unclear and it appears that the idea of SSR is very strange, even bizarre, to the teachers, and that this could be the reason for the lack of thrust. On the other hand, authorising and organising an SSR period rests with the management. My observation that SSR is an alien concept is borne out by watching the classes when I visited the school on Fridays in order to monitor the progress, and also validated by the teachers’ written comments, which are discussed below.

After six weeks (allowing time for the idea to take root), the teachers were asked (anonymously to encourage candour) to submit a written report on the primary stage of SSR, in which they:

- described what was happening in their classrooms;
- pinpointed the problems;
- recognised successes;
- formulated suggestions and proffered their personal opinions.

The purpose of this exercise was to gain insight into the situation via the teachers’ eyes and thus include them in the decision-making process: their comments and suggestions could then emerge in the planning phase of the second cycle. The teachers’ comments were most valuable because of their grass roots contact with SSR and their responses would indicate the areas of misunderstanding of SSR that could be corrected. The teachers responded well by answering the questions diligently and were mostly optimistic.

However, in the descriptions of what was happening during the SSR period, it seemed that, despite several who revealed a good grasp of the philosophy driving SSR, others were totally lost (e.g. ‘Learners who stutter and do not want to read in front of others’; ‘Readers need to be tested’ and, ‘Can also be utilised as a study period’). It became clear that the teachers needed to be reminded of the ‘rules’ for SSR (that had been discussed previously), and I explained the rules to the staff and a list of rules was redistributed to each teacher.

The problems in the classrooms seemed to be a lack of concentration, a lack of reading material, noise from outside the classroom, learners not taking SSR seriously and the sharp insight from one teacher that, ‘Some teachers themselves do not see/understand the importance of reading’. By contrast, some of the successes were most heartening: ‘They seem to be interested in the story – want to know how it ends. Most learners are serious’; ‘Some learners do not even hear the bell ring. Some want to take the book to come and read after school’ and, ‘Learners learn how to concentrate and try their best to read’. This last observation already suggests a progression by means of the implicit message that the learners could not concentrate before.

Opportunely, the teachers’ suggestions and opinions were worthwhile. A few examples of the excellent suggestions are quoted verbatim below and several were heeded and executed. (This is in line with one of the aims of the research, to involve the teachers as co-researchers and colleagues):

- Grade heads can assist by taking classes of teachers who are absent.
- Instead of register class, the ... 5th period (after break) would be better.
- If the school could come up with a programme that could be uniformly implemented, we would be sure of one goal.
- All must be serious – outside noise could still be heard.
- Bring back a “library period” to make reading fun.
- Excellent idea! Readers enjoy and get an opportunity to read. It encourages learners to read more at home on their own. It will develop their concentration skills.

- Use comic books, picture books, magazines, easy reading (short stories, fairy tales).

Although these opinions revealed a positive attitude and insight, other equally perceptive revelations about the teachers, by the teachers, were less encouraging (these have also been quoted verbatim):

- Good thing, as long as everybody does his/ her duty. Teachers should be in class, not outside, talking!
- It could be very fruitful if well planned; but very time consuming if the objectives are not understood by both teachers and learners.
- This can only work if every teacher and learner realise how enjoyable, enlightening, interesting and important reading is to the intelligence.

Although these reports are often sincere, honest and revealing, they should also be taken from whence they come: teachers know what they are expected to say and are unlikely to confess that they are the ones ‘outside, talking!’ Thus, my sallies into the classrooms to investigate the situation give a more balanced view, generating the following observations, the first visit being made in October 2007:

- Learners were up to 20 minutes late.
- The noise outside was excessive for a long time into the period.
- The teachers left the classrooms unattended often.
- The teachers did not read and did administration.
- Many learners were ‘reading’ a single piece of newspaper covered with advertisements, or school textbooks.
- Many learners and teachers loitered in the corridors.
- Some classes were without supervision (rugby being played in one classroom) while members of staff sat idle in the staffroom.
- A few classes were running perfectly but were disturbed by the noise.

Some of the staff reports hinted at these same problems I described (of noise, the lack of reading material, staff absenteeism, the lack of teacher involvement and discipline and the lack of discipline among the learners). These troubles mirror exactly what emerged from the preliminary investigations and the School Indaba (*cf.* 5.3.1). Additionally, the lack of a culture of reading at the school is palpable.

By March 2008 I observed that both the teachers and learners had settled and, in general, the SSR classes were quiet and the learners reading. However, few teachers were seen to be modelling reading. Moreover, I realised the importance of establishing a system that would incorporate incoming members of staff into the reading programme and the prescriptions of SSR. I observed and recorded the predicament in my AR journal of new or substitute teachers looking lost and not a little puzzled in chaotic classrooms when the SSR reading period is rung and learners arrive with newspapers. This was raised at an SMT meeting and, according to the SMT, such systems were in place. It does not seem so.

It was awkward for me to address this issue of teachers' refusal to follow the SSR prescriptions when I found them to be in defiance of the rules which had been stated repeatedly. Eventually, in some classes, it was observed that a few learners had made the transition from newspapers and magazines to books – an indication that reading had reached a more serious level.

It is important to take note of the warning sounded in chapter 3 that the classes of teachers who do not follow the recommended method meticulously, or in whose classes the learners read only erratically, show little improvement. In other words, 'Having the books in the classrooms was not enough. They had to be used regularly'. (Elley & Mangubhai, 1981:16). Similarly, Day and Bamford (1998:129) caution that the teachers should not, under any circumstances, regard the SSR period as an opportunity for them to fulfil their administrative duties. They maintain that this undervalues reading which is exactly what SSR strives not to do

On the occasions when I found the learners without a teacher, I described and explained the project to them. The learners' positive reaction to a gentle and logical account was astonishing and prepared my mind for the final phase of the first AR cycle – that of reflecting.

Before moving to reflection, I must complete the observing phase by considering CBI next.

5.3.5.2 Observing phase of cycle 1: Content-based instruction

There has been a major shift in the language teaching staff and many of the decisions and discussions were made with people who are no longer here. Consequently, I have increased the scope of the intervention to include all subjects rather than only the languages (as had been planned initially) because all members of staff and all school subjects can benefit from CBI and can apply it in the classrooms. In this way general knowledge may also be grown, important aspects of language be developed and all the teachers trained and empowered in agreement with the aims of the project.

However, it is difficult to get hold of the staff and after Dr van Wyk's introductory lecture, the follow-up demonstrations on the basics of CBI required the turning of new sods every time. The teachers were requested to jot down (anonymously) what they had gained from the first session and which aspects they would implement. Although the answers indicated that the teachers could name some of the concepts that had been demonstrated, the answers were a little vague and confused. To be fair, one must concede that these are early days and the concepts appear to be new to the teachers. Many had difficulty in expressing themselves in English and should be told in the future that answers in Afrikaans would be welcome. No suggestions were made - and one teacher's comment that s/he would use SSR in his CBI was not encouraging.

Valiantly, the initial demonstration was followed up by regular lectures which were designed to increase audience participation as the teachers, it was hoped, grew in knowledge and confidence. Dr van Wyk arranged one of the star education students from the University of the Free State to give a demonstration lesson to a class of grade 8 learners. As in all CBI training and demonstrations, the attendance was poor, despite adequate and repeated advance warning. While the teachers said the right things, my gut feel was that they were not engaging with the new methodology. This perception was endorsed by the fact that when I requested that teachers invite me to view their efforts at CBI in their classes, only two invitations were issued. I consequently decided to interview a sampling of eight teachers individually in order to assess their understanding of CBI. The results were dismal and none could describe what CBI was. The interviews are transcribed in appendix IV:4.

While CBI would tend the reading development of all learners, *Readucate* was introduced to assist the illiterate learners. My observations follow.

5.3.5.3 Observing phase of cycle 1: *Readucate*

When the learners had been divided into classes and a trained teacher allocated to instruct them in the newly acquired *Readucate* methods, the acting phase was in place and I proceeded to describe their progress in the observing phase of AR.

The illiterate learners had been sifted from those that can read by means of a reading test (*cf* appendix I) and divided amongst the teachers who had received *Readucate* training (during the first *Readucate* training session). The classes were scheduled for Tuesdays and Thursdays after school. The attendance was very poor and I observed that not only the learners, but also the teachers were guilty of absconding. The teachers often cited unexpected intrusions and appointments as excuses and a vicious circle was set in motion: when the learners arrived there was no teacher and when the teacher arrived there were no learners. Yet, I was allocated a class and the attendance was good and the class ran regularly. It is true to say that I found that the least excuse on the learners' part kept them away. The teachers have to be able to be good motivators in order to keep the attendance high. One of the trained teachers sat passively in her classroom, and left after five minutes, without having made any attempt to seek her pupils out and motivate them to attend. Over R5 000 had been spent on her training, yet she taught not a single class before leaving the school. In total, of the first training session, three of the nine trained *Readucate* teachers were lost to the school.

The testimony to Fofosa School's success with *Readucate* has been included in appendix III and shows how, in a class of 46 grade 7 learners, eight were considered competent and 38 incompetent readers. After one term of *Readucate* (daily), the results show that 37 learners were competent and nine incompetent - a complete reversal in the class. (A letter of validation sent by the DoE to Mrs Freinkel of *Readucate* is also included in appendix III). Unlike at Fofosa, the crisis of illiteracy is

not being resolved with the current state of teaching and discipline at Wag-‘n-bietjie Secondary School.

Both sessions of *Readucate* teacher training sessions proved problematic. The teachers arrived late, were tardy in returning after the tea break and were unexpectedly absent. After the second training session, the teachers established a committee to deal with *Readucate* problems. They decided that the new classes would be taught on Fridays after school. Needless to say, none was taught and they were rescheduled to midweek. With the training having been completed in February, it took nearly *six months* before the first classes to be taught - in August 2008! On 9 October 2008, I journaled that, after a *Readucate* teacher’s untimely death, the committee had done nothing to reallocate the learners that had been in her classes. After a year of teaching, few *Readucate* trained teachers had taught more than the alphabet and the 60 sets of *Readucate* books bought for the project and given to the vice-principal could not be traced.

I perceived that some of the warnings cited by Burns in 5.3.3.2 (Planning phase of cycle 1: Determining the constraints) probably apply here: viz: disinterest amongst the teachers; extra workload resulting from the research; little local support for the research (from the parents, teachers and the SMT). It is true to say that teachers had been co-opted into the *Readucate* training, having been identified by the deputy principals and with my being unaware of their willingness or otherwise to undergo training at the time. In rereading my journal I found mention of some dragging of feet which possibly should have been heeded.

However, it is a pity that, in view of the teachers’ frustrations with so many illiterate learners in their classes, and their apparent concern for the children’s futures, the teachers are unwilling to help for an hour or two extra per week. At this point of the project, *Readucate* is the only intervention that asks the teachers for extra time - SSR, CBI and the creation of a reading culture are all part of the school day. The section that follows considers the observing phase of creating a culture of reading.

5.3.5.4 Observing phase of cycle 1: Creating a culture of reading

The acting phase of cycle 1 described the loss of the marketing student whose expertise would have been valuable. Consequently, I had to propel the campaign and, as mentioned in the acting phase, requested the assistance and support of the teachers, in particular the principal who had accepted this as part of his role definition at the meeting on 23 October 2007.

In the description of the acting phase, the ideas generated were listed (balloons were handed out, posters made by the learners, a puppet show presented, a notice board installed, a reading room requested, magazines collected, read-a-longs and voluntary 'read aloud' sessions were introduced and prizes awarded for its attendance and a toy singing donkey introduced as a mascot). The notice board was a success - its prominent position made learners aware of any information that was displayed.

This notwithstanding, it must be noted in the observing phase, that all efforts have been on my initiative, with Dr van Wyk's support and assistance. I was sentient to the fact that marketing, like other aspects of the project such as staff motivation and control over the work done, were not only beyond my field of research (which is reading development) but also beyond my power as attested in the interview with Adv. Smit (appendix II: 3.2) who warned about the legality of accepting the delegation of authority.

I became intensely aware of a hunger for books amongst the learners. An entry in my personal AR journal describes a learner attending my literacy classes (*i.e.* a child who could barely read) who held a 'read-a-long' book to her chest, stroked it and said, 'I wish I could have a book like this!' In addition, the 'read aloud' sessions on Fridays started with an audience of one solitary learner and reached a climax (after the attendance prizes had been handed out at assembly near the end of 2008) with over 50 learners crowding the library and sitting on the floor. The numbers stabilised at between 20 and 30 learners once a week.

The enthusiasm of the learners was also observed in the zeal with which the younger learners made posters and blew up balloons, and in their warm reception of a puppet show about reading organised by Dr van Wyk and me. However, the response to the appeal for magazines and books was less successful. This will be described in greater depth in the following subsection (5.3.5.5), because it is more relevant to the observation of the staff.

Before moving to the final phase of the first AR cycle (the reflecting phase), what remains is a brief observation of the roles of the teaching staff at this stage of the project.

5.3.5.5 Observing phase of cycle 1: The teaching staff

The action phase mentioned that the low morale and the problems described at the School Indaba should be addressed lest they encroach on the efficient establishment of the reading programme. The SMT agreed to address the issues of low morale, absenteeism and slack discipline with as much energy as possible.

On the initiatives of Dr van Wyk and me, a weekly tea was instituted which several teachers reported to be greatly enjoyed by the staff, but no proposal was forthcoming on any of the interventions implemented. Examples are listed below:

- Teachers were requested to attend my ‘read aloud’ sessions in the library and to come forward and do some themselves. Four teachers came to listen but none offered to read.
- Dr van Wyk and I collected several boot loads of magazines for SSR and the teachers none. The teachers complain about the lack of reading material for SSR saying, ‘All the magazines have been stolen’. One load of magazines was transferred to a teacher’s boot for delivery and never seen again.
- There is no commitment to teach literacy (*cf.* 5.3.5.3 *Readucate* above), despite the teachers’ complaints that their teaching is hindered by illiterate learners.

- The CBI training is poorly attended. Teachers walk in and out the meetings at will, answering cell phones and even eating. No excuses are proffered for absenteeism and no disciplinary action taken.
- Teachers show no enthusiasm to motivate the learners for SSR and rebuff any attempts to get them to heed the rules which, according to the minutes (see appendix II: 2) have been given and explained to them several times.
- The school is noisy, classes are unattended and teachers wander around, talking in the corridors and even warming food in the microwave oven in the staffroom during teaching periods.
- In my journal, I recorded the cynicism of a teacher who said, ‘The learners only come to reading at break because you give them biscuits!’ In truth, the number of voluntary listeners was growing with biscuits or fruit being handed out only occasionally.

The observing phase delivers us to the reflection. It is hoped that the deliberation and analysis which follows and which signals the end of the first AR cycle will indicate the way forward so that, in accordance with Figure 5.1, the second cycle will be more productive than the first.

5.3.6 Reflecting phase of cycle 1

AR, as depicted in Figure 5.1, enjoins the action researcher to ‘reflect and analyse the intervention’ as the last phase of an AR cycle. This entails that I should contemplate the issue that was defined initially and consider its evolution through the phases of planning (when the issue was still abstract in the sense that it exists as a theory on the drawing boards), via the operational, practical phase of acting, through the more passive phase of observing what happened in practice before reflecting on the cycle. After reflection, the process repeats itself in the second AR cycle.

Figure 5.1 also measures the axis of time against the axis of change, indicating that AR implies improvement (change) as the cycles progress (over time). In fact, I will drive this quest for improvement in the second cycle of AR and the consequent modifications to the actions that the reflections indicate. The ideas born from the

reflections should consider what happened in the first cycle, what can be changed (and how), in order to replan a subsequent cycle that will achieve the desired improvement, and so designate AR a worthy research methodology.

As in the preceding sections, I plan to discuss the reflections on each intervention separately, starting with SSR.

5.3.6.1 Reflecting phase of cycle 1: Sustained Silent Reading

The acting phase mentioned how, despite a slow start, the SSR settled down to a stable situation with the learners reading quietly in most instances. My observations that the teachers did not really adhere to the SSR rules and the positive reaction of the learners when I explained the value and excitement of reading to them provoked the reflections described in the following paragraphs.

My ideas and preconceptions were jolted and challenged by a conversation with one of the teachers (recorded in my AR journal) during which the teacher had said, ‘The problem is that we, the black teachers, have no culture of reading ourselves!’ The teacher described how she, reluctant and bored, had read a book during a long spell in hospital, and how surprised she had been at the joy it had given her. This prompted her to buy herself books. These words recalled the words of a different teacher whose written response to a questionnaire about the obstacles to the programme stated: ‘Some teachers themselves do not see/understand the importance of reading’ (*cf.* 5.3.5.1). This eye-opener harks back to the cultural hiatus described among the constraints in 5.3.3.2 (Planning phase of cycle 1: Determining the constraints). In the same vein, I subsequently picked up on a similar comment made by the Mpumalanga MEC for Education, Mathulare Coleman, who pronounced that, ‘The problem is that even our teachers don’t read because they did not get an education that adequately prepared them to teach and develop reading skills,’ (Mokgakane, 2008:[1]). At the time I observed this but did not ascribe it sufficient credence despite the reminder in chapter 2 (2.3.1) where the socio-cultural and emotive factors influencing English Second Language readers were mentioned. In this subsection (2.3.1) Eskey (1986:4-5) reminds us that the second language reader inevitably belongs to a culture with ideas about reading that might be very different from our own – indeed many of the

learners can be said to come from an oral culture where stories were preserved in the retelling from one generation to the next in the absence of writing. I observed that, while having been vaguely aware of this lack of reading culture among other ethnic groups, I had failed to transfer the observations made of learners to the teachers from the same book-poor culture - subconsciously making the false assumption that trained teachers would be readers. At this stage of my reflection, I queried the depth of teachers' professional training and possibly more importantly, their schooling in terms of teaching methodology, matters of urgency and discipline.

Consequently, I became alert and understood that I would have to intervene in order to rouse both the learners and the teachers to read. In response to this, I decided to do lively motivational demonstrations during the SSR classes to inspire both the teachers and learners alike. In line with this, I considered that the learners required more stimulating reading materials. These reflections will direct the initiatives for SSR introduced during cycle 2.

A positive move made by the SMT, based on the teachers' suggestions (described in 5.3.5.1 Observing phase of cycle 1: Sustained Silent Reading) to move the SSR period from the period *after* break on Fridays (when the learners lingered in weekend mood before coming to class), to Thursdays *before* break. I regarded this as an admirable and inspired move, and laud the management team for implementing the teachers' suggestions. In this way the teachers became involved as co-researchers, which is one of the aims of the project. Heeding their suggestions should improve their feelings of disempowerment and improve their morale. If these proposals can be successfully implemented, the improvement will be in line with the AR ideals of progress over time, indicated in the discussion in the first paragraph of this subsection.

The next subsection describes my reflections on the progress of CBI, the methodology which aims to empower and develop the teachers in the quest for improved reading.

5.3.6.2 Reflecting phase of cycle 1: Content-based instruction

On 10 May 2008, my AR journal details how difficult it is to monitor what is happening in teachers' classrooms without being intrusive. Yet, how else can their understanding and commitment to CBI be established? This is a particularly thorny issue because CBI is potentially one of the most significant ways in which all the desired reading outcomes specified in chapter 1 (also *cf.* 5.3.3.1 in this chapter) may be achieved.

Moreover, CBI is the methodology chosen to re-train and empower the teachers - with the retraining of teachers having been identified in this dissertation as essential to the improvement of reading (*cf.* chapter 3. This is also applies to the research questions in 5.2.1: How can the teachers be trained and their teaching practices changed in order to cultivate fluent readers?) and empowerment as one of the basic aims (*cf.* chapter 4). The application of CBI would also improve all the aspects of reading identified as lacking in chapter 1, *viz.* vocabulary, general knowledge, language and comprehension.

In the observation phase of CBI, the elusiveness of the staff in terms of attendance of training sessions and buy-in was mentioned. Many teachers arrive late. Others come and go at will. Some of the questions the teachers ask indicate that they have no idea what we are trying to do. (A teacher said, 'The learners do not have TV. That is why their general knowledge is so poor,' and added sarcastically, 'If you want to impress us, give us dictionaries!'). I considered their attitude defeatist and, as illustrated by the quotes in brackets, their preparedness to commit to the project seemed conditional. This attitude was very wearisome to me as is the fact that the legwork done over a period of more than a year had to be repeated. This was discussed at meetings with the SMT and, unfortunately, despite assurances to the contrary, there was no improvement, or disciplinary action from the management team. In a last-ditch effort to inspire the teachers, Dr van Wyk arranged for a visiting academic and expert in the field of CBI, Prof. Donna Brinton, to give the teachers an elementary introduction and demonstration of CBI in April 2009, during cycle 2.

Because the SMT seems reluctant to assist in the motivation and discipline of the teachers, the situation does not appear very optimistic and the way ahead, bleak. My deliberations brought no other insight about how to act in order to boost CBI into the second AR cycle. Hope for the second cycle of CBI rests on meeting and hearing a world-renowned expert in the field, Prof. Donna Brinton, who has agreed to help the teachers during a scheduled visit to the university.

The next paragraph considers the first cycle reflections that will inspire the second cycle concerning the attempted *Readucate* intervention that is aimed to teach the illiterate learners to read.

5.3.6.3 Reflecting phase of cycle 1: *Readucate*

The observing phase recorded the disappointing progress in the running of the literacy programme, *Readucate*.

During the observing phase of *Readucate* (5.3.5.3) I mentioned that teachers had been co-opted into the *Readucate* training, and that those chosen had been identified by the deputy principals with my being aware of neither the criteria used for their selection nor their willingness (or otherwise) to undergo training at the time. (However, I did not yet know the teachers in order to be able to make suggestions but did specify that dedicated teachers should be chosen). I also reported in the observing phase (5.3.5.3) that, on rereading my journal, I had noticed that some teachers were dragging their feet when attending the training course. This should possibly have been heeded as a warning. The aspects relating to the selection of the teachers (described above), together with the additional work entailed by attending the training course and presenting the classes to the learners which were described in the constraints to the programme (*cf.* 5.3.3.2), could be partly responsible for the teachers' lack of application. This being so, it may be concluded that this type of training should be entered into less glibly. However, at the time, the teachers all verbally endorsed the programme and empowerment was a common refrain among them. In addition, without some internal intervention to help the illiterate learners, it is a conundrum to know how else the problem of illiteracy at high school level could be solved.

In the running of the classes, the management performed none of the monitoring (I was aware of roll call being taken on about three occasions by a learner who had been seconded to do so by the vice-principal) or motivational tasks suggested (which they had undertaken at the meetings with the researchers (*cf.* appendix II)).

In order to salvage the situation, I considered the suggestions that had been made several times by the teachers on various occasions, (at meetings and in individual conversations diarised in my journal) and requested that *Readucate* be presented during school hours. However, this would depend on the principal's approval. This request was made at a meeting where, coincidentally, the SMT put forward the same proposal. Once again the suggestions of the teachers had contributed to a refinement of the practical applications of these interventions. Consequently, for the second cycle of this project, *Readucate* would run during school hours (albeit only once in a seven day cycle) and so, the first AR cycle concerning *Readucate* ended on an optimistic note.

5.3.6.4 Reflecting phase of cycle 1: Creating a culture of reading

How to create a culture of reading in the school was one of the aims and research questions in this project. The acting phase of cycle one mentioned that, despite the principal's acceptance of the role of motivator of the teachers and learners in all aspects of the project, all of the ideas described thus far (*cf.* 5.3.4.4 Acting phase of cycle 1: Creating a culture of reading) had been initiated by me.

During my contemplation, I considered the marketing attempts described in 5.3.4.4 (puppet show, balloons) as being efforts on a grandiose scale - in the sense that they were spectacles to grab the learners' attention with their flamboyance and amusement value - but this style of marketing tends to be superficial and its effect short lived. While these ostentatious motivational attempts obviously have their place, they lack the depth that can be achieved subtly in each lesson, with the gentle persistence and persuasion of a passionate well-trained teacher in a disciplined classroom backed up

by methodologies such as CBI, and based on the teacher's own fervour. In the same way that I cannot 'police' how much CBI is being implemented in each classroom, I cannot show or force the promotion of reading in the teachers' classrooms.

Thus, I reflected that it was impossible for me to grow a true culture of reading (*i.e.* the classroom motivation described in the previous paragraph) on my own because of my limited direct contact with the learners. I considered that the best I could do, would be to establish a venue where I could make direct contact with the learners and try to build a culture of reading for pleasure as a demonstration model to the teachers who, I hoped, could eventually take over, once the project had gained momentum. In this way, I wished to lead by example. Despite my brief to work with the teachers and not the learners, I hoped to reach the staff in a roundabout way. (cf. the research question: How can the problems of attitude and motivation amongst the teachers be addressed so that the project will run successfully after my withdrawal?)

As mentioned in the observing phase (5.3.5.4), I had successfully implemented a day for reading aloud for pleasure at break. In view of requests from the learners, the hunger for reading, the lack of an active library at school and the reasons described in the previous paragraph, I reflected that I would like to increase the number of voluntary reading sessions available to the learners in the second cycle, and that I should, once again, ask for my own classroom to be used as a reading room.

The problem of how to involve the teachers in creating a culture of reading still remains and it leads to the phase of reflecting on the teaching staff.

5.3.6.5 Reflecting phase of cycle 1: The teaching staff

From the report on the teaching staff in the acting phase 5.3.4.5, it can be concluded that at this stage of the project, the teachers and the leadership of the school lie at the kernel of the reading project's lack of progress at the school. At this juncture it is valuable to reiterate the words of Condy (2008:610) who avers that 'literacy achievement depends crucially on the nature and quality of instruction that learners

receive in the classroom’. (cf. chapter 2; 2.3.3). (This quote is also pertinent to the discussion on creating a culture of reading in the classroom in 5.3.6.4). In addition, Condy emphasises, ‘the quality of the principal, the level of teacher commitment and the extent of community involvement’ are the ‘most powerful factors’ that shape how a school is run (and implicitly on the success of the reading programme currently being undertaken).

After all, my role in the reading project at the school is to train and empower the teachers. I remind myself that the fact that the teachers have given no cooperation is not of my making. On the occasion that I invited a representative from the education department and the chairman of the SGB to attend a difficult meeting about the problems experienced in eliciting cooperation from the teachers and the SMT, a representative of the DoE admonished the principal by asking, ‘If you didn’t want to burden your staff with extra work, why did you ask the university for help?’ I had been invited by the principal to improve reading; the chosen interventions were all in place and yet there seemed to be little effort from the teachers. I wondered whether the teachers who were doing well could be acknowledged and perhaps be used to start other classes off well.

At this point it might be valuable to reflect on attitude and motivation (cf. also the research questions in 5.2.1) as discussed in chapter 2 (2.3.3) where the remark was made that, ‘It would appear that, for this project, the problem of attitude and motivation is twofold: at Wag-’n-bietjie Secondary School: both the teachers and the students are in need of this powerful instrument’. Chapter 2 also cites Day and Bamford (1998:22) who differentiate between *attitude* and *motivation*. They specify that the nature of attitude is evaluative – referring to whether one regards something with favour or disfavour. It is clear that the teachers’ attitudes towards the school, the SMT and the learners are negative.

Understanding the source of the teachers’ attitudes is the first step to solving the problem. In my reflections, I consider the data gathered from the teachers during the preliminary questionnaires (cf. 5.3.1.1 in this chapter). In 5.3.1.1 I divided the problems into two categories: those pertaining to the learners and those pertaining to the school/education system. It becomes clear at this stage of the project that the

reading interventions address the problems with the learners only. The poor attitude of the teachers is caused by factors over which I have little control and no authority and I dealt with this in the following ways:

- The SMT has been requested to lead, discipline and communicate with the research team and the teachers (I have offered to organise a mentorship and have supplied literature in order to assist them).
- I have requested help from the DoE (a representative was invited to attend several meetings, and attended one).
- The SGB has been requested to intervene (the chairperson attended a meeting, and assisted somewhat but has limited powers. Another member failed to arrive or excuse himself from a meeting that he had been asked to attend).
- The alumni have been approached for support: they supplied the data from the School Indaba but did not return phone calls when contacted and their representative missed a meeting to which he had been invited, with no excuse.

(The involvement of the DOE and other stakeholders was endorsed by Prof. Peter Rosseel) (*cf.* appendixII:3.6). Bamford and Day (1998:22) maintain that any attitude may be changed subject to variables such as how strong an attitude is, other attitudes and the source of the attitude. The source of the attitude has been discussed above. The other aspects (how strong an attitude is and other attitudes), I cannot but speculate upon. These may be general such as cultural or personal attitudes. And, with a teaching staff of about 35, this is unfeasible.

Among the offers Dr van Wyk and I made to the SMT was that of a mentor to assist with the management problems. It was tactfully suggested that an ex-headmaster of a top achieving school be called in to assist the SMT with the school management. This was done after the School Indaba when the problems with management and communication had been raised by people other than by Dr van Wyk and me, and the subject was thus out in the open. Such a suggestion would also be in line with my prerogative to empower the teachers. It was turned down.

Despite the above, the SMT should be given credit for the excellent suggestions for improvement in the presentation of *Reeducate* and SSR (discussed under the relevant headings above). One of the deputies came forward to take the reins (the principal

seconded all authority in terms of the reading to the deputies) and, without this deputy, the project would have died young. The last meeting with the SMT at the end of 2008 was positive and the spirit better. Added refinements such as offers of tea and biscuits were a significant improvement. The SMT have attended meetings punctually (during the first 15 months they were consistently late), and for the first time placed items on the agenda of their own accord. Private conversations with Prof. Wilfred Greyling (the then professor of English, UFS, *cf.* appendix II: 3.3) assured Dr. van Wyk and me that, despite apparent slow progress, in a subtle yet steady and gradual manner, change was happening. Accordingly, I hoped that this augured well for the second cycle which is described below.

5.4.7 Conclusions and results: cycle 1

All the preceding subheadings describing the phases of cycle 1 (5.3.3 to 5.3.6) have alluded to Figure 5.1, which is a schematic representation of the phases of AR. This has enabled me to pinpoint my progress while working through the AR phases as meticulously as possible. Accordingly, the following short section is congruent with the final injunction on Figure 5.1 to *Report results* before moving on to cycle 2 which starts with the words *Re-engage with real world situation*. By reporting the results, this brief discussion ties up the threads of the research thus far so that the value of cycle 1 may be qualified and the second cycle begin with all the facts at hand.

One of the most straightforward inferences drawn from cycle one is the value of Sustained Silent Reading as a first-rate reading tool: SSR is not only relatively easy to implement, but also seems to be one of the most successful interventions (despite teachers' refusal to follow the prescriptions) as attested by the following contentions.

The Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School's 2008 matriculation results showed an improvement of over 30% on the 2007 results. With the 2008 results coinciding with the first throughput of the new Outcomes Based Education curriculum, one could argue that the improvement might be false and a coincidental result of the change in curriculum, however four factors point to SSR as having made a positive difference:

- The other high school in the same township, Watervalboven School, with a similar learner profile, applied to me for assistance with reading. The teachers

at Watervalboven School quoted the teachers at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School who, apparently, attribute the improvement to SSR.

- During the 43rd annual TESOL convention on 26 March 2009 in Denver, Colorado, USA, Dr van Wyk interviewed Prof. Bill Grabe, professor of linguistics at Northern Arizona University, USA. Dr van Wyk expressed her doubt that the improved matriculation results at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School could be attributed to SSR. (SSR was the only intervention that had been applied to grade 12. The others had targeted the lower grades and were not yet fully operational during 2007-2008). Prof. Grabe stated his firm conviction that the SSR had indeed played a major role.
- Writing about the 2008 matriculation results in *Mail and Guardian* online, Charlene Smith (2007:1) refers to the 62,5% national pass rate and observes that, 'this is somewhat *lower* than what has been achieved in recent years', and that, '[t]he pass rate has declined each year since 2004; in 2007 the pass rate was 65,2%, [as the] Minister of Education Naledi Pandor unblushingly tells us' (italicised emphasis and brackets inserted by me). In contrast, the results at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School improved from a pass rate of 52% in 2007 (below the national average) to 88% in 2008 (considerably above the national average). The progress at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School runs counter to the national trend.
- The results of the *Book Flood* experiment described by Elley and Mangubhai (*cf.* chapter 3, 3.2.3) support the improved examination results.

I admit that these examples may be criticised as anecdotal, yet hope that support from four such diverse sources endorses the assertion of success. It must be remembered that proving the improvement quantitatively in the short term is not the aim of this project; rather it is a long haul to change results by means of reading and empowering the teachers in the long term. It is very significant that pre and post-testing of learners in grade 9 in 2009 shows a definite improvement in reading after nearly two years of intervention. This is reported in more detail elsewhere.

One of the most remarkable insights gained during cycle 1 was described during the reflecting phase on SSR when I was astounded to realise that the lack of a culture of reading extends beyond the learners to the teachers themselves. If truth be told, this

acuity may account for some of the lack of ‘buy-in’ described during all the interventions of cycle 1. In the light of this insight, all the interventions (SSR, CBI, the growth of a culture of reading and *Reeducate*) will have to be modified in such a way as to accommodate these teachers in order to accomplish the desired positive change over time as the project moves out of cycle 1 and through cycle 2. Examples of some adaptations have been described and consist of *i.a.* finding more stimulating reading materials for the learners and giving demonstrations to both teachers and pupils. I have also considered starting a staff library.

The lack of a reading culture among teacher led me to query the depth of teachers’ professional training in terms of teaching methodology (the principal believes in drilling and repetition, ‘the good, old-fashioned way’) and possibly more importantly, their own schooling in their perceptions and experience of matters such as urgency and discipline. Many of the teachers grew up and studied during the apartheid era and received the inferior education dealt to black and ‘coloured’ people and, although the data gathered implicate the SMT in failing to lead the school, Wag-’n-bietjie Secondary School has a proud history during which it was led successfully by coloured people from the community. I bewail the lack of communication, the litter, teachers lingering on the verandas, smoking, the absenteeism and failure to attend meetings that go undisciplined. If one extends this line of thinking, the DoE also comes under the magnifying glass. Smith’s newspaper article after the release of the 2008 matriculation results reiterates one of the constraints cited in 5.3.3.2:

The unions also have to be accountable. The South African Democratic Teachers’ Union has succeeded in building a generation of teachers who simply don’t care. It’s important that worker’s rights are protected but not that they are so over-protected the under-performers can never be fired and the future of children is wrecked because they don’t receive adequate education.

Various factors prodded me to consider questionable methodology as a problem with the teaching at Wag-’n-bietjie Secondary School (including the principal’s comments cited earlier in this paragraph). One of the most significant factors influencing my thinking was the realisation while researching this dissertation of how the definition – and the consequent understanding - of reading has changed since the 1980s (*cf.*

chapter 2). The Development Bank of South Africa's (DBSA) *Education Roadmap: Focus on schooling system* mentions that, 'The most common form of reading in these classes consisted of teachers (sic) writing 3 or 4 sentences on the board and then leading the reading of these, with children following in chorus'. (2008:26).

I infer that all teachers except, perhaps, the very youngest are ill-equipped to teach reading, assuming that the institutions at which the most recently qualified teachers studied are au fait with the latest thinking and methodologies. It becomes apparent how important retraining and refresher courses are lest teachers become fossilised in their profession. Indeed, the DBSA's *Roadmap* emphasises the same point, insisting that, 'Effective teacher development is critical' (2008:43). The successful application of CBI would put the teachers at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School at the top of their profession in terms of training. It is important to reiterate that the SGB and the alumni have been fully informed of the problems encountered. Their hands are tied. I have also kept the representative of the DoE updated about the impending disaster in terms of academic proficiency unless reading at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School is improved and he consulted Prof. Greyling in this regard in November 2008. (*cf.* Prof. Greyling's analysis of the reading tests in appendix I).

The ineptitude of the teachers described in cycle 1 points to the importance of having simple systems in place so that incoming members of staff may be incorporated into the reading programme and the prescriptions of each intervention. I hope to leave the school with these systems in place, including the test and memorandum to sift the incoming grade 8 learners each year so that those who are functionally illiterate can be diverted to *Readucate* classes. In so doing, it is hoped to fine-tune the all interventions during the second cycle of AR which is described next.

Despite my gloom at the sad state of the teachers that has been described in cycle 1, I recorded several positive moves that have been documented in the relevant sections above (*e.g.* the change of timeslot for SSR and *Readucate*; a reading room has been allocated). These were changes initiated to improve the efficacy of the interventions,

and thus we see the wheels of AR cycles moving (albeit ponderously) in the desired upward spiral – that of change for the better in cycle 2.

5.4 Cycle 2

Preliminary contact with Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School had been made at the end of 2006 and the first AR cycle for this reading project kicked off in the new year, when the schools opened in mid-January 2007. At the end of cycle 1, the reflecting phase recounted the sluggish start to all the interventions and the subsequent difficulty in picking up speed during that (the first) cycle. If truth be told, in December 2007 my disappointment was such that I came close to abandoning the project. Indeed, this frustration is a constant theme in my AR journal (e.g. both *Readucate* and SSR took *six months* to implement after the intention (SSR), and training (*Readucate*) had been completed), climaxing in the documentation of the headmaster's comment that my 'sense of urgency' was unreasonable. I perceived this as an indication of differences in cultural attitudes that are difficult to resolve, and realised it was a sensitive matter to address. Whatever the truth, cycle 1 was completed over a period of two years: from January 2007 until December 2008. Obviously, systems in place and momentum gained in cycle 1 fuelled the project and cycle 2 was completed in less than a year - between January and September 2009, with my remaining in contact in order to drive lagging enthusiasm.

For cycle 2, the following data-gathering techniques were the same as those used in cycle 1:

- interviews and discussion with and questionnaires from the teachers;
- written reports from the teachers;
- consultation with experts in different fields (Prof. Peter Rosseel, Mr Paul Cassar, Prof. Donna Brinton; Prof. Lucius Botes). These are referred to in the text below and extra information supplied in appendix II:3.
- meetings with the teachers, in particular a critical reflective plenary with the teachers but without the presence of the head or deputies (suggested by Prof. Rosseel and described later);
- tests of grade 9 learners (*i.e.* the 2008 grade 8 learners who had been tested early in 2008) to measure any improvement in their reading in a period just short of two years.

A great deal of the data collected in cycle 1 is still relevant, and indeed spills over into cycle 2. Also, much of the data from cycle 1 are validated in cycle 2 (e.g. the lack of

leadership becomes palpable when, after three requests, the principal still had no plan for sustainability). This validation adds depth and credibility to the data and conclusions in cycle 1. In addition to data gathered in this way, I also interviewed several experts in different fields to sound their perceptions and reactions to the problems that I encountered during the second cycle. These discussions are described in appendix II: 3.

It has become an established practice during this chapter on the AR cycles to pinpoint the project's progress by referring to the different phases of the particular cycle as depicted in Figure 5.1. Having reported the results of the first AR cycle above, I start my engagement with cycle 2 with the directive to 'Re-engage with real-world situation', from where my redefinition of the issue will relate to the results of the first AR cycle.

5.4.1 'Re-engage with the real-world situation' and 'Define the issue'

What follows is a brief summary of the state of affairs after the completion of the first AR cycle. In so doing, I will 'Re-engage with the real-world situation' at the school. In addition, the issues that need to be addressed will be mentioned ('Define the issue') so that the planning phase can be considered. Despite the inevitable overlap between the different subsections, the interventions will be considered individually and in the same order as described in the first cycle. Accordingly, cycle 2 will correspond with cycle 1.

Sustained Silent Reading is running quite well and is the most successful aspect of the project thus far. At the end of cycle 1, I realised that the teachers do not value reading enough and lack the motivation to adhere to the ground rules for SSR and so I intend to intervene to inspire the learners, class by class.

Content-based instruction has been marred by dismal attendance of the workshops and demonstrations. Questionnaires in cycle 1 revealed that the teachers had no idea of what CBI was. I hope that the proposed visit from an internationally acclaimed expert in April 2009 will help inspire the teachers.

Readucate's progress has been slow because of the reluctance of the learners and the teachers to commit to teaching and learning after school. During the last SMT meeting of cycle 1, it was agreed to incorporate the *Readucate* classes into the school day.

The creation of a culture of reading rested on my shoulders in cycle 1. The 'read aloud' sessions have been successful and I hope to increase the number of readings per week and seek a reading room. It has been suggested on numerous occasions that the teachers involve themselves in reading to the learners, but they seem unwilling. They have been invited to visit during the readings but have not done so. The problem of sustainability will have to be solved in cycle 2.

The teachers are reluctant to participate in any of the interventions that I have offered. This is a result of poor discipline, a lack of accountability, low morale and weak leadership (*cf.* the data collected from School Indaba and from the teachers, above). In addition, I have been nudged by comments in my journal which have helped me develop tentative observations into insights. One such reflection was to consider whether the teachers have had adequate training. If not, and if their behaviour as teachers has been moulded by poor training; and their own perceptions, experiences and beliefs about what 'happens' at school based on their own experience in similarly poorly disciplined schools, they can hardly be blamed for the way in which they teach. In other words, the school culture might be based on their experiences at schools with a low work ethic and no accountability: none of the teachers seems embarrassed or ashamed to arrive late for classes, to leave a class on its own, to linger on the verandas smoking or talking while the noise coming from the classrooms is deafening. The *Education Roadmap: focus on schooling system* released in November 2008 supports these observations, and comments that 'Effective teacher development is critical' (2008:26), and cites the DoE priorities in 2008 as, *i.a.* 'principal and teacher training and increasing the number of Dinaledi high schools [that] prioritise mathematics, science and literacy' (2008:16). (The Dinaledi schools project that aims to increase access to higher grade maths and science in underprivileged schools has contributed to a steady increase in the pass rate in those subjects (SouthAfrica.Info: [1]).

I see the heartbreak of learners' becoming increasingly sidelined from the rest of the world where today's technology is out of date by tomorrow – and the principal refuses to generate a sense of urgency. It becomes clear that the theory and practice of change management needs to be considered.

The paragraphs above have established the status quo at the beginning of cycle 2. From this starting point, I move to the planning phase of cycle 2.

5.4.2 Planning phase of cycle 2

During the first AR cycle there was a considerable run up to the planning phase. Fortunately, this is not so in cycle 2: the momentum gained in the first cycle makes the progress less ponderous than at the outset of the first cycle, and ideas generated at the end of cycle 1 fuel cycle 2. Instead, I am concerned with the refinement of the interventions that are in place during cycle 2.

5.4.2.1 Planning phase of cycle 2: Sustained Silent Reading

In order to improve on SSR which was functioning quite smoothly at the inception of cycle 2, I considered how to stimulate both the teachers and learners to become passionate about books and reading. This decision had been made during reflecting phase of cycle 1 and it was resolved to prepare motivational lessons for the staff and learners and to buy as many diverse high-interest, well-illustrated books as possible, so that the learners could read at the level *i minus 1* (*cf.* chapter 3: 3.2.2). It must be mentioned that my decision to 'climb in' to rouse the teachers and learners during SSR not only addresses improving SSR but also helps create a culture of reading. My resolution to integrate SSR and the creation of a culture of reading in my planned motivational lessons was referred to in the observing phase of cycle 1. To this purpose, I reiterated my request for a reading room (which had been unsuccessful in cycle 1).

It was decided to initiate the motivational classes with the lower grades in order to develop a body of reading learners from the lower grades upwards because improving reading, learning to read and creating a culture of reading are all long-term goals. I developed a lesson to present to each class in turn with the teacher present. The session would contain the following elements:

- The singing donkey and the words of the song so the learners could read and sing along. (This was devised as an ice-breaker and to create the perception that reading is fun).
- A ‘chat’ about the value of reading. This was kept short and was referred to often during the lesson. (This was to develop the long term value of reading).
- A tactful discussion of differing cultural attitudes towards reading. (This was to try and change attitudes towards reading).
- Real examples of my own children’s books with the birthday and Christmas inscriptions. (This demonstrated the value attributed to books by people - as representatives of certain cultures - that give books as gifts. Learners were fascinated by the realia, especially the dates and intimate personal inscriptions).
- Telling the story and showing the pictures in one of the humorous children’s stories given as gifts (above). (This was to show by means of the text, the fantasy, the humour and the illustrations that reading was fun).
- Examples of fun books for young people. A great variety of high-interest, beautifully illustrated books on all levels to be made available in the reading room. (This was to show the learners what was available to them, close at hand).
- A ‘read-along’ with a CD and learners sharing books containing the text. (This was to help learners read easily and share a reading experience *cf.* read-along in chapter 2).
- Friendly but firm discipline and an insistence on mutual respect. (This was an attempt to show that discipline is necessary despite having fun).
- An invitation to the reading room at break for fun reading of the books available.

The practical application of this plan will be discussed in the acting phase of SSR. Before this, I will consider the planning phase of CBI.

5.4.2.2 Planning phase of cycle 2: Content-based instruction

The phase of cycle 1 that reflected upon the implementation of CBI to improve reading at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School concluded on a dismal note because Dr van Wyk (who assisted in the demonstration of CBI) and I were unable to reach and inspire the teachers to execute CBI, and both felt despair when questionnaires completed by the staff revealed that they could neither define nor describe the process. This, and indeed all the poor attendance of all CBI workshops, fed my growing malaise with the level of teaching methodology at the school and the consequent need for retraining described in 5.4.7 (Conclusions and results: cycle 1).

Accordingly, we pinned their hopes on the visit of Prof. Donna Brinton, an internationally acclaimed expert on CBI, who agreed to give a talk and demonstration to the teachers in April 2009. Dr. van Wyk promised that those who had attended the lecture and demonstration would be awarded a certificate of attendance which would enrich their CVs (in accordance with the stated aim of the project to retrain and thus empower the teachers).

Fortunately, it was possible to plan Prof. Brinton's visit well in advance so that the teachers could make arrangements to attend. In addition, Dr van Wyk and I were able to prime the teachers and the SMT about how privileged they were to be able to attend a demonstration and talk first hand from an academic of Prof. Brinton's stature.

However, before Prof. Brinton's visit can be considered, the planning phase of *Readucate* must be reviewed.

5.4.2.3 Planning phase of cycle 2: *Readucate*

It will be remembered that by the end of cycle 1, *Readucate* was running on empty: the attendance of both teachers and learners was inadequate to maintain a successful teaching dynamism. At the end of cycle 1 the SMT announced their plan to redesign the time table so that so that the *Readucate* programme could run during school time in 2009. This was the only hope of helping the illiterate learners.

In line with the sifting process established in cycle 1, the SMT and I resolved to test all the incoming grade 8 learners so that the non-readers could be separated from

those who could read adequately. The new grade 8 learners would be tested using the same test that had been applied in 2008 and which was based on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). (It will be recalled that the initial testing had been too difficult with a test based on the learners' prescribed textbooks). Once the learners had been sorted, the weakest would be allocated to the *Readucate*-trained teachers. It was proposed that the remaining learners would be given journals to write and that I would give the teaching staff a short talk and suggestion on the theory and practice of writing journals (*cf.* chapter 3; 3.4.1).

With the planning phase of the *Readucate* intervention in cycle 2 now complete, I will proceed to describe my designs for creating a culture of reading at the school.

5.4.2.4 Planning phase of cycle 2: Creating a culture of reading

In cycle 1, I had started reading aloud to the learners - with an initial audience of one. This swelled to a record of 50 but reached a constant of at least 20 learners who requested that the reading be done more frequently. One of the problems of reading in the library was that meetings were often held there. With a reading room this would be obviated and I felt that I could try and create a special place just for reading. The idea of reading taking place in a 'special' place adds to the value and status of reading and also has practical implications: books and equipment can be stored there. Because of the problem of theft at the school, Dr van Wyk and I resolved to provide lock-up cupboards for the reading room and several other classrooms and a security door for the reading room, using some of the money donated by Raubex Construction.

I would like to reiterate that the creation of a culture of reading overlaps with the desired outcomes of SSR, and appeal to the reader of this document to consider them together. For example, the motivational lesson described in 5.4.2.1 above was conceived to influence the learners' behaviour in SSR but also serves to inspire extensive reading and implicitly, should nurture a culture of reading. In addition I would like to point out that the research questions (concerning background knowledge, the training of teachers, teachers' and learners' attitude and motivation, and the teachers' involvement as co-researchers) are also dealt with here.

I realised that the ultimate sustainability of the reading room will be the litmus test of the teachers' commitment to their calling and of their prior undertaking to generate a culture of reading. Accordingly, I resolved to incorporate this in my planning of how to approach the teaching staff.

5.4.2.5 Planning phase of cycle 2: The teaching staff

Despite the sad state of the teachers that was described in cycle 1, I recorded several positive moves that have been documented in the relevant sections above. These were changes initiated to improve the efficacy of the interventions, and pointed to the desired change for the better that AR strives after. Moreover, any positive initiative from the teaching body was in accordance with the stated concept and aim of the role of the teachers as colleagues and co-researchers.

My experience with one of the deputies was positive; and my growing perception that I was, perhaps, judging the teachers by my own standards prompted me to plan a comprehensive questionnaire in which I hoped to ascertain:

- the teaching body's perceptions, understanding and commitment to each intervention since the inception of the research study, *i.e.* how aware, unswerving and engaged they are;
- what, where and when they had studied and how they felt about continual study in the teaching field, *i.e.* the value of their education, their level of professionalism; whether they felt they needed extra training and their attitude towards teaching;
- what they would be prepared to do for the reading programme in order to make it sustainable;
- any suggestions they might have to improve the project before I left.

I planned to investigate my perceptions that extra staff training was necessary, the teacher's level of dedication to the children entrusted to their care. I hoped that the questions would help point the way. Besides these, I wanted to consider what the teachers really wanted me to do before the research project was complete and I withdrew from the school – a major concern being the sustainability of a project that had been running at the school for nearly three years at that stage.

Prof. Peter Rosseel from Belgium, an authority in the field of educational change, suggested a critical reflective plenary session be held with the staff without the presence of the head and the two deputies. (*cf.* appendix II: 3.6). This was prompted by the awareness of the low morale and deep dissatisfaction at the school which was ruining the chances of implementing the reading interventions and, in so doing, it was hoped to gauge whether and how the teachers could be helped.

The planning stage of cycle 2 now makes way for the acting phase which will be introduced in the paragraphs below.

5.4.3 Acting phase of cycle 2

Although acting involves the implementation of the strategic plan, it must be remembered that the action should not be completely controlled by plans: rather, the action merely looks to the planning phase for its rationale – hence the advantage of great flexibility in research afforded by the AR methodology. Heydenrych's words (2001:[10]) that, 'Due to this flexibility, negotiation and compromise may be necessary. Change may be slow and build in small steps' both encourage and warn us.

The acting phase of Sustained Silent Reading will be considered first.

5.4.3.1 Acting phase of cycle 2: Sustained Silent Reading

As described at the end of cycle 1, it was decided to change the SSR period from Fridays after break to before break on Thursdays because the new time would be more conducive to a serious attitude towards reading. This was implemented in cycle 2 and represents the AR ideal of an improvement over time and, as previously stated involved the teachers as co-researchers.

In subsection 5.4.2.1 (the planning phase of sustained silent reading), it was resolved to present motivational sessions to excite the learners' and teachers' interest in reading, starting with the grade 8 classes and moving steadily upwards, grade by grade. I made my presentations on Thursdays during the SSR period. Of great consequence to the SSR programme was the purchase of a vast number of high-

interest, well-illustrated children's books of varying levels of difficulty and covering the widest possible range of topics (as specified in the discussion on SSR in chapter 2). These were to be made available to the learners during SSR and at break time in the reading room, as were a few sets of 'read-along' books with accompanying CDs. (The new books and the 'read-along' books also contributed to creating a culture of reading). I incorporated these books into my motivational demonstration lesson.

With the allocation of a reading room that was more suitable than the large disused woodwork room offered previously, I scored a hat-trick. At last it was possible to knit the threads of motivational lessons, new books and a reading room into a pattern that benefitted both SSR and the creation of a culture of reading at the school. I could use the room for storage of the books for SSR and for private enjoyment, and intended to use it as a reading haven for the learners at break where the stories could be read.

The progress of SSR is continued in the section on the observing phase of cycle 2. Meanwhile, the acting phases of CBI, *Readucate*, creating a culture of reading and the development of the teaching staff will be explored in this order.

5.4.3.2 Acting phase of cycle 2: Content-based instruction

In the planning phase, Prof. Donna Brinton's visit was viewed as a last-ditch attempt to breathe life into the enactment of CBI.

As author of several books and articles on CBI (*cf.* appendix B: 3.5), Prof. Brinton is a linguist of world renown, and a specialist in the field of CBI. During a working visit to the University of the Free State in April 2009, she agreed to present a workshop to the teachers at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School, when so requested by Dr van Wyk. This action had been planned towards the end of 2008 and the teachers invited to participate. This action is in line with the stated aims of empowering and developing the teaching staff described in chapter 1 and the research questions posed above in this chapter.

Accordingly, two hours were allocated during which Prof. Brinton explained CBI and presented a simple demonstration of a basic CBI lesson, augmented by many alternative activities that could be used in the same or a similar lesson.

Subsequent training sessions were scheduled for the acting phase of CBI in the second cycle. However, at the time of writing they had not yet been implemented because my repeated requests for a date failed to bear fruit. In addition, the questionnaires completed by the teachers indicated that few wanted more training sessions. Comment and analysis on the state of affairs will be made in the observing and reflecting phases in which a final attempt to train the teachers will be mooted.

Thus ends the acting phase of CBI and I proceed to consider the same phase of *Readucate*.

5.4.3.3 Acting phase of cycle 2: *Readucate*

I was excited to have the *Readucate* classes changed to a period during the school day. After the sifting had been completed (by means of the established and validated test, *cf.* the planning phase), the learners were divided among the trained teachers.

In the planning section, journaling was proposed as an activity for the learners who had not been allocated to *Readucate*. I explained the idea of journaling to the teachers, as planned; and exercise books were bought from the sponsor's funds and distributed to the teachers. In addition, I supplied the teachers with a list of suggested journaling topics and motivational techniques.

It was difficult for me to check on the progress of the literacy classes because each teacher taught his/ her class during a different period and the school is on a seven-day rotating timetable, with periods varying in length and starting time from one week to the next. I requested the times in vain. After some time (and numerous requests for information) had passed, Deputy A assured me that the classes were up and running. Deputy B was requested to report on the progress of each class.

The acting phase of *Readucate* concludes seemingly on a positive note. From here we discuss the enactment of the creation of a culture of reading at the school.

5.4.3.4 Acting phase of cycle 2: Creating a culture of reading

The planning phase recorded my delight when, at last, a reading room was allocated. This was where I hoped to create a haven where reading could be nurtured.

During the planning phase (5.4.2.4), it was mentioned that the creation of a culture of reading should be considered in tangent with SSR, because of the huge overlap. This is seen in the increase of the number of voluntary learners in the reading room after successful demonstrations of the value of reading during the SSR period (*cf.* 5.4.3.1). In order to create a stimulating atmosphere and to display this room as the entrance to a different world, the door of the reading room was painted red, the floor scrubbed and polished, a carpet and table cloths from friends, and the room decorated with movie posters, A.A. Milne characters (Winnie-the-Pooh and friends) and flowers. I played music when the bell rang to invite learners into the reading room.

Without a doubt, this acting phase was an exciting part of the project and managed to maintain its dynamism and vitality. I opened the reading room daily to learners who came of their own accord. The activities in the reading room were varied each day. I printed out Disney songs and made a songbook so that a sing-along became an exercise in reading too. Other activities comprised the read-along that had started in cycle 1, read aloud (by the teacher) and silent reading of a variety of magazines (*i.a.* *Knowledge, National Geographic, Soccer, Rugby, Ideas, Ideas, You, Huisgenoot, People, Your Family, Popular Mechanics*) and the high interest books that had been bought for the project. It was hoped that some of the reading matter provided would improve the learners' general knowledge which the teachers had identified as a problem (*cf.* chapter 1).

The teachers were invited to spend a few minutes sharing the singing and the books, and listening to stories. Few came. And so, this is an appropriate lead into a consideration of the teachers.

5.4.3.5 Acting phase of cycle 2: The teaching staff

In the acting phase of cycle 2 data were garnered in three ways: by means of the critical reflective plenary, an exhaustive questionnaire and informal discussions with the teachers. It is hoped that the data collected will examine whether the staff has

been fairly judged. These conclusions will be discussed in the observing phase and suggest how to proceed (the 'reflecting phase').

During the critical reflective plenary meeting suggested by Prof. Peter Rosseel (mentioned in the planning phase), the teachers worked in groups to answer the following questions:

1. What would you like to experience in your teaching at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School? (This refers to your calling as a teacher and your job satisfaction).
2. Would you like for the learners? (What is your vision for them?)
3. What problems hinder you in achieving the above?
4. Will the reading programme be sustainable after I have left? (This examines the commitment)

Besides the critical reflective plenary, the teaching body filled in an exhaustive questionnaire which probed their attitudes towards reading, the interventions in place and their commitment to them. It also investigated the teachers' levels of education and their attitude towards ongoing training. (The questionnaire and a summary of the answers are available in appendix IV:5). Complementary to the questionnaires, I sought out certain teachers in order to discuss matters arising from the questionnaires and to try to drive the commitment to sustainability of the project by one-on-one contact.

The results of the data gathered will be discussed in the following subsection, that of the observing phase of cycle 2.

5.4.4 Observing phase of cycle 2

The phase of observation essentially concerns examining the effects of critically informed action. Because I will never be able to anticipate all the pitfalls imposed by the 'real-life' setting that is fundamental to AR, observation should be done with great circumspection, great vigilance and as meticulously as possible. Thorough observation informs the reflection in the final phase and it is here that the hoped-for change that is the purpose of AR will be contemplated. Accordingly, the interventions of this project will be observed one at a time.

5.4.4.1 Observing phase of cycle 2: Sustained Silent Reading

The change of time for SSR from Fridays after break to Thursdays before break was successful. Learners' punctuality improved and it seemed that their concentration was better too. This was indeed a change for the better and an example of the positive cooperation of the SMT with the researcher as colleagues.

The motivational lessons described above were extremely well-received by both learners and teachers, several of whom expressed their appreciation, astonishment and delight. The learners were remarkable in their keenness to handle the books and thoroughly enjoyed the 'read-along' – sitting in silence and even pointing to the text. However, occasionally teachers seemed uncooperative and disinterested – one teacher had earphones in his ears.

I found moving from classroom to classroom with packs of books and paraphernalia hard work, especially when teachers were absent and classes had been moved unexpectedly. I noted that, while I would like to prepare a box of 40 of the new books for each SSR class each week, counting these books out and in could not really be done by one person alone. In addition, the number of boxes being collected and by whom has to be controlled. I often brought a friend to help but this is not a long-term solution - and in fact I organised the books alone. Because theft is rife, it is imperative that the books be counted and the teachers and learners held accountable. For this reason, strong cupboards that lock were installed in some of the classrooms. It was hoped to install these in all classrooms needing lock-up facilities; but with so little buy-in from the teachers in terms of looking after the resources, Dr van Wyk and I started hesitating and baulked at the expense when it became clear that the teachers were not committed to fetching books and accepting responsibility for them.

In terms of the SSR intervention, the teachers' positive comments far outweighed the negative ones. The question, 'Describe the progress on SSR since the beginning'

elicited the following responses (the numbers in brackets indicate how many teachers made similar comments. They are quoted verbatim):

Positive observations.

- SSR:helps learners to read in silence (2);
- The learners concentration has increased (4);
- Learners more restful they have learned the value of reading (4);
- It is valuable to the learners; progress is patent the learners obviously enjoy it (4);
- The learners do show interest in reading/ enjoyment (3);
- Disciplined reading, material not textbooks any more (2);
- At first SSR was difficult to implement due to learners; not being used to reading (5);
- Progress is visible (5).

Other comments:

- It improved my own reading and writing;
- Little progress;
- The teachers must still get into the same routine and discipline;
- No reply (2).

The following question overlaps with the previous one, but was conceived in this way in order to probe and stimulate reflection in the teachers' responses to the questionnaire. 'Describe any change in behaviour you have noticed since the inception of SSR':

Positive responses (these have been quoted verbatim):

- At first they couldn't make sense of the period and struggled to settle. Now they settle down quickly and easily the moment they open up their reading materials (4);
- Learning behaviour has improved; more challenged and curious;
- Now they can read in silence and spelling is improving;
- Learners feel free to share their thoughts;
- Eager to read (7);
- Their behaviour has changed a lot because during their free period you see them with magazines and newspapers, reading;

- Moved from reading pictures to text (2);
- They are beginning to become inquisitive, disciplined and enjoy reading;
- Bring their own books;
- More excitement and interest in reading by some learners. They are starting to value books more, but there is lots of work to be done.
- They have started feeling more comfortable, concentrate more and their work has improved.
- Learners are keen to get newspapers or any material and are not shy to ask.

Negative replies

- No answer (5);
- Can't say;
- No significant change.

As reported at the end of cycle 1, there is evidence to support the notion that SSR is making a difference. I conclude on a positive note before moving to my observation of CBI: I read success in many sunny smiles and words of welcome when I arrive at school and the learners' applause and cheering when I deliver boxes of books.

5.4.4.2 Observing phase of cycle 2: Content-based instruction

The teachers seemed to enjoy the lecture and lesson presented by Prof. Brinton. Many attended, yet there were many absent from this prestigious event with no proffered excuses (despite having been alerted to the date the previous term).

The teachers participated in Prof. Brinton's demonstration with enthusiasm but with certain silliness (perhaps their jokes about whether bats could be eaten indicated a lack of self-confidence). It was difficult to decide whether this was a reflection of their attitudes or not. My impression was that the teachers were not serious enough during this session.

In cycle 1, I had interviewed the teachers to establish what they understood by CBI after the training sessions that had been presented. The interviews revealed that few had any understanding of what CBI was about. I resolved to follow up Prof. Brinton's lesson and demonstration with a questionnaire in order to establish whether

there had been any growth in the teachers' understanding. The questionnaire would also ask about the implementation of CBI in the teachers' classes.

The questionnaire brought the following information to light:

- Only two answers indicated an understanding of what CBI entails. (Only 25 out of the 33 respondents answered the question)
- Twenty-two (out of 33 respondents) did not answer the questions about Dr Brinton's lecture. (Nine answers were enthusiastic, two negative and one 'knew it all').
- Eight teachers stated that they would like more CBI training; 11 said they would not; 12 did not answer and two were undecided.
- Two teachers were prepared to give a demonstration CBI lesson for constructive criticism (18 said no; 12 gave no answer, and one was not yet confident enough).
- Two would be prepared to organise such a demonstration. (No answers: 11; no reply: 20).

Based on these data, I conclude that CBI has not been as successful as had been anticipated. Discussion of CBI will be resumed during the reflecting phase of CBI. In the meantime, I will document my observations of the *Readucate* classes.

5.4.4.3 Observing phase of cycle 2: *Readucate*

Having been assured that the classes were up and running, I nevertheless requested that the deputy collect progress reports and comments on their experience of the new *Readucate* time slot. On the appointed date, only four reports were forthcoming. The most devastating account was the headmaster's report, which has been copied verbatim below:

Progress Report:

1. Progress is slow because there are more learners who can read, but needs (sic) encouragement.
2. Sifting is a painstaking process.

3. Those who cannot read will then after the sifting get the necessary attention.
4. **Reading:** The idea was that they read and then their comprehension tested. **Those without comprehension and those whose alphabet is locked away will then be tended to.**
5. The rest of the group will be re-integrated in the bigger reading group.

(The use of bold is in the original report)

This report reveals that the principal is unaware that the learners have already been sifted by an IELTS-validated test. Those in the principal's group had all achieved less than nine out of fifteen in a comprehension test on grade 4 level (*cf.* chapter 1 described how the first test based on the grade 8 prescribed books in cycle 1 was found to be too difficult and the IELTS-validated test was devised). The test had been discussed at a meeting with the staff at which the principal and Prof. Greyling were present and during which the principal questioned its validity. There is no need for him to re-integrate any learner into 'the bigger reading group'. In other words, the learners in the principal's *Readucate* group have already been sifted by the time the principal has been allocated the learners and the principal has not taught a single lesson between the testing in January 2009 and 2 June 2009, the date of his report. Moreover, the principal willingly underwent *Readucate* training having acceded to the moral implications of accepting training of R5250.00 per trainee which had been impressed upon all trainees, following problems in the first training session.

Common to several reports from other *Readucate* teachers was the observation that the changed time was a great improvement on the extra-mural time-slot. They reported that the attendance had been much better than before.

My inquiries into the use of the journals that had been provided to the learners not attending *Readucate* were futile. It was impossible to say whether the journaling was being applied as a language technique at all. The teachers' final questionnaire revealed that some teachers said the learners read during this period but I wonder

what they read as the boxes of books are locked up in the reading room. In the final questionnaire, only one teacher mentioned that the learners wrote journals.

Another example of the lack of dedication and dismissive attitude towards the programme is seen in the following report, quoted verbatim (the teachers had been requested to write a report to indicate problems, make suggestions and comment on the progress):

Report on *Readucate* Classes

I completed book 1.

Busy with book 2.

Book 1 covers the alphabet. This implies that in a six month period, the teacher has covered little more than the ABC.

In their final questionnaire, the teachers perceptions of the programme were vague and non-committal. They have been summarised in appendix IV:5. Many teachers felt it was more suitable for use in primary schools, yet *Readucate* has proved itself as successfully addressing adult illiteracy too (*cf.* Chapter 3; also appendix III).

Fortunately, in this account of the project the failure of *Readucate* is counterbalanced by the success of the reading room.

5.4.4.4 Observing phase of cycle 2: Creating a culture of reading

It has been mentioned that the implementation of the actions planned for SSR was integrated with those of the aim to create a culture of reading at the school. The success of the inspirational lessons was evident in the increased number of learners who came to the reading room voluntarily at break time. The learners who came were respectful and responsive and very keen to read or be read to. The books and magazines were well cared for and, unlike the other classrooms at school (at my insistence), there was no litter in the reading room despite learners' eating their school lunches there during break. It has been an immense pleasure to interact with them.

Admittedly, the 25 to 40 learners who attended, did so voluntarily and were not likely to be the ‘difficult’ children at school, and their response to gentle chiding when necessary was always positive: no disciplinary problems were encountered.

In April 2009, a reading room was incorporated into the reading project as a base for reading, and as an instrument for the creation of a culture of reading at the school. To my mind, the greatest problem would be sustainability. Correspondingly, Dr van Wyk and I placed this matter on the agenda of several meetings (10 March 2009, 2 June 2009, 18 August 2009), with the particular request that the SMT should prepare a presentation of sustainability for the meeting on 2 June. A reminder was e-mailed to the school two weeks in advance. No plan was forthcoming. The request was repeated before the meeting with the SMT on 18 August 2009 but no plan had been prepared.

In my AR journal, I recorded the astonishment, even panic of the SMT when they realised that my time at the school was running out. One of the deputies mentioned that one of the teachers was prepared to take charge of the project, but I struggled to set up a meeting with her. In the meanwhile, a parent came forward and in fact took over the reading room a few days a week. However, on occasion the mother cancelled at the last minute which slowed the momentum of the reading intervention. I observed that the numbers of readers in the reading room dwindled when it was not open daily. In order for this intervention to be successful I hoped that the teachers could be persuaded to do this voluntary work. This point leads the discussion neatly into the next subheading which concerns the body of teachers.

5.4.4.5 Observing phase of cycle 2: The teaching staff

Thus far, the teachers have appeared to be media stereotypes of teachers in underperforming schools in South Africa: uncommitted, ill-disciplined, lazy and absent without reason (*cf.* South African Principals’ Association Conference 5th June 2009 and DBSA education roadmap, 2008). In chapter 4 (*cf.* 4.4.2 Triangulation and validation) Leedy and Ormrod (2005:100) list ‘Extensive time in the field’ as a criterion which would to lend validity to AR and plausibility to the results. I have

spent three years at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School and observe that all of the problems identified in the pilot investigation (that were validated by the School Indaba) still exist. They were recorded in the critical reflective plenary session with the teachers on 22 July 2009. Furthermore, the teachers' replies to the final questionnaire were a well of information. The following deductions were based on these documents and supported by my observations.

During cycle 2 the social dynamics amongst the teaching body seemed to modulate and became difficult to grasp. Although in general the teachers were friendly and open to discussion, I documented my puzzlement with the factionalism amongst the staff in my journal, and was careful not to probe overtly or become involved in gossip. The teachers' hostility towards the deputy who tried to take up the reins of the failed leadership was patent. One teacher recounted her defiance of the deputy's authority with pride; another commented in the questionnaire that she was being 'spied' on. One teacher made the comment that, 'The racism on the staff has reached boiling point'. This refers to the coloured teachers' ostensible resentment of the black children and teachers. Moreover, having announced his imminent resignation, the principal's presence waned. Despite this, a marginally hostile attitude was perceived which spilled over into antagonism and even rudeness from teachers on occasion: one teacher bluntly refused to complete the questionnaire; another closed his eyes and slept during the critical reflective staff plenary meeting, with an earpiece in his ear. This period of flux, with its lack of leadership and communication, was summarised in my AR journal in Yeats's (1972: 210) words: 'Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold'. This underlines the need for a strong central leadership, to bind the school together.

The indication in March 2009 that I would be completing my project and my consequent request for a plan for sustainability induced incredulity, if not shock, amongst the teachers and the SMT. No suggestions for sustainability were forthcoming initially. As described above, the involvement of a parent was mooted, followed up and came to fruition with a mother opening the reading room up to three times a week. After a few weeks, I managed to gather a few volunteers and

demonstrate to them that the reading room was a pleasure (requiring a minimum of effort), rather than a burden. At last things seemed to be happening, a shift which augurs well for the school should it come under strong leadership in 2010.

One more observation was that many of the teachers' answers to the questionnaires were certainly questionable: many claimed to have used the overhead projectors (OHP) (that were still in boxes); their initial complaint of having 'very big classes of 45 – 50 learners' did not agree with my tally of classes ranging between 22 and 45 learners, with an average size of 34. By way of comparison with a well-functioning school, according to Mr Cassar, the class size at Eunice High School is about 30 – 36 learners.

During this research project I expressed concern based on my observations at the school, about the level of the staff's qualifications and whether they were up to date. The questionnaire revealed that the teachers were generally well qualified, and that many were still studying. This leaves little excuse for poor performance. The teachers' lethargy and apathy seems clear from the number of questions that they were not prepared to answer. This observation is in line with the following facts which appeared in the DBSA roadmap (2008:26) which is quoted below:

- 386,000 teachers, with most trained pre-1994
- Post-1996, voluntary severance packages led to many skilled teachers leaving the profession
- Subject knowledge problem is more serious issue than under-qualifications
- Some teachers may be encouraging pupils to take lower-level (easier to teach) subjects
- Effective teacher development is critical

The observation phase of the AR cycle appears relatively straightforward: I have immersed myself in the 'real-life situation' being studied over a long period of time and hope that I have gained a profound understanding of a unique situation by means of the immersion, perhaps more deeply than could be obtained from the face value of the items on my questionnaire items. However, my involvement has been an

investment of time, energy, and self which could suggest an element of subjective colouring. Despite this, I hope that the length of time in the field and the triangulation of my data with that from the teachers themselves and from outside – the alumni - contribute to the credibility and validation of the results.

5.4.5 Reflecting phase of cycle 2

In this phase I reflect on the success of the interventions that have been implemented, based on the observations on how the action and research processes have gone ('making sense of evidence' (Heydenrych, 2001[11])). Heydenrych explains that the reflection 'takes account of the variety of perspectives possible in the social situation and comprehends the issues and circumstances under which they arise'. He also reminds us how reflection leads to the identification of a new problem or problems which prompt a new AR cycle (2001[11]).

5.4.5.1 Reflecting phase of cycle 2: Sustained Silent Reading

As noted briefly during the observing phase (5.4.4.1), the change of time slot for SSR has not only been an improvement but also an example of the positive cooperation of the SMT with the researcher as colleagues. This relationship where positive suggestions are freely forthcoming and are discussed and implemented by colleagues without obstruction lies at the heart of the AR ideology. In my personal AR journal, I recorded my cautious optimism that this was a signpost to a smoother way ahead.

It has been mentioned that the actions planned for SSR were integrated with the creation of a culture of reading at the school. The success of the inspirational lessons was evident in:

- the increased number of learners who came to the reading room voluntarily at break time;
- learners approaching me to reserve the a book for reading during SSR the following week;
- a teacher's account of her overhearing two boys arguing about a fact that one maintained to have read in one of the new books;

- children's requests that the reading room be open after school
- learners asking to come to the reading room to read when a teacher was absent and they were left alone.

It is important to note that all of these point to a change in behaviour that has been effected at Wag- 'n-bietjie Secondary School.

I recorded my delight in my AR journal that I had, at least, touched these lives. In consultation with Dr van Wyk and me, Prof. Rosseel (*cf.* appendix II: 3.6) endorsed this, and insisted that this reading experience had touched the learners' lives and could never be taken from them.

The most pressing problem threatening the successful functioning of SSR is the distribution of the new books that are in the reading room. The books have to be counted before the SSR period and again when the boxes are returned - and the teachers and learners held accountable. This problem was epitomised when a teacher left for home unexpectedly during an SSR period, leaving the books with the learners. I waited in vain for the books to be returned and spent 40 minutes tracing them. It is unclear how this system will ever become sustainable if there is so little accountability amongst the teachers. A few isolated incidents of the non-return of books have been noticed. In cycle 1 the magazines collected by Dr van Wyk and me had all been stolen. This was recounted by the teachers with a shrug and request to 'please bring us more'.

I am pleased to report that the mother who came to help with the reading room was a dedicated and responsible person. In practice, last minute cancellations destroyed the momentum of daily reading and it is clear from the turn out that (numbers of readers fall after an unexpected cancellation of reading at break) that a backup system with a teacher in charge has to be in place - as the reading intervention can hardly be imposed solely upon a parent from outside. I reflect on the possibility of forming a committee of learners which would become active in the next cycle as a support to teachers helping in the reading room and which would drive the reading room project

from the bottom up. (I would like to reiterate that cycle 3 is hypothetical in terms of this dissertation but that I hope to help extend the project forward in 2010).

Of all the reading interventions at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School, SSR is the most successful and, as described in 5.4.7 (Conclusions and results: cycle 1), it is hoped that SSR has contributed to the improved matriculation results in 2008.

Having reflected on the value of SSR in this project, I will deliberate on the situation of CBI at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School.

5.4.5.2 Reflecting phase of cycle 2: Content-based instruction

In cycle 1 the teachers' answers to a questionnaire indicated that they did not really know what CBI really was, despite several sessions having been presented/ arranged by Dr van Wyk. The questionnaire answered during the second AR cycle, subsequent to Prof. Brinton's visit, revealed the same. In addition, in the second questionnaire disclosed that the teachers were not interested in any more CBI training.

It was wonderful that the consultation with Prof. Rosseel provided a ray of hope (*cf.* appendix II: 3.6). He suggested that my approach was too scholarly, and that I should move away from a purely academic approach in favour of telling the teachers to perform a few basic operations in each class they teach, for example, they should teach vocabulary, and sentence construction. It was decided as a last ditch effort, to have a final meeting with the teachers and suggest this narrower approach, if nothing else.

It seems that CBI has not proved to be very successful in this project. The discussion moves to the reflections on *Readucate* which has been as difficult to launch.

5.4.5.3 Reflecting phase of cycle 2: *Readucate*

I am horrified at the implications of the headmaster's report on his *Readucate* classes, and indeed the lack of reports from the other trained teachers. The principal's report revealed finally what had long been suspected: he has is ignorant about what is happening in his school. He does not know that the learners are being sifted by means of the reading test and presented to the school as a tool for testing each grade 8 class entering the school so that immediate attention can be given to the failures by means of *Readucate*.

Dr van Wyk and I spent several weeks doing case studies of the worst failures in order to try to explain where and why the reading problems originated. I decided to teach a few of the weakest of these extra *Readucate* classes during the SSR period, starting at the beginning of September. It became clear from the first lesson that the learners *had never heard of the vowels presented in the first lesson* according to the *Readucate* methodology. And yet, according to them, they had been attending classes. It was patent that, between their sifting tests in January 2009, until September 2009, nothing had been taught to them. This state of affairs was damning. How could the teachers involved accept training and empowerment at great cost and then fail to do anything about learners in their care whose future is compromised because of their inability to read?

While the cheerless description above signs and seals the *Readucate* intervention in terms of this dissertation where only two AR cycles have been described, the truth that AR moves in a dynamic upwards spiral must be kept in mind. Accordingly, I am pleased to recount a new thrust that falls beyond the scope of the two cycles described here - but which (I hope) will give the *Readucate* saga a positive spin. This rainbow of hope is described below.

The aim of a *Readucate* refresher course had been on the agenda of meetings between Dr van Wyk, the SMT and me several times, to no avail. During this period, contact with Mrs Edna Freinkel at *Readucate* indicated her enthusiasm to arrange such a course. In desperation, I requested Mrs Freinkel contact the school directly since I

could not obtain a suitable date from the SMT. With great tenacity, Mrs Freinkel contacted the school and was granted time at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School. She addressed the teachers on 14 October 2009. If this study had allowed for a third AR cycle, this new impetus would have been the starting point for the *Reeducate* intervention in the new cycle.

What follows moves from the poor picture described above to the most successful aspects of the project, alongside SSR: creating a culture of reading.

5.4.5.4 Reflecting phase of cycle 2: Creating a culture of reading

In cycle 1, it was observed that when I first experimented with the idea of reading aloud to the learners at break, the teachers should take ownership of the reading and each take his/ her turn to read.

However, with the increase in numbers of learners attending the reading, and following numerous requests to read more often, I realised how important the reading was to the children. Consequently, I feared that the momentum gained would be lost if teachers did not arrive or if the reading was unenthusiastically performed: I felt that the reading had to be done regularly and rigorously in order to build enthusiasm to drive a momentum; and that a culture of reading could only be grown if this momentum were maintained. In addition, in neither the first cycle nor the second did any teacher come forward with an offer of help with reading, despite invitations to attend and participate in the readings – and so I kept up the running of the reading room herself.

The reading room has become an astounding success, yet I was aware that I should not be running it because my brief was to engage with and empower the teachers - and not to interact with the learners. The failure of the teachers to engage in the project propelled me to connect with the learners – for to do otherwise would mean abandoning a successful intervention.

At this point I return to my awareness that I might be expecting action from the teachers that they are unable to give. In terms of reading, the Mpumalanga MEC for Education, Mathulare Coleman, pronounced that, ‘The problem is that even our teachers don't read because they did not get an education that adequately prepared them to teach and develop reading skills’ (Mokgakane, 2008:[1]). How can such teachers be expected to motivate learners to read? The final questionnaire answered by the teachers is very revealing: although most pay lip-service to the value of reading in their own lives, many replied vaguely and many answers reflected shallowness in educated adults’ reading tastes. A (black) teacher’s comment cited in cycle 1, that the black people have no culture of reading is recalled here. (cf. 5.3.6.1). In addition, a (coloured) teacher’s words that ‘teachers themselves do not value reading’ have been quoted. In other words, there are three diverse references to the lack of reading amongst the teachers. Indeed, most teachers plumped for popular magazines. A summary of the teachers’ answers to the question about what they enjoy reading, follows:

- No reply: 4
- Nothing: 1
- Magazines: 10
- ‘Everything’ (sic): 4
- Magazines and books: 8
- Books: 3
- Other: 1

The magazines and newspapers cited were also superficial in content (*You, Huisgenoot, Sarie, Men’s Health, Daily Sun, Volksblad*)

Upon reflection, I admit that the reading room project developed rather quickly without interaction and consultation with the staff. In other words, I behaved in a unilateral manner that is inconsistent with AR methodology. However, my concern for the learners’ manifest hunger for reading overrode my concerns for correct AR procedure as the teachers had never volunteered to read to the learners when I was

piloting reading aloud in cycle1. I was aware of behaving in a one-sided way at the time but the experiment had almost launched itself in that it had been driven by the learners' request for more reading. Seen from this perspective, the reading room is in line with AR methodology which strives for improvement over time, with the progress based on observation and reflection on the success (or otherwise) of an action. Moreover, I felt that, if the reading room had to be abandoned after six months due to the unwillingness of the teachers to take over, the learners would at least have had six months' exposure to books with the only cost being to me – in terms of my effort to set up the reading room, stock it and open it every break time. The reading experience that the learners gain in the reading room touches their lives and can never be undone.

At the time of writing, the omens are good: a dedicated parent assists a few times a week and, apparently, the staff has volunteered to keep the project going and I established a committee of learners. This would be the setting for the planning phase of AR cycle 3, which is beyond the scope of this dissertation: however, given the ethical considerations (discussed in chapter 4 and below) and that the project has been running in a 'real life setting', I feel compelled to continue playing a peripheral role at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School, should the new principal (as yet unannounced) condone this and I be welcome.

I reflect that the ontological assumptions delineated in chapter 4 are a pertinent here: the practical issues of improving reading have to be infused with moral values. In a spirit of commitment to the school and because of a genuine desire for progress in an admittedly difficult setting, I cannot walk off, dissertation in hand, having used the school as the means to an end. The teachers' impulses – however sluggish and tentative – towards taking over the reading room augur well for the project. I, once having officially completed my task, would like to keep inspiring them to continue the project.

The final act of reflecting concerns the teaching staff. Since the beginning of this chapter, the topic of the teachers has been dealt with under all the subheadings

describing the interventions because I have thought good to do so, allowing a separate discussion of the teachers each time because their role is seminal to the long-term success of the project. Obviously this approach to the discussion results in a certain amount of overlap and repetition - but this is inevitable in such a tightly knit and dense exposition.

5.4.4.5 Reflecting phase of cycle 2: The teaching staff

The planning phase described that the critical reflective staff plenary session intended to examine the root causes of the low staff morale and patent unhappiness. In so doing, it was hoped to gauge whether and how the teachers could be helped. The discussion of attitude and motivation in chapter 2 indicates that attitudes can be changed, albeit with great difficulty. The chapter also considered the value of intrinsic motivation. While job satisfaction is not the same as motivation, the two concepts are clearly linked. Indeed, in the well-known Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (1943:370), the need for self-actualization is the final need that manifests when the lower level needs have been satisfied.

It is clear that few teachers experience any joy and fulfilment in their teaching. This is attested to by their outspoken complaints about their lack of fulfilment, their threats of leaving, the absence of discipline, and of the lack leadership attested to, amongst many other complaints, at the meeting on 22 July 2009 (*cf.* appendix II). It is significant to reflect that nothing has changed since the initial interviews on 21 November 2006 and that the same gripes were mentioned in the School Indaba conducted by the alumni in January 2008. In addition, the general laxness cannot possibly be conducive to job satisfaction. The questions of the staff plenary session quizzed the teachers about what they wanted from their jobs. The discrepancy between what they want and what they get is a barrier to job satisfaction. In addition, their relationship with their principal is at fault: this is an important aspect of their job satisfaction and throughout this study the data have revealed dissatisfaction with the management of the school.

Heydenrych (2001:[9]) is eloquent in his reference to the personal consequences of a situation such as this. Referring to the workplace as the site where most of our lives are spent, he develops the following line of thought:

... the workplace experience can have a tremendous impact on the rest of people's lives. If a participatory society is possible, it must be instituted at work, for the workplace is the most political of all areas. The current situation is such that human efficacy can develop more outside the workplace than inside. In general most staff members have given up - their input does not seem to make a difference and they fall into a continuous state of apathetic indolence and emptiness. These people have little ability towards self-actualisation, which is important for re-establishing professional practice. People will have to learn to be of worth to themselves by identifying and taking up their professional ideals. ... [P]eople have to move from learned helplessness to empowered actors.

In other words, despite all problems, the teachers have a choice. My reflections on these powerful words remind me that, despite difficult circumstances, there is no need for competent people to act incompetently. If the teachers could develop a high internal locus of control, they would believe that events result primarily from their own behaviour and actions. The responses to the final questionnaire underline this:

- The teachers requested new apparatus and then did not use it when it was provided. In the final questionnaire several repeated their request for OHPs and other apparatus to help them – and the OHPs had been delivered and handed over at least a year previously.
- The teachers whinge constantly about their work overload, do little extramural work and yet Mr Paul Cassar, headmaster of Eunice High School (the most highly rated school in the province) recounts that each teacher is responsible for three hours' extra-mural activities a week.
- The results of the questions that probed their educational status indicate that many are highly qualified. (My doubt about their educational level was discussed previously, and has thus proved unfounded).
- Many were unaware of what was happening in the reading programme, despite its relatively high profile, and constant request for comment and involvement.

Their complaint that their teaching is hindered by learners' poor reading has become a refrain. With *Readucate* in place, this refrain loses credibility.

- Their answers revealed several teachers were skirting the truth: many claimed to have used the OHPs provided by the sponsor when I know that two out of the three are still in boxes (and the one that has been unpacked is the one I opened for use in the reading room).

These factors being so, the teachers are forging their own unhappiness.

Yet 23 teachers do not have sufficient textbooks for teaching – a situation dire enough to depress any teacher in any school, let alone one in which illiterate learners struggle to copy their work from the board. (Seven teachers have sufficient textbooks for teaching; three did not reply). When Dr van Wyk and I realised the scope of this problem and suggested fundraising for books, the principal announced that he *had bought chairs for the staffroom* with the last monies raised in this manner. This suggested plan of action was not discussed. In this behaviour, I perceive the 'learned helplessness' quoted above. The same conduct is true of the examples listed below.

It was mentioned in the reflecting phase of cycle 1 that Dr van Wyk and I had offered a mentor the SMT to assist with the school management. This offer was refused as were other offers of help:

- I offered to coach ten willing borderline matriculants using CBI in order to get them through their final examinations, thus improving the matriculation pass rate.
- Mrs Edna Freinkel's desperate desire to do a refresher *Readucate* course and motivational talk had been on the agenda for many months. (Mrs Freinkel visited the school on 14 October 2009 after she had negotiated with the SMT directly and insisted on a date).
- When it became clear how many classes were without textbooks, Dr van Wyk requested a list of books for grade 8 before the June holidays so that she could buy them – at the time of writing this dissertation, at the end of October, nothing has been forthcoming.

At the beginning of the third quarter it seemed that the principal would be retiring at the end of the year. At a meeting between the SMT, Dr van Wyk and I on 18 August 2009, the principal voiced his displeasure with Dr van Wyk and me in angry tones because, he maintained, we had consulted him on neither Prof. Brinton's visit nor that of the local newspaper (which resulted in a newspaper article and photographs being taken). When it was pointed out that these matters had not only been minuted but had been on the agenda, he apologised and left.

After this incident, I perceived a change in the dynamics at school with the principal distant and the deputies more committed and responsive. Perhaps this is the beginning of new impetus which will result in greater staff commitment in the hypothetical 'cycle 3'.

There is no doubt that the interventions have shaken the world of the teachers. Within the last few days about eight volunteers have presented themselves as volunteers for the reading room and I have sent magazines to the staffroom so that the teachers can have their own 'library'.

All the interventions have been fully discussed and so, the following section concludes this chapter with a quest for wisdom drawn from what has been described above.

5.4.6 Conclusions and results: cycle 2

As in cycle 1, the progress of cycle 2 has followed the phases of AR depicted in Figure 1. This has enabled me to describe the AR phases as meticulously as possible. The disadvantage of adhering to the schematic representation precisely is that the written report becomes fragmented and rather rigid when, in reality, the phases and actions overlap, merge and do not always proceed at the same pace and the end of one AR cycle flows into the beginning of the next. Although this dissertation covers two AR cycles only, AR should be an ongoing advance over time. Consequently, the observing and reflecting phases of this, the second cycle, propel the project towards a hypothetical third cycle. As a matter of fact, plans for 'cycle 3' are in place and will be indicated as the thrust for 2010 in the discussion below.

In the conclusion to cycle 1, despite my gloom, I recorded several positive moves for the launch of cycle 2 (the new timeslots for SSR and *Readucate*; the allocation of a reading room). Both Sustained Silent Reading and the creation of a culture of reading in the school have been most successful are the most successful aspects of the project. In terms of the success of the SSR intervention, in response to the questionnaire, the teachers' positive comments far outweighed the negative ones (*cf.* 5.4.4.1). My motivational lessons seem to have yielded fruit and the teachers reported greater concentration and interest in reading.

I have established by means of the questionnaire that there is no real reading ethic amongst the teachers (*cf.* 5.4.5.4). In other words, it is not completely fair to expect non-readers to impart their enthusiasm for reading to the learners. My decision to intervene and offer my motivational lessons was thus correct. Based on the experience, observation and reflections on these interventions, I have considered and started to implement new initiatives which would form the planning phase of a third cycle. These initiatives are intended to provide sustainability of the reading room and try to encourage the teachers to read. Despite my imminent withdrawal from the school, these ideas have been mooted and accepted:

- I have collected magazines and books for a staff 'library'.
- A meeting has been held with volunteer teachers to take over the reading room. I demonstrated that the reading room does not involve any work; that it is pleasant 'work' and that the teachers will not have to perform this duty very often.
- A committee of learners has been set up to monitor the reading room and to 'drive' the teachers. In other words, the learners can approach the willing teachers for supervision in the reading room.
- Based on suggestions made in the teachers' questionnaire, I have requested that the library be reopened.
- I have requested that the SMT and heads of departments (HOD) should attend the last meeting with the SMT scheduled for the end of October. With hindsight I think that the HODs should have been involved in these meeting from the beginning of the project from the start and the constant requests that

were agreed to and then not acted upon might have been more successfully carried through.

Content-based instruction has been marred by dismal attendance of the workshops and demonstrations. Questionnaires in cycle 1 revealed that the teachers had no idea of what CBI was; and the questionnaire in cycle 2 yielded a similar result despite the lecture and demonstration from Prof. Donna Brinton. Prof. Rosseel suggested that this intervention should have been offered in a less academic manner and that the instructions to the teachers should have been limited to precise brief directions, e.g. teach all new vocabulary, define all new concepts, make the learners read a short paragraph and rephrase the content.

The progress of *Readucate* was slow in cycle 1 and has continued slowly in cycle 2. Mrs Edna Freinkel, a founder and trustee of *Readucate* came to visit the school on her own initiative after my negotiation with the school failed and attempted a *Readucate* refresher course and a motivational talk to the teachers. This would form the thrust for a new AR cycle as discussed earlier. Unfortunately, despite Mrs Freinkel's sincerity and gentle, inspirational manner, she was met with boredom, hostility from the group of teachers and defiance from one teacher who was rude and challenging. I am reluctantly forced to admit defeat with the literacy training.

The bad attitude of the teachers has been mentioned before. In addition, I considered whether the teachers had adequate training. The questionnaire answered by the teachers indicated that most of them are well-qualified, albeit not always very recently. I believe that a good education, no matter how outdated, should cultivate self-reflective people. For most teachers at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School, this is not so. The comments in the *Education Roadmap: focus on schooling system* that 'Effective teacher development is critical' (2008:26) apply here too.

However, because this research project is being brought to a conclusion at the most difficult time possible for the school where the principal has resigned and is less involved than ever, it is probably unfair to tar all the teachers with the same brush. I perceived a glimmer of optimism when I started withdrawing from the school. At the time of my withdrawal, which is being done a step at a time, it seems that the more

committed teachers feel compelled to step forward and accept some responsibility. In truth, this research project is reaching its end at a crucial time at this particular school, where rumblings of change are perceptible: the principal has resigned, and the deputies have jumped into the breach. Furthermore, several teachers (and a parent) have volunteered to run the reading room. I have appointed a committee of learners to 'drive' the teachers and learn responsibility but this shows that, still, the initiative is mine.

Against the backdrop of my long experience at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School, I do not perceive Mrs Freinkel's visit (mentioned above) as an entire waste of time and describe my reasons in excerpts from an e-mail I sent to Mrs Freinkel afterwards. This is included because it gives perspective to the real operation of the project:

I ... wish to thank you for the trouble you took to come. Despite the problems that you perceived at the meeting with the teachers, Arlys [Dr van Wyk] and I have found that every little thrust in the right direction at [Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary] School eventually has a cumulative consequence. While the learners suffer from the poor leadership, lack of discipline and lax teachers, the grade 9 tests seem to reveal a vast improvement after two years. While I cannot attribute this to *Readucate* because, as you can see, most are still on book 1 or 2, nevertheless the learners - and indeed those slack teachers - are being challenged in ways that would have eluded them had we not been there. On Thursday I got a reading room committee going and told the learners to drive the teachers. Arlys and I also commented on the total lack of respect that seems to be typical of all the relationships at the school. By your kind and compassionate behaviour towards the teachers, the kids and that poor boy with the attitude, we are showing them something different. Arlys forced a class to pick up the rubbish in a classroom on Thursday: I allow no mess in the reading room. That is also respect and they are learning. Slowly, I know. [The deputy] does not have this disrespectful attitude so perhaps she can effect change... A last thought apropos of [the teacher's] behaviour*: Arlys [Dr van Wyk] and I have found that the only times there has

been progress in our work at the school has been after a confrontation which shames them. And the teachers were horrified and embarrassed by her behaviour.

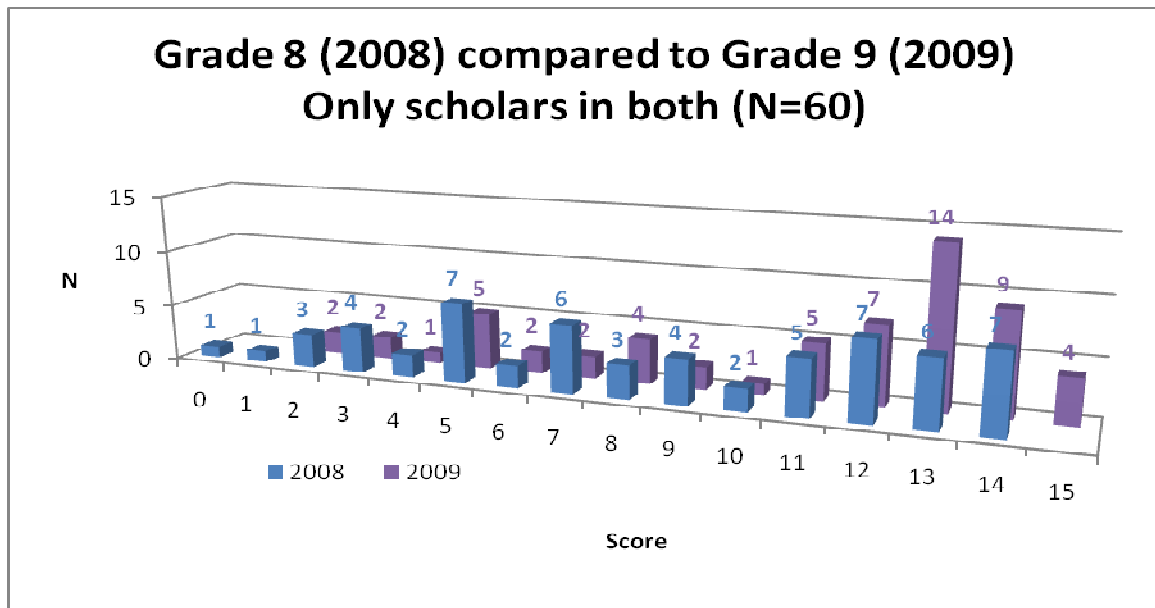
(* one of the teachers had been challenging and very rude to Mrs Freinkel)

In terms of the ethical considerations mentioned in Chapter 4 (*cf.* 4.2.1.1 Ontological assumptions), I feel bound to continue to direct the reading project for a while - particularly because the new dynamic described in the observing and reflecting phases of cycle 2 has resulted in much new knowledge during the last month or so of this cycle. Indeed, as Heydenrych (2001:[1]) argues, 'The researcher's role is characterised by the immediacy of the researcher's involvement in the action process. The researcher becomes as much a subject and learner as the participants. AR is therefore not simply research done on other people'. This intimate involvement makes it difficult for me to walk away.

At the very end of cycle 2 I retested the grade 9 learners (who had been tested the previous year in grade 8) in an effort to measure any reading improvement. Although this is not a quantitative study, the trend was most pleasing. The statistician from the University of the Free State presented the following report:

'In order to determine whether there was a statistically significant increase in the results for the test, the results of those scholars who were in Grade 8 in 2008 and again in Grade 9 in 2009, were compared. This is shown in the figure below (N=60).

Figure 5.2 Test results Grade 8 (2009) compared to Grade 9 (2009)



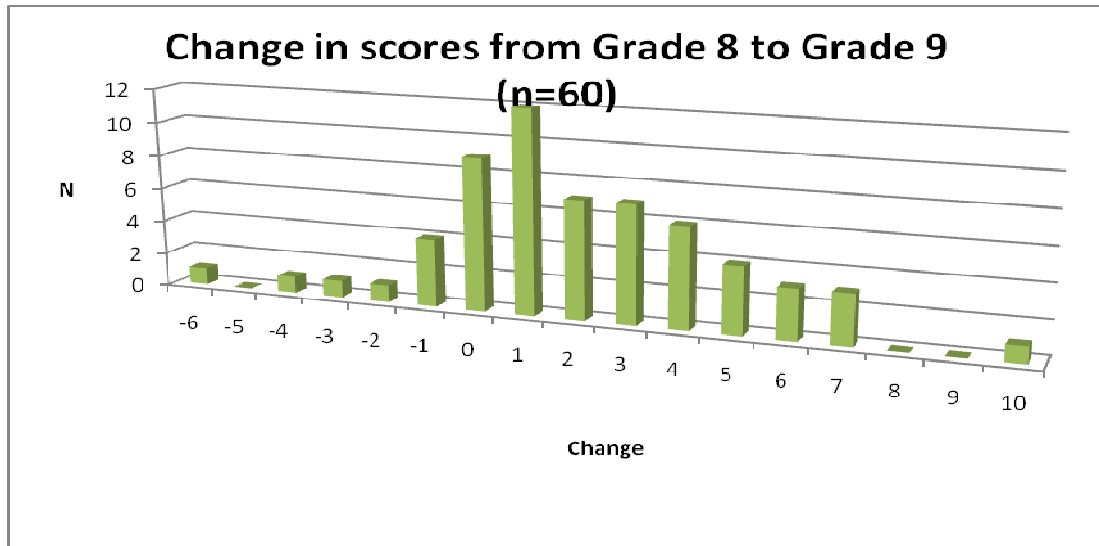
The table below shows a comparison of the scores of the scholars from 2008 to 2009. From this it can be seen that the mean and mode both improved by 2 points, and the individual scores changed from a low of -6 (*i.e.* there was one individual whose score *worsened* by 6 points) to a high of 10 (one individual's score improved by 10 points). When the changes in the scores between 2008 and 2009 were compared with a t-test for paired samples, a highly significant result was obtained ($t=-5.48$, $df=59$, $p<0.01$). Thus the results of the scholars did improve significantly from 2008 to 2009.

Descriptive statistics for 2008/2009 scores (N=60)

<i>Statistic</i>	<i>2008</i>	<i>2009</i>	<i>Change</i>
Mean	8.5	10.5	2.0
Standard Deviation	4.1	3.8	2.8
Median	9	12	2
Mode	5	13	1
Minimum	0	2	-6
Maximum	14	15	10

The changes can be seen in the figure below:

Figure 5.3: Change in scores from Grade 8 to Grade 9



The table below shows the descriptive statistics for all learners who were in both the Grade 8 and 9 classes of 2008, as well as the Grade 9 class of 2009. From this it can again be seen that, overall, the Grade 9 class of 2009 fared much better than the Grade 9 class of 2008, with an increase in the mean score from 8.9 to 10.4, and a two-point increase in the median score. When the scores between the Grade 9 classes of 2008 and 2009 were compared with a t-test for independent samples, a highly significant result was again obtained ($t=-3.40$, $df=329$, $p<0.01$). This again confirmed that the Grade 9 class of 2009 had fared significantly better than the Grade 9 class of 2008.

Descriptive statistics for 2008/2009 scores, all learners:

<i>Statistic</i>	<i>Grade 8—2008</i>	<i>Grade 9—2008</i>	<i>Grade 9—2009</i>
N	139	164	167
Mean	7.8	8.9	10.4
Standard Deviation	3.9	4.1	3.6
Median	7	10	12
Mode	5	12	13
Minimum	0	1	0
Maximum	14	15	15

A truly quantifiable result would take a larger body of learners and a control group, amongst other things and so I am aware that such testing would not pass muster in a quantitative study. Nevertheless, this is an AR study and these results are intended to bolster the other ‘proof’ of improvement seen in the 2008 matriculation results, the learners’ behaviour and the teachers’ observations.

The final chapter considers the broader conclusions can be drawn from the experience at Wag-‘n-bietjie Secondary School and their value for resolving the literacy crisis in South Africa.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

Once you learn to read, you will be forever free

Frederick Douglass (ca 1818 – 1895)

Former slave and abolitionist

6.1 Introduction

The introduction to Chapter 1 of this dissertation told of the rapid and turbulent period of adjustment in our world and society since 1994. The field of education is a case in point: there has been no area of greater concern in our country than for the future of education; and few other domains have been subject to as much change as education. What is more, South Africans have become aware of how poorly their children rate in literacy when compared with their peers in other countries – and this literacy project was born of the national reading deficiency.

6.1.1 The purpose of the study

This subsection intends to recap the stated aims of the study in a couple of paragraphs. In rereading the goals, the reader will be better prepared for the discussion and the final conclusions.

Apart from the key aim of improving the literacy of learners, this research project sought to equip teachers with the necessary skills and techniques to implement good reading practices in their classrooms (in all subjects) in order to improve the reading of weak readers and develop the teachers professionally - by improving language and reading, performance in all subjects will improve. Because the chosen methodology was AR, the teachers were to be included as participants and co-researchers while improving their teaching skills. Teachers were also trained to assist the illiterate learners to learn to read. Furthermore, it was hoped to create a culture of reading at the school, and to ensure sustainability so that the teachers could run the programme

after the completion of the project. An additional aim was to reflect critically on the interventions in the quest for a more generalised understanding of an educational problem, in the hope that the results would have additional value: to facilitate a closer understanding of reading development in one township school as an example of a general educational problem. This chapter contains valuable guidelines for teaching and learning.

The subsections that follow will consider and analyse the results and findings of the research project as they apply to the original goals cited above. They will be discussed before the limitations of the study and the recommendations for further study deliberated. The next section, *Results, analysis and significance of the work*, examines:

- the results in terms of the improvement of reading;
- the application of reading as an agent of change;
- the findings in terms of leadership and human skills development that impinged on this study;
- its application in the community; and
- comments, suggestions and a blueprint for similar studies.

6.2 Results, analysis and significance of the work

6.2.1 Results: reading improvement

The cycles in chapter 5 have revealed that some of interventions (SSR, CBI, *Reeducate*, creating a culture of reading) designed to empower the teachers and improve the learners' reading had different success rates. In point of fact, this dissertation ultimately aimed at the improvement of reading: and so, the following paragraphs will discuss the extent to which this may be claimed to have been achieved.

When the results of the grade 8 learners in 2008 are compared with those of the same group of learners who were in the grade 9 towards the end of 2009, it appears that there has indeed been an improvement in their reading. The learners wrote the same test a little less than two years apart, and the statistician's graphs are available in chapter 5 and in appendix I:2. While a normal improvement in reading over time

should be expected, it would appear that the trend is salient. The statistician reported the results as follows:

When the changes in the scores between 2008 and 2009 were compared with a t-test for paired samples, a highly significant result was obtained ($t=-5.48$, $df=59$, $p<0.01$). Thus the results of the scholars did improve significantly from 2008 to 2009.

It has been emphasised before that this is not a quantitative study and that ethical considerations preclude a control group. In order to consider the results from another angle, the statistician compared the grade 9 marks from 2008 with the grade 9 marks from 2009. In other words, he first compared the progress of the same learners over a period of time and found ‘a highly significant result’ and then compared the marks of two grade 9 classes (2008 and 2009), *i.e.* of different learners at the same level. In this instance the following results were reported:

it can again be seen that, overall, the Grade 9 class of 2009 fared much better than the Grade 9 class of 2008, with an increase in the mean score from 8.9 to 10.4, and a two-point increase in the median score. When the scores between the Grade 9 classes of 2008 and 2009 were compared with a t-test for independent samples, a highly significant result was again obtained ($t=-3.40$, $df=329$, $p<0.01$). This again confirmed that the Grade 9 class of 2009 had fared significantly better than the Grade 9 class of 2008.

In other words, the learners who had been subjects of the programme measured significantly better than their peers in the same grade the previous year.

Furthermore, in the conclusion to the AR cycle 1 in chapter 5 (*cf.* 5.4.7), it was noted that the Wag-‘n-bietjie Secondary School’s 2008 matriculation results had showed an improvement of over 30% on the 2007 results, and that this improvement ran counter to the national trend. This and three other pieces of evidence supported the hope that the reading interventions have nudged the results upwards (for a full description see 5.4.7 in chapter 5).

To recap: the results of the reading should be seen against the background that this study was done using qualitative methodology that does not set out to weigh and measure exact quantities in a precise manner. In other words, it is apt that exact figures are not the purpose of the study because the development of reading is a slow

process and any progress in language is subtle and elusive and takes place over a long period of time. The intention is not for the quantitative measurement to be taken literally but rather be seen as an attempt to identify a trend. It is important to note that, apart from the practicalities, the ethical thrust of AR precluded some learners being sidelined from reading improvement in order to take the part of a control group for statistical purposes. A true measurement would have to be taken in a few years' time. In the meantime reading as an agent of change will be discussed.

6.2.2 Effecting change

It has been mentioned that education has been subject to immense change since 1994. Unfortunately, change is inclined to have an adverse effect on human beings and results in increased levels of stress, low productivity and clinging to outdated methodologies and strategies. This section discusses and analyses the findings of the project in terms of how change was perceived in different ways: as at the heart of AR methodology yet presenting as a problem area in practice.

In their chapter, *Organisational Change and Stress Management*, van Daalen and Odendaal (2001:412) emphasise that an important advantage of AR 'lies in providing a scientific methodology for managing planned change'. This dissertation has shown how AR is designed to spur change. In the case in hand, AR impels educational change and staff development in that it:

- is decision-driven (indeed the teachers may be part of the decision-making process) and not hypothesis-driven and so facilitates quality problem-solving and decision-making (Krathwohl 1998:601; Kember & Gow 1992:301);
- focuses on the problems with the 'agent' *actively* trying to solve them (van Daalen & Odendaal, 2001:412); and
- relies on employees as co-researchers and thus it (should) reduce the resistance to change (van Daalen & Odendaal, 2001:412).

Yet, despite its positive attributes, inherent in the hoped-for change are the problems that the change itself brings.

During the endeavour at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School, the practical application of AR as an instrument of change revealed how extremely challenging it is to implement

new interventions to effect change without strong support systems, good discipline and leadership. It is important to remember the grim situation at the school at the beginning of the project which impinged on the spirit of the school, making working there – and implementing change – trickier than might be expected from a ‘normal’ school. This is discussed in detail in the AR cycles in chapter 5. The challenge in AR is to marry research and practice. Heydenrych (2001: [6]) points this out and comments that, because teachers work with humans, the laws of human nature should not be overlooked in the practice of AR. Indeed, the description of the constraints to the project in chapter 5 cites human relationships, multi-culturalism and multi-racism as potential threats to the smooth running of a project at an educational institution. All of these have to be managed positively in any situation where educational change is the focus.

During a personal interview, Prof. Rosseel pointed out and recommended one of the most important values that can be extrapolated from the work at the school. He drew attention to the fact that change management in such a school could be effected by means of *concentrating on the reading* in the reading programme because it calls up people’s values and beliefs; and not by focussing on the teachers’ or even the children’s behaviour or by using an academic approach. In other words, the reading itself should be used as an agent of change. This subtle observation implies a dichotomy in what is meant by change within the context of this work: my initial perception of change was that I would enter the school and empower the teachers to teach and improve reading. However, it became clear as the research unfolded that the teachers’ attitudes would also have to change and that this was beyond my field of expertise. Prof. Rosseel’s suggestion reconciled this disparity and links the practical with the theory discussed in chapter 4 where McNiff and Whitehead (2006:23) explain that ontology means ‘the study of being’ and maintain that AR is not only suffused with values and is ‘morally committed’, but that the research should take place within a social context. These findings prompted by Prof. Rosseel are in line with these ontological assumptions.

One of the insights to be gained from this work is that change happens slowly (Prof Rosseel's words were: 'patience, patience, patience...'). This observation ostensibly gives the lie to my sense of urgency maligned by the principal (*cf.* chapter 5). Out of this discrepancy is born the insight that a sense of urgency for *things to be done* and the patience that is required for a *change of attitude* to occur before *things can be done* are the opposite sides of the same coin. In other words, the urgency in action, in practice, will change attitudes. This was perceived to happen in the instance of this research project with my leading by example and buy-in following, albeit tentatively at first. The incorrect assumption was made at the beginning of the project that the attitudes of the principal and staff were the same as mine. Thus, I, too, have to change.

Prof Rosseel's proposal that the emphasis should mutate and the new focus be on human skills and values rather than 'academic prescriptions' as agents of change was partly achieved during the second AR cycle – and this proves his insight to be accurate: had there been more time between then and the time of writing, the success would have been greater. When I started demonstrating the value and excitement of reading and running the reading room herself, I was able to reach the teachers and the learners via the realia in my demonstrations and attractive books in the reading room. Once artefacts that had sensory, emotional and other value transformed the theory of reading, the project improved. After an initially unreceptive response from the teachers, (some) teachers have changed and are prepared to run the reading room. This is a major achievement and plans are intact to nurture this new attitude in the New Year.

One of the aims of the project was to empower the teachers by improving teaching skills. This was attempted by means of *Readucate*, CBI training and the SSR. As recounted in chapter 5, it was difficult to implement the training of *Readucate* and CBI fully. However, the teachers were not always willing to model reading as prescribed and this precluded optimal achievement of SSR (*cf.* the results of the book flood described in chapter 3). Despite this, a change of behaviour was observed and the creation of a culture of reading was successful and even spilled over into the

staffroom where efforts are being made to establish a small staff library of magazines and books. It is clear that that many of the findings in terms of reading are tightly linked to the comments on leadership, change and human skills discussed elsewhere.

It is clear that a project on reading spills over into many other realms of human behaviour. The foregoing paragraphs show that other skills and insights than the pure application of academic knowledge are demanded of a researcher – as attested to by the following observations on leadership.

6.2.3 Leadership and human skills development

The negative effects of change in education cited above were all present at the school when I first met the teachers. These manifested themselves (amongst other things) as the teachers' frustrations with the poor levels of reading - but were, in fact, part of a bigger picture that was not obvious to me at the time and which was described in the data gathered at the School Indaba. These qualities were all defined as lacking at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School and were discussed at the SMT meeting on 2 June 2009. The findings about the teaching staff have been described in detail in chapter 5 and validated by data captured from the teachers themselves, from the School Indaba and in observations and discussions with teachers and several experts in different fields (*cf.* appendix II: 3) and by three years at the school.

It seems that the institutional culture of the school should be addressed. This refers to an unconscious way of behaving and getting things done. Schein (1992:12) defines this type of corporate culture as:

A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved problems of external adaption and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems

If these 'basic assumptions' are deficient, they should be changed. Problems such as excessive absenteeism, staff discipline and their low morale might be solved. All of

these problems impinge on the successful application of reading strategies at the school.

Human skills should also be developed amongst the teachers amongst whom defiance, racism and backbiting are rife. These skills involve the ability to work well with other people both individually and in a group. Managers with good human skills are able to get the best out of their people. Consequently, a recommendation for the future at this school specifically and for education in general, is that human skills and management expertise be developed. This is in line with recommendations by the Annual Provincial Conference of the South African Principals' Association (2009: 12), the *Education Roadmap: Focus on schooling system* (2009: 43), and the declaration by the erstwhile Minister of Education to the South African Principals' Association (SAPA) conference, Pretoria on 4 September 2008. On this occasion the minister stated that 'In recognising principals as leaders who must learn and as stewards of learners who require learning, new skills, new ethics, individual and community morality; you have captured the essence of what education leadership should mean'.

In chapter 5 I mentioned that I would not be leaving the school abruptly at this point: it has already been mentioned that one of the insights to be gained from this work is that change happens slowly. In order to succeed, a researcher doing a similar project must be committed wholeheartedly to the real situation that presents itself, be prepared to change his or her mindset and in so doing, acknowledge the others in the project. It is important to spend a considerable period of time in the research field and it would be true to say that such a project should not be driven by the pressure to complete an academic project.

This subsection (of 6.2 *Findings and their implications for language practitioners*) has discussed human skills development and leadership as aspects that would improve the functioning of a reading programme in a similar institution in the future. The following subsection outlines how the community can assist in achieving this goal.

6.2.4 Application in the community

This project revealed the need to involve the community in the improvement of reading. Chapter 4 (Social purposes of AR) mentioned that the power of AR is at its best when ‘driven by a sense of social action...and with the aim of the emancipation of the participants’ (Henning, 2005:47); and that it can be successfully performed within schools, within the family and community at large. This AR project is in line with these words as it concludes that the action needs to move beyond the school gates and try to improve the way in which communities operate by getting their members to contemplate the situation and become responsible for their actions (*cf*: 4.2.1.4 *Social purposes of AR*).

Prof. Rosseel’s suggestions of ‘stakeholder management’ are also apposite here: the possibility of optimally leveraging teachers, parents, members of the SGB, community leaders such as the ministers and church groups must be investigated in order to uplift the community and support the teachers. (I did involve the SGB and the department and contacted the alumni during this project: however, this needs to be extended with the aid of the new principal). An extra benefit of involving the stakeholders would be that by becoming more involved in the school, they will help improve the motivation of the teachers and the learners. Certainly, the lack of motivation in both the teaching body and the corps of learners was one of the research questions posed in chapter 5. Passion for the school and commitment to it will be born from the stakeholders’ involvement, and passion and enthusiasm are motivators.

A request that I act as consultant to run a similar project at the other secondary school in the township has been acceded to. This request is an immediate consequence of the project at Wag-‘n-bietjie Secondary School and indicates the community’s awareness of the value of education and that education cannot be achieved without reading.

The project has been propelled and enabled by a generous donation of funds by Raubex Construction. It is of great consequence to the project that the findings and applications can be applied to a similar educational institution because this adds depth and merit to the work completed at Wag-‘n-bietjie Secondary School in that the

knowledge and experience can be used and applied beyond the limits of one school's boundaries: carrying the experience and expertise forward, and it further adds a future dimension to what might be a purely academic exercise. Certainly this initiative is congruent with the spirit of AR as existing in practice in a real world.

6.2.5 Comments, suggestions and a blueprint for similar studies

Despite the ambivalent success of the teachers' training described above, a result of this study is that learners' reading seems to have improved (*cf.* the discussion of the improved matriculation results in chapter 5 and, more specifically, the results of the testing of the grade 9 learners after less than two years of reading, both mentioned above). It has also been found that, although the teachers seemed intractable, awareness of the value of reading has been created. Accordingly, the following results and suggestions may be recorded:

- The learners have become hungry for books. They want and need new attractive books of high interest. They are willing and enthusiastic. This craving for books was the impetus for the creation of the reading room.
- According to the retesting of the 2009 grade 9 learners, their reading seems to have improved significantly (*cf.* chapter 5).
- There is an indication that the reading interventions may have improved the 2008 matriculation results (*cf.* chapter 5).
- The library should be opened.
- The parents and stakeholders should become involved (discussed above and below).
- The most significant result is that the learners' behaviour has changed. They are seen walking with books and magazines and learners have requested on more than one occasion that the reading room be opened after school (*cf.* the teachers' comments in chapter 5). This shows a progression from reading at break time once a week via daily opening of the reading room to an even greater need for access to literature. In addition, the learners' punctuality has improved

It must be remembered that the research has been completed at a most sensitive time at the school with the imminent departure of the principal and when there has been tentative buy-in from some of the staff. It is hoped that new leadership will result in training being better received in the future.

The following scheme is offered as a type of blueprint for future work:

1. Establish the style and strength of leadership at the school.
2. Negotiate the scope of the project *i.e.* what it involves and how much time teachers are willing to spend on it.
3. Establish the will of the staff and create a team of those who are willing.
4. Staff development is at the heart of the project. In other words, during this project reading would be used to develop the teachers and the learners. Change will be effected via reading: by using the values and beliefs embodied in reading and in people's attitudes to reading. Emphasise the human skills and the practical skills rather than the academic skills.
5. Involve the DoE and try to institutionalise my position by obtaining a mandate for my work from the DoE, the SGB, the alumni and the parents.
6. Establish outstanding, formal channels of communication.
7. Involve the HODs with the SMT in meetings and to assume responsibilities.
8. Insist on respect (including matters such as punctuality, cleanliness and communication).
9. Plan for sustainability (the staff, committees of learners, students doing community service, parents, churches, the elderly, discussed below).
10. Arrange mentorships from the excellent schools in town to inspire professional behaviour at school and change the corporate culture of the school (discussed below).
11. Keep aims simple, e.g. all subject teachers must teach a few specified aspects of language in their classes daily.

It is fortuitous that what was learned in the current project will be applied in 2010 at a school in the same township with a similar profile. The blueprint will be applied in this case.

This section reveals the complexity of the issues involved in such a study. It has been possible to draw conclusions and make suggestions on the topics of:

- effecting change;
- leadership and human skills development;
- reading development at a school; and
- the application of the study in the community. .

Inevitably, a study contains shortcomings and constraint. These are mentioned below.

6.3 Limitations of the study

I experienced the complexity of the situation at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School as a severe limitation (*cf.* chapter 5 and also appendix II:3.1: the School Indaba). Also, the tension of developing the reading and actually implementing the change at the school was difficult. It was difficult to balance the implementation of the intervention and academic rigor of the AR (which intends to enhance and inform the process) in a way that was acceptable to both me and the teaching body. This was noted in the description of the AR cycles. Consequently CBI and *Readucate* were only partially implemented which meant that the more specific and detailed aspects of language were not addressed specifically enough. Similarly the intended involvement of the teachers as co-researchers and colleagues was partly achieved: much of the action was based on their suggestions (which were theoretical) but the practical initiative was slow in developing.

In retrospect, I should have spent more time at the school before embarking on the study to gain a clearer insight of the context and the complexities involved. Diversity training or study before attempting change would have been an excellent way of reconnoitring the situation in advance.

In line with the comments in the preceding paragraph, the process of selecting which teachers to undergo *Readucate* training was not thoroughly thought through and was done in an arbitrary top-down manner by the deputy principal when I did not know the individuals concerned. (This was mentioned in chapter 5). Had I done an advance study of the status quo in the school at the time, *Readucate* might have been

abandoned or tackled differently. Yet it happened unexpectedly at the beginning of the project that teachers had to be identified to undergo this training. This was undertaken by the SMT at the time, one of whom was new on the staff. Only once the training was underway did the teachers' reluctance to participate become evident. This set *Reeducate* up for failure in 2007 - 2009.

In a similar vein, my establishment of the read-aloud sessions was a unilateral decision. This blossomed into the establishment of a reading room with daily reading activities. Because this way of acting runs counter to the AR spirit of consultation and colleagues' working together, it is thus a limitation of the study. Ironically it was one of the most successful efforts and it seems that with the committee of learners that has been established, and the tentative buy-in of some willing teachers and a parent, it may succeed.

In spite of the limitations, this study offers guidelines for other practitioners wanting to effect change in a school setting (see above). Moreover, it seems to have improved reading and, most importantly, succeeded in changing the lives of many learners whose attitudes and behaviours attest to their new regard for books.

6.4 Recommendations for further research

This study attempted to improve the reading at a township secondary school and in so doing, intended to train the teachers in modern methods of teaching reading. The follow-up studies indicated below would flow logically from this study:

- A study could focus on the language proficiency of one specific language group of learners at the school. Specific features of their language ability could be studied and recommendations made to teachers on ways to improve their language ability and facilitate their language acquisition with improved teaching techniques. Such a project could present new findings on problems specific to the particular language group concerned.
- A language development project for only the incoming grade 8 learners could be conceived in which all the aspects of language (reading, writing, speaking

and listening) could be integrated. This could be widely applied to incoming grade 8 learners.

- The development of reading could be combined with the development of writing based on the symbiotic relationship between the two. The influence of one writing intervention (such as the journaling proposed in this study) on reading proficiency could be considered. This would enrich the learners' second language.
- The role of a programme of extended reading and the creation of a culture of reading could be considered as a vehicle to motivate and involve the teachers and boost the spirit of the school. This would assist in the change of attitudes amongst teachers and improve the corporate culture of the school.

These suggestions flow from aspects that were touched on during the course of this project and which seem ripe for development.

6.5 Conclusion

The following rundown contains the merit and relevance of the value of the project which will be discussed in a few short paragraphs.

Education is of great concern in South Africa because of increasingly falling standards. This sounds the reveille for improved reading, the primary aim this study. It was decided to effect this change by empowering the teachers to teach reading and to seek (by critical reflection) a more generalised understanding of the teaching of reading so that the results would have the additional value in that valuable guidelines for teaching and learning may be drawn from this study.

Empowering the teachers in this way involved effecting change at the school. It was discovered that the best way to do this was by using reading to call on the teachers' values and in so doing make change possible. This was partially achieved during the second cycle of AR. It is hoped that the change will continue to grow at the school.

During this project it became clear that the learners could indeed be inspired with a love of reading. Improvement was observed in the learners' behaviour generally and towards reading. In this dissertation, suggestions were made to enhance this.

The research found that strong management and human skills development would improve reading. A blueprint was proposed on how to proceed in a similar situation.

The main limitations of the study were reportedly the complexity of the situation and the difficulty in juggling theory and practice in a way that satisfied both me and the participants. An extended period of investigation before embarking on such a venture was suggested and certain flaws in this study were indicated. Finally, recommendations for further research were made.

The path at Wag-‘n-bietjie Secondary School has been long and winding - often fraught with difficulties that seemed insurmountable at the time. The project was kept on track by the choice of AR as a research methodology because of its combination of discipline and suppleness, and also the doggedness to persevere: it has certainly been enriching and gratifying to work steadily and relentlessly in order to achieve certain goals. Against the background of the educational crisis mentioned in our country, it is hoped that this offering might have practical value.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Reading test

1. Test with the memorandum

Test that was written by grade 8,9 and 10 learners in February 2008. It is intended for all future incoming grade 8 learners to identify weak readers for literacy classes. The grade 8 class of 2008 was retested in grade 9 in October 2009, using this test to establish whether there has been an upward trend in reading.

Important: Teachers should explain to the learners that these test results will be kept private and confidential. Answer on the question paper

New Hearing Aids

It was John's birthday. He was sixty years old. He heard that many people began to have trouble with their eyes and ears when they turned sixty. John decided to go and see the doctor to have his eyes and ears checked.

The doctor gave John some tests. The doctor told John, 'Your eyes seem fine but your hearing is starting to deteriorate. It's nothing to worry about. It happens to most people when they get older, and it can easily be fixed with a hearing aid'.

John was disappointed. He didn't really want to wear a hearing aid but he knew that the doctor was right. He asked the doctor about different kinds of hearing aids.

The doctor showed him several kinds. Some of them were quite large and everybody would be able to see them. Others were much smaller and less noticeable.

'Do the small ones work as well as the large ones?' he asked the doctor.

'Oh yes,' replied the doctor. 'In fact, they are more modern and usually work even better than the large ones. However, they are more expensive'. John tried on the hearing aids. He didn't like the large ones and decided to get the smallest one he could. It was very expensive but nobody would be able to see it. Nobody would guess that he was wearing it.

The doctor ordered a hearing aid for John, and a few days later John picked it up from the doctor. He put it in his ear and went to work. At work he saw his friend, Jack.

‘Jack,’ he said, ‘do you notice anything different about me?’

Jack looked at him and shook his head. ‘No,’ said Jack.

‘Good,’ said John. ‘I’ll tell you a secret but don’t tell anyone else. The doctor said my hearing was starting to deteriorate and I needed a hearing aid. I bought a very small one. It was very expensive, but it’s very good. No one can see it’.

‘That’s good,’ said his friend. ‘What kind is it?’

John looked at his watch. ‘Two thirty,’ he said.

Vocabulary review

Underline the answer that explains the underlined word.

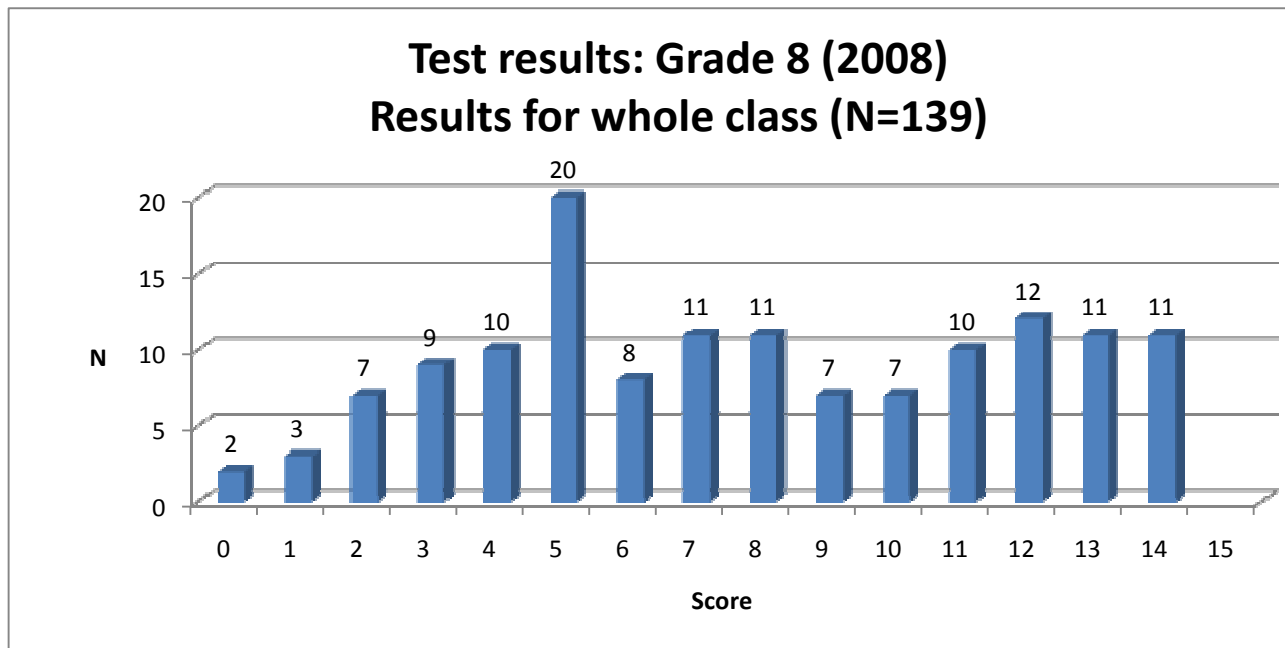
1. The old dog’s health began to deteriorate during the cold winter.
a. get better b. get cold c. get over d. get worse
2. I spilled some juice on my pants. Is the spot noticeable?
a. clearly heard b. easily seen c. hardly begun d. nearly done
3. The apartment was very modern with lots of electronic equipment.
a. by the way b. just right c. out of order d. up to date

Comprehension.

Underline the best answer.

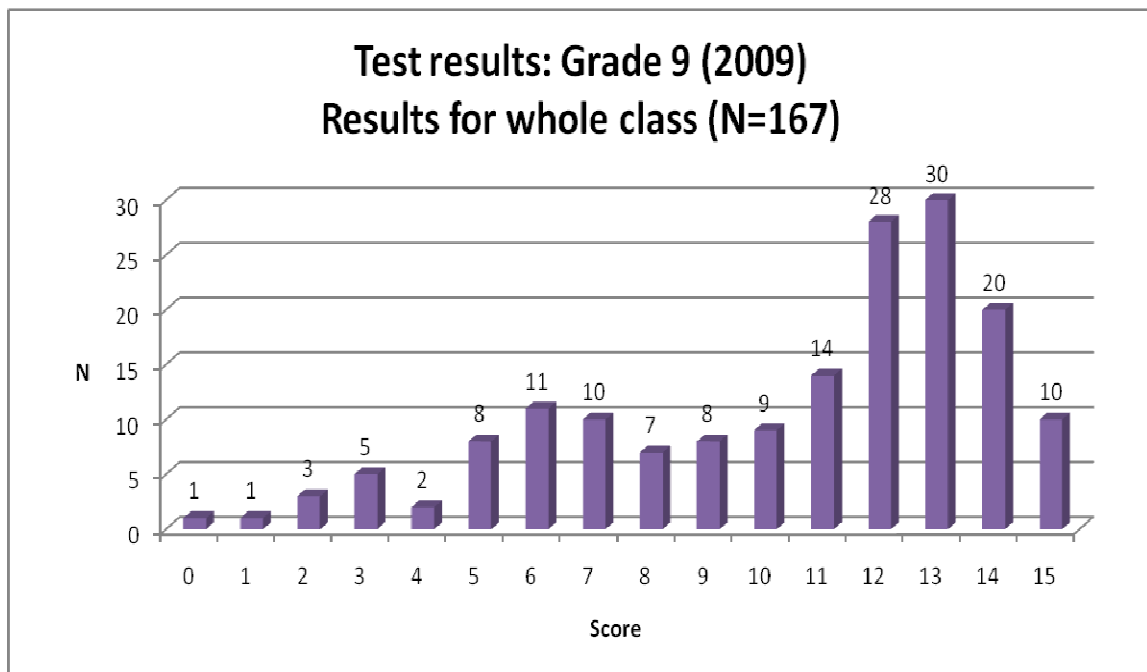
1. Why is this story funny?
a. John has a hearing aid b. The doctor tricked John
c. John’s hearing is very bad. d. The hearing aid does not work well.
2. Why is John losing his hearing?
a. He had an accident. b. He is getting older.
c. He likes loud music d. His office is very noisy.
3. Who is Jack?

Figure A1: Test results Grade 8 (2008) whole class



The figure below shows the results for all the Grade 9 learners tested in 2009 (N=167). They had a median score of 12, and a mean of 10.4 on the test, with a standard deviation of 3.6. The mode was 13, with 30 (18%) of the sample achieving this score.

Figure A2: Test results Grade 9 (2009) whole class



Appendix II: Summaries of meetings

Please note that only the main points of the meetings are recorded in point form to prevent the document from becoming too long. In order to be able to skim and scan the minutes, the important words have been made bold. The original documents are lodged with the researcher.

1. Meetings held with teachers

1.1 Held on 21 November 2006

- Purpose: to identify the language teachers' **problems with the learners' reading** skills, and establish a partnership.
- The **teachers will be trained** in methods to solve the reading problems.
- This is a **joint effort** involving the teachers and the researcher. It is not an investigation or criticism of the teachers.

1.2 Held on: 23 February 2007

- Purpose : to discuss **strategies** to address reading problems identified
- Anonymous questionnaire on **current strategies** for teaching reading.
- **Introduction** to CBI, the reading process and developing reading methods and reading strategies.
- **Different teachers than previously.**
- Decision: **sustained silent reading once a week.** The technique and rationale were explained and the '**rules**' were **distributed**
- Teachers reported their **frustrations** with the status quo.
- **Focus group interviews** were conducted with the teachers (results are quoted in chapter 1)

1.3 Held on 25 May 2007

- Discussions of 23 February repeated. (**project was re-explained; repeat of short CBI presentation**)
- Reported results of the **grade 8 tests and questionnaires.**
- **SSR has not yet been implemented.**
- Teachers' questionnaire completed to gauge their **commitment** and **perceptions** and also ask for **suggestions.**

- The following comments were made:
 1. Learners do not have access to TV
 2. Concern about the failure rate of the Grade 8s
 3. Learners can answer questions verbally but cannot read or write
 4. The work at school is irrelevant
 5. One teacher makes learners read out loud (not a language teacher)
 6. No supporting resources for OBE
 7. Learners cannot grasp basic concepts.
 8. We have to go back to basics
 9. Some write phonetically. Frustrates teacher
 10. Learners cannot copy from the board.

1.4 Held on: 14 January 2008

- **Reading programme re-explained** because there were teachers still unsure of its origin and purpose.
- The **donation** from Raubex Construction were discussed and explained.
- The **goals and the interventions** already in place were explained.
- Teachers wrote their interpretation of the **obstacles to the programme**, anonymously.
 1. Lack of reading material at school and at home
 2. Not enough parental involvement
 3. Not enough commitment of teachers and learners.
 4. Time allocated to teaching and reading – already overloaded
 5. Demotivated teachers and learners
 6. Owning the project and its outcomes needs to be addressed
 7. Noisiness of children during school hours
 8. Low self-esteem
 9. Hours of training per day too much for teachers. (*Readucate*)
 10. Some learners live very far away.
 11. This programme should be part of the normal school day as far as possible. Learners are tired and hungry after 2 p.m.
 12. The teachers have a negative approach towards the programme. The main reason is that the teachers do not want to put in the effort.

13. Children do not apply themselves.
14. Teachers think that if you are a teacher, you can teach a learner to read. Not so. You need a specific method to do this.
15. Failing to work as a team of instructors results in the fact that the school does not achieve its goals of improving reading to maximum of learners.
16. Staff discipline is poor
17. Hunger of pupils.

Problems the research team encounter

- Communication with school
- Lack of staff commitment
- Lack of initiative
- Force Field Analysis. Where are we? **What have we done so far?**
 - Introduced Sustained Silent Reading
 - Introduced content-based instruction
 - Requested a reading room at the school
 - Established good lines of communication and a working relationship with the school management team
 - Trained 9 *Readucate* instructors
 - Started group *Readucate* literacy teaching

Interventions/ Actions for 2008 revisited:

- **SSR:** the rules, aims and rationale were **explained again.**
- Continued **training of teachers**
 - **CBI** across the curriculum with Grades 8,9,10 teachers.
 - ***Readucate*** groups. The existing groups will recommence on 21 January 2008. The responsibilities and commitments of the teachers to be trained in *Readucate* during January/ February 2008 were spelled out.
 - **Reading room.** A venue has been identified. The purpose and value of the reading room were explained to the staff.
 - **Reading aloud every Friday at break.** The staff will take turns to read aloud at break in the reading room.
 - **Journal writing.** This was explained to the staff by the researcher.

1.5 Held on 22 July 2009

Critical reflective staff plenary

The teachers worked in groups to identify problems and initiate discussion. The numbers in brackets indicate the number of similar answers.

1. What would you like to experience in your teaching at Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School?

Improved **discipline** (2x); **time management** and internal **motivation** of the learners; better **results**; **teamwork**; competent **management**; 100% **pass rate**; fulfilment; better two way **communication** (not just top-down); clever, **hardworking** learners; bigger **salaries**; **motivation of the SMT**; **permanent reading teacher**.

2. Would you like for the learners?

Textbooks (x2) and self-**study skills**; the ability to **work on their own**; **motivation**; experience the **joy of learning**; to be able to **read**; to make **logical deductions**; enough **resources** (x2); **food and cleaning** for learners (soap and washing powder).

3. Problems

Learner **behaviour**, ill **discipline** (x2); **Language of instruction** gives problems; **needy learners**. **Teachers do not want to supervise** during detention as the system has failed.

Lack of resources (textbooks, means to make copies), lack of technology.

Lack of **communication from the SMT** = a one man show. **SMT does not help us**. Always uncertain about what is happening at the school. You play too many roles and **do not always know what is expected from you**. Lack of **parental involvement**. **Buildings** need to be upgraded (asbestos is cold/ hot). **Budget is very limited**.

4. Sustainability of reading programme

Yes. The results have shown to be fruitful and the programme is vital for learning.

Not with all grades.

Teachers' workload is too great (x3).

Undisciplined learners think **Readucate is too elementary**. Learners absconding (x2).

Reading material? Reading hour is good.

Silent reading is **too long**.

2. Meetings held with the School Management Team

2.1. Held on 27 July 2007

- Discussion of the possible **sponsorship** by Raubex Construction
- Mrs Edna Freinkel from *Readucate* has an anonymous donation to train 10 teachers to teach illiterate learners. **Ten teachers** should be identified.
- Crux of the matter: **accountability**: the money cannot be poured in by sponsor. The researcher manager will be on site almost every day.
- 5 – 10 learners per teacher who will teach them to read for free extramurally. Progress must be documented and a history of why they cannot read.
- **Another ten teachers can be trained** in January.
- SSR should be continued. **SSR rules will be faxed through again.**

2.2 Held on: 7 September 2007

- Problem: **who will attend the *Readucate* training session?**
- Guidance of teachers: students will present a **CBI demonstration lesson.**
- **SSR** programme must be monitored closely. Learners giggle. Take long to settle. Their concentration spans are very short. Teachers are uncertain about what to do. **'Rules' will be handed out again.**
- Sponsorship for reading development at Dr Blok School. The teachers have asked for the following on their **'wish list'**:
 - OHPs and screens
 - Dictionaries
 - Books for the library
 - Maps and charts

2.3 Held on 23 October 2007

- **Communication with the school** is awkward.
- The proposed **programme of meetings to be diarised.**
- Problem: to help **identify the teachers to be trained by *Readucate*** next year
- **Role definition:**
 - The principal's role: the prime motivator of the staff and learners
 - Dr van Wyk's role: the project leader who will contribute knowledge

- The researcher's role: to write reports, do AR, monitoring, implementing reading interventions.
- **Project expectations:**
 - The researcher's expectations: the envisaged outcomes.
 - The principal agreed with the outcomes and wishes to see all learners able to read when they leave. He believes they will be empowered by *Readucate* and asks that the knowledge and experience gained at Dr Blok be shared with other schools after this project finishes.
- **SSR is still being inadequately applied and understood.** It was decided to address the staff at break the next day to explain and hand out **rules** for SSR.
- It was agreed that there were **problems with staff discipline and motivation.** The researcher was requested to discuss individual problems with the principal and to address the staff.
- **Advertising campaign** and the involvement of the **marketing student:** A marketing student and her professor have been approached to drive the reading at school by marketing.
- The SMT to investigate the use of the language programmes at the school's **computer lab.**
- Other matters:
 - Students are prepared to come to school to implement the **language experience approach.** (It was not possible to implement this).
 - *Readucate* teachers to be interviewed to establish and **report progress**
 - The need to meet regularly with the Grade 8 teachers was expressed.
- **Reading room:** requested.

2.4 Held on 19 November 2007

- **Communication** still not easy.
- Report on observations of the programme of **SSR:** improved but still problems.
- Requested report on *Readucate* incomplete.
- **Reading room:** A room previously used for woodwork was offered.
- The way forward in 2008:
 - The reading project to **focus** on Grades 8, 9 and 10 in 2008.

- All grades 8, 9, 10 **retested for literacy**. *Readucate* to continue.
- The **reading room** and a **roster** implemented for reading every Friday at break. (This should be voluntary, and sustainable).
- **SSR will continue** with whole school
- **Readucate training** would take for 11 more committed people as soon as possible in the New Year. A **date was requested urgently**.
- Training of all Grade 9 and 10 teachers to teach **CBI in all subjects** will take place.

2.5 Held on 29 January 2008

A was absent.

- **Readucate training**: second session of training on 4 February 2008.
- SMT confirmed that teachers had **been identified and are aware** of the scope of the course and commitments required of them. During the past session there had been **problems with punctuality and attendance** which had caused problems. The logistics were discussed.
- Staff: The **importance of daily staff meetings** in the staffroom:
- **Staff discipline to be addressed**. The management should lead by example and that no lingering should be allowed by either staff or learners.
- **Monitoring staff absenteeism** One day 15 of the 37 teachers were absent. Reasons: study leave to which they were entitled; and that they were also entitled to a certain number of days' leave a year. There were problems with labour unions that could be encountered.
- **Retesting** of all Grade 8, 9 and 10 learners: allocation of learners to *Readucate* literacy classes has been rather random.
- **CBI training** of grades 8, 9, and 10 subject teachers urgent.
- **Acknowledgement** requested for staff and learners who attend *Readucate*.
- How to **monitor** the programmes in place? The researcher and the vice-principals undertook to monitor them.
- **Reading schedule** and programme for break on Fridays after 15 February.
- **Room offered for reading** unsuitable it is large, dirty, needs paint, the lights are broken and it is far from the movement in the school. The pros and cons will be discussed.

2.6 Held on 15 April 2008

Chairperson of SGB had been invited and was present. Apologies: DoE representative. Late: principal

It was agreed that a **plan of action** was necessary as many projects were faltering and a matrix was drawn up. Dr van Wyk and the researcher requested that the chairperson of the School Governing Body, in the absence of the principal, **to confirm their mandate to continue the project at the school**. This was done.

- The **loss of *Readucate* material** taken by teachers was resolved.
- SMT has addressed the **problem of punctuality of the staff and learners**.
- Request that the **library be made available as a reading room**.

2.7 Held on 19 August 2008

Principal: absent with apologies

- **New apparatus:** (data projector, 3 OHPs and 3 screens purchased on teachers' request) are **not being used**.
- **Improved communication:** The researcher and a deputy would have regular meetings to discuss progress, to develop trust and mutual recognition.
- ***Readucate*:** the teachers' list of obstacles to *Readucate* presented (cf. meeting 14 January above). Friday classes changed to Wednesdays. B will monitor these classes and prepare a report on the progress. Monitoring of **the 60 sets of *Readucate* books** bought. Old commerce stationery offered for the *Readucate* learners to write in. A deputy will collect feedback forms on progress and attendance for the researcher on *Readucate* at the end of the term. (Note: these were not completed by all teachers and most were incomplete)
- **CBI:** two dates in September requested in order to **make up lost training sessions**. The researcher would like **to attend** CBI classes but on invitation only. She will conduct **interviews** with the staff.
- **Staff morale:** Tea: in the staffroom on Fridays is up and running. The researcher and Dr van Wyk would provide eats for the teachers.
- **A thank-you letter** should be sent to Raubex construction for renewing their investment.

2.8 Held on 20 October 2008

- *Readucate* classes: are **not running well**. Forms designed by the researcher **to assess** progress in each class.
- **Involve the parents** if possible, to inform them about the project at meetings and by letter if their children need to attend. The **teachers do not seem to be committed**. The classes of the late teacher need to be divided into other groups. The *Readucate* committee has not done this. **What has become of the sets of *Readucate* books?** Nobody is certain.
- **Apparatus:** The three new overhead projectors requested **are still in boxes** in the storeroom. A says the concept is ‘new’ to the staff and **they have no transparencies**.
- **SSR:** The researcher is going to focus on the grade 8 classes and then move up grade by grade. The reading is in place but there are a few problems. **The researcher plans to demonstrate and motivate the learners.**
- **Buy-in:** The researcher is interviewing and discussing the programme with members of staff individually in order to **encourage buy-in** to the programme.
- **CBI date:** Dr van Wyk **again requested a date** so that the meetings that were cancelled can be caught up. C will find a suitable date.
- **Prizes:** The researcher wants to offer **book prizes to those who have attended** most library readings. She will hand them out at **assembly**.
- **The dictionaries** bought for the school should be distributed.

2.9 Held on: 18 November 2008

- A **reading room** has been identified and will be prepared for 2009.
- The researcher offered to use **CBI to coach ten borderline matrices**.
- **CBI: Prof. Donna Brinton will visit the school** on in April 2009 to teach CBI. She is a world-renowned expert in CBI. **All staff** members should attend.
- **SSR:** is going well as all are quiet but lack enthusiasm.
- ***Readucate*:** SMT will slot it into the school day as the classes after school are not working.
- **Thanks:** The SMT thanked Dr van Wyk and the researcher for staying the course and for their efforts.

2.11 Held on 10 March 2009

Deputy: absent

- **SSR:** The researcher and Dr van Wyk have chosen R15 000 on books and want to fix the cupboards so that the books can be locked up. B and C will identify where they are needed.
- The new **reading room** will get a security door.
- **Cleanliness:** Dr van Wyk and the researcher requested that general **cleanliness of the grounds and the classrooms** be addressed. A replied that it would **not be possible** to ask teachers to clean their classrooms. It was a personal matter.
- **Discipline** of the staff and children should be addressed. A, B and C said they would do attend to it.
- **Readucate:** has started. The other learners should **write journals**. The researcher will address the staff to explain it. Journals have been delivered to the school.
- **Sustainability:** This is the biggest problem that lies ahead when the researcher leaves. This need to be considered and suggestions made at the next meeting.
- **CBI: Prof. Donna Brinton will visit the school** on 20 April 2009 to teach CBI. She is a world-renowned expert in the field. **All staff** members should attend.

2.12 Held on 2 June 2009

Absent: Deputy

- **Readucate:** A deputy had been asked to **prepare a report** on the progress in Readucate. He had information from **only three out of 16 teachers**. A mentioned the computer reading programmes available to the school. This has been discussed before and nothing has been done about it.
- **Sustainability:** Dr van Wyk asked A for the **requested plan** for sustainability. **The principal had none**. The researcher asked about **sustainability of the reading room**. The principal said that the **new librarians** would co-operate next term. (At the time of writing, nothing has yet been done).

- **Respect:** From observations, and notes written by the learners about the reading classes, it is clear that the **learners are treated rudely and even sworn** at by some members of staff. Dr van Wyk mentioned that this was in conflict with educational principles and that this aggravates disciplinary problems.
- **Staff plenary:** A date for a staff plenary was requested before the end of term. (This was not received until July, for a meeting to be held the next day).
- **Ethics and leadership:** The researcher shared her research findings on ethics and education. She gave copies to all. Dr van Wyk shared some words about leadership.
- **Apparatus:** Dr van Wyk complained that the **OHPs that had been requested by the teachers were not being used at all.** At a previous meeting, the reason given was that there were no transparencies and these have been supplied. A. said that the teachers were **not au fait with technology and requested an OHP demonstration.**
- **Teaching methods:** Dr van Wyk complained about the teaching methods because **teachers copy the whole textbook onto the blackboard.** A said that **was a good old solid way of teaching.** Dr van Wyk **disagreed and emphasised that it was for this reason that CBI was being introduced.** A said that there was no money for books. The researcher suggested **fundraising** as she knew someone who did this professionally. A said it had been done and **he had bought chairs for the staffroom** with the money. Dr van Wyk was aghast and **offered to use some of the sponsorship to print books** off a CD. A said they were of poor quality and that each LF wanted a different textbook. A would investigate whether he could allow Dr van Wyk to print the textbooks. (Note: At the time of writing there had been no reply).

2.12 Held on: 18 August 2009

This meeting did not take place as at the outset the principal accused the researcher and Dr van Wyk of having informed him of neither Dr Brinton's visit nor that of the local newspaper. It was pointed out to him that these had been on the agenda of meetings, and he apologised and left.

3. Special meetings

3.1 School Indaba: January 2008

These problems were identified at the School Indaba called by the alumni and attended by members of the SGB, HODs, members of the staff, parents and interested parties. The researcher attended two Saturday sessions. The matrix was e-mailed to the researcher by Ms A. Tarentaal (2008). It has been inserted verbatim.

Problem	Probable cause	Response strategy
1. The lack of accountability of learners has teachers crying for help. (e.g. for attendance, homework, studying, their behaviour)	1. Learners do not know or realise the need to take responsibility.	
	2. Learners seek attention from parents and regard this as a way to achieve it.	
	3. Teachers spoon-feed the learners too much.	
	4. Learners lack vision (hope)	Tell them about jobs and bursaries available so they can develop a goal in life. Motivational talks.
	5. Teachers are concerned that there is no way in which such children who are not interested in education can be refused access to the school.	
	6. The literacy problem leads	

	to the disengagement of the learners.	
	7. Poor vocational guidance is provided to learners by teachers.	
2. Lack of communication and poor communication	1. Language barriers are a barrier to communication (reading, speaking, writing and listening).	Put communications systems in place.
	2. Refusal by some teachers to change and become more accommodating. Refuse to learn other languages.	
	3. The old school culture does not want to make way for a new all inclusive culture.	
	4. Life values of teachers differ. Honesty does not appear to be a shared value when messages are relayed down the chain of command.	There must first be consultation then consensus before messages are created.
	5. Communication from school management team not always clear as there is no process or system to prevent miscommunication.	Other written means of communication such as memorandums should be used.
	6. No unity in School Management Team. SMT themselves do not adhere to what has been agreed (sets a poor example).	

	7. Learners have poor literacy skills.	Learners should follow the literacy programme being presented.
	8. Lack of respect for one another.	
3. Lack of direction	1. SMT is not giving direction as they are divided	Volunteers to initiate social gatherings to alleviate segregation.
	2. There is no willingness to execute the plan, starting with the SMT and trickling down the chain of command.	SMT must lead by example.
	3. It is not clear whether external direction is sought and utilised (e.g. teachers becoming grade 12 markers, networking and LFs)	
	4. The SMT's current plan is not focussed and poorly communicated hence there is doubt about its existence.	
	5. The plan is too top-down with no buy-in from the bottom.	
	6. A lack of common vision.	
4 Lack of growth and undesirable growth in the areas of academics, staff, unity, communication, interpersonal	People are not receptive to new ideas.	

relationships.		
	Too few new ideas are introduced.	
5. Teachers are segregated and work in different directions	Teachers refuse to change and become accommodating	Build a team spirit to eliminate cliques.
(Teachers are disengaged behind desks, do not interact with learners or other teachers. There is a racial and cultural divide.	SMT is divided and not giving clear direction.	Develop a caring attitude caring about the children, especially the vulnerable ones.
	Language and cultural differences.	
	Parents are not involved as expected.	
6. Lack of motivation and negative attitudes	Teachers and learners feel overwhelmed by socio-economic factors.	Address the culture of staff absenteeism.
	The image of the school is very negative.	
	Lack of discipline	Stop the culture of poor discipline of both teachers and learners, and start enforcing the code of conduct.

3.2 Adv. D. Smit: 3 March 2008

Adv. Smit runs her own private practice and specialises in labour law.

Tel: 0827099590

3.3 Prof. W. Greyling: (the then Professor of English, US): 15 July 2008

Address to all teachers on Report on Wag-'n-bietjie Secondary School: literacy testing

A literacy test, designed on the basis of test specifications which are consistent with the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), and current testing practices (cf. Hughes, 2003: Chapters 4, 5, 7 and 11), was used to assess learners' proficiency in English. The test was pitched at Grade 8 level, and for the Grade 8 cohort, we obtained reliability indices (i.e. alpha coefficients) ranging from 0.83 to 0.88. The test is at the beginning stages of the development process; so, we intend to work towards improving its reliability and validity. We are nonetheless confident that the current test provides relatively reliable information about the target group of Grade 8, 9 and 10 learners.

From the findings quoted later in this report, we are able to conclude, tentatively, that

- (a) a significant number of learners in Grade 8 are at risk. The frequency tables for 8B, 8C and 8D show that 55 (50%) out of 112 learners are on scores of 50% and less on the test. We have identified Grade 8B as a particularly vulnerable group in which 22 (54%) out of 41 learners have obtained scores of 6.25 (42%) and lower out of 15.*
- (b) an equally significant number of Grade 9 learners are at risk. The frequency tables show that 56 (40%) out of 140 students are on scores of 50% and less on the test. We have identified Grade 9E as vulnerable as 27 out of 39 learners in the Grade have obtained scores of 50% or less. The vulnerable students in Grade 9E make up 19% of the full cohort. One would also expect the means for Grades 9 and 10 to be significantly higher than those for Grade 8 as the test is pitched at Grade 8 level. Although these means are higher, they are not significantly so.*
- (c) learners at Grade 10 level test as high risk (on a Grade 8 level test). Of those tested, 35 (19.5 %) out of 179 are at risk, this in spite of their writing a Grade 8 level test.*

- (d) of the full cohort 146 (34 %) out of 431 learners are at risk.
- (e) In some of the grades, there are a wide range of literacy skills, and this fact has implications for those who are adequately literate and those who are not. See, for example, the minimums and maximums for Grades 10D, 10E, 9A-E, as well as 8B, D and C.

Implications

Language proficiency is one of the best predictors of success in the educational system. Lack of academic literacy and language proficiency will compromise the educational process in various ways. Learners in the vulnerable group will encounter problems in accessing the meanings in texts, both written and spoken; thus, they will have difficulty engaging in educational processes. Learners who are unable to read and write will experience failure and exclusion. Scaffolded intensive and extensive reading instruction, we believe, is a primary strategy, among many, to develop not only academic literacy and language proficiency skills, but also to promote learner autonomy. It would also seem that the wide range of skills in the same grades will require individualized instruction. We see these as obvious objectives.

Reference: Hughes, A. 2003. *Testing for Language Teachers*. (Second Ed). Cambridge: Cup.

3.4 Prof. Lucius Botes: 4 November 2008

Prof. Botes is the programme director of Masters in Development Studies which is run from the University of the Free State and applied internationally. Prof. Botes is a seasoned scholar in the field of community development. He is currently the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities.

3.5 Prof Donna Brinton: 21 April 2009

Prof Brinton is the Associate Director of UCLA's Center for World Languages and also lectures in the Department of Applied Linguistics and TESOL. She acts as Coordinator of the UCLA ESL Service Courses. Prof Brinton has published widely with her field of expertise being TESOL. Prof. Brinton has worked as a language specialist for the US government and has conducted teacher education programmes around the world. brinton@humnet.ucla.edu

3.6 Prof. Peter Rosseel: 10 August 2009

Prof. Rosseel was consulted for advice about change management. His field of expertise is described below.

Prof. Peter Rosseel is Director of Life Long Learning at the University of Leuven. He is also an Extraordinary Professor at the Faculty of the Humanities of the University of the Free State. His research and teaching interests lie in the domains of Instructional Psychology, Change Management, Academic Entrepreneurship, Management of Diversity, Leadership, Intercultural Management and Performance Management. He manages research and education projects for the European Commission and the Flemish Government that have resulted in several publications. He is frequently consulted by large corporations world-wide.

peter.rosseel@lll.kuleuven.ac.be

3.7 Mr Paul Cassar: 17 August 2009

Mr Cassar is the headmaster of Eunice Girls' School, one of the top schools in the country. Mr Cassar is also a consultant to the DoE concerning underperforming schools. Tel: 051- 444 1765

Appendix III: *Readucate* success stories

1 The Department of Education



DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
DEPARTEMENT VAN ONDERWYS
LEFAPHA LA THUTO
ISEBE LEZEMFUNDO



Karol District Office
Private Bag X1013
De Aar
7000

Date: 30 March 2005

Tel: 053 6329200

Fax: 053 6313250

Enquiries : PGN Masuabi
Reference :

TO: Mrs. E. Freinkel

Since the implementation of *Readucate* in 1997, there has been a significant improvement in Educators skills and attitude towards the teaching of reading and writing. Unfortunately a very low percentage of +/- 20% of all the educators in our region have been trained. If all educators were trained the overall improvement would be far greater.

With this 20% of educators teaching, reading and writing have improved by 40%. Sadly a lot of the *Readucate* skills are lost in the classes in which the other educators are not trained.

The overall behaviour of the learners improved more than 50% due to their positive attitude and eagerness to learn. Learners who have been trained are able to analyse problems, their self-confidence and self esteem improved dramatically.

If all educators were trained according to the *Readucate* Programme the improvement would be 90% -100%.

Due to the high illiterate rate in our area *Readucate* could make a vast difference to many of our learners lives.

Yours sincerely

PRINCE GOODWIN NEO MASUABI

DISTRICT DIRECTOR



FOFOZA HIGHER PRIMARY SCHOOL

P.O. Box 253
Nwamitwa

0871
12 APRIL 2007

REG.NO. 501472318 EMIS NO: 915530488 Enq: Principal: 072 225 9562

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

Grade	SEPTEMBER 2006					NOV/DECEMBER 2006				
	No. Wrote	No. Competent	%	No. Not Competent	%	No. Wrote	No. Competent	%	No. Not Competent	%
R	48	28	58,3	20	41,7	48	48	100	-	-
1a	43	22	51,2	21	48,8	46	36	78,3	10	21,7
1b	46	31	67,4	15	32,6	43	24	55,8	19	44,2
2a	51	24	47,1	27	52,9	50	40	80,0	10	20,0
2b	50	26	52,0	24	48,0	50	36	72,0	14	28,0
3a	45	19	42,2	26	57,8	46	38	82,6	08	17,4
3b	47	30	63,8	17	36,2	43	32	74,4	11	25,6
4a	45	19	42,2	26	57,8	41	40	97,6	01	2,4
4b	46	20	43,5	26	56,5	45	33	73,3	12	26,7
5a	54	39	72,2	15	27,8	55	52	94,5	03	5,5
5b	58	39	67,2	19	32,8	58	55	94,8	03	5,2
6a	31	21	82,0	10	18,0	30	30	100	-	-
6b	30	21	63,0	9	27,0	30	30	100	-	-
6c	28	12	4,9	16	57,1	28	28	100	-	-
7a	46	08	6,3	38	93,7	46	37	80,4	09	19,6
7b	39	08	20,5	31	79,5	39	26	66,7	13	33,3
7c	49	23	67,3	26	32,7	45	41	91,1	04	8,9

FOFOZA HIGHER PRIMARY SCHOOL
Reg. No. 501472318

2007-04-12

P.O. BOX 253 NWAMITWA 0871
Enq: Principal:

In grade 7, in September 2006, **8 learners** were considered competent and **38 incompetent**. After **one term** of *Readucate*, in December 2006, results show that **37 learners** were competent and **9 incompetent**. That's a complete reversal of the class!

Appendix IV: Questionnaires and interviews

1. To establish the learners' socio-economic and educational background

1. How many languages do you speak well?
2. What is your home language? Mark the language that applies.
3. Say which languages you speak.
3. How far did your mother/ caregiver study?
4. How far did your father/ caregiver study?
5. How many people live at home with you?
6. How many books do you have at home?
7. What books (not magazines) does your mother/ caregiver read?
8. What books (not magazines) does your father/caregiver read?
9. What magazines/ newspapers does your mother/ caregiver read?
10. What magazines/ newspapers does your father/ caregiver read?
12. Which of your parents'/ caregivers' magazines do you read?
11. Why do you need to read well?
12. Explain what you think about reading.
13. How do you see your reading problems? Do you need help? Explain

2. Questionnaire to the teachers to establish problems and how they teach reading

The results of this questionnaire have been inserted in the text in chapter 5. It is mentioned here in order to indicate the list of questionnaires fully.

3. Please list the obstacles to the reading project

The results of this questionnaire have been inserted in the text in chapter 5. It is mentioned here in order to indicate the list of questionnaires fully.

4. Questionnaire to establish what the teachers understand by CBI

1. Describe what you understand by CBI
 - Teaching the vocabulary (x 4)
 - Trying to make the learners learn the language while they learn the content.
 - I am not sure, I could not attend the training (x 3)
2. How do you apply it in your classrooms?
 - I teach them to spell the words (x 2).

- I teach them the difficult words before I teach the lesson.
- I am not sure how to do it (x 3).
- I make them read (x2).

5. Final questionnaire to the teachers

There were 33 respondents out of a teaching staff of 35 (1 refused to reply; 1 was on maternity leave)

1. What are your qualifications?

Refused to answer: 13

The rest of the teachers had degrees and teaching diplomas; several had more than one degree and six were studying further.

2. When did you get these qualifications?

Refused to reply	Before 1985	1985-1995	1995- 2000	2000-2005	2005 - 2009
14	5	9	4	2	6

3. Where did you qualify?

No reply	College/ Technichon	University	Not clear
11	7	21	1

Some teachers have attended more than one institution.

4. Do you have enough textbooks for teaching?

Yes	No	Other
7	23	3 did not reply

5. What workshops have you attended workshops? Describe their value.

13: Departmental workshops worthwhile on new syllabus assessment and training.

1: not enough depth.

1: useless because the emphasis is on teachers not learners and more admin involved.

1: 'some were'. No description.

17: did not reply.

6. Do you think you need any extra training to be a good teacher?

Yes	No	Other	No reply
17	8	1 wanted support; 1 wanted training in administration	7

7. Sustained Silent Reading. Describe the progress since the beginning.

Positive observations

- Helps learners to read in silence (x2).
- The learners concentration has increased (x4).
- Learners more restful they have learned the value of reading (x4).
- It is valuable to the learners. Progress is patent the learners obviously enjoy it (x4).
- The learners do show interest in reading/ enjoyment (x3).
- Disciplined reading, material not textbooks any more (x2).
- At first SSR was difficult to implement due to learners; not being used to reading (x5).
- Progress is visible (x5).

Other comments:

- It improved my own reading and writing.
- Little progress.
- The teachers must still get into the same routine and discipline.
- No reply (x2).

8. Describe any change in behaviour you have noticed since the inception of SSR (This overlaps with the previous question but it was asked to stimulate reflection)

Positive responses:

- At first they couldn't make sense of the period and struggled to settle. Now they settle down quickly and easily the moment they open up their reading materials (x4).
- Learning behaviour has improved; more challenged and curious.
- Now they can read in silence and spelling is improving.
- Learners feel free to share their thoughts.
- Eager to read (x7).

- Their behaviour has changed a lot because during their free period you see them with magazines and newspapers, reading.
- Moved from reading pictures to text (x2).
- They are beginning to become inquisitive, disciplined and enjoy reading.
- Bring their own books.
- More excitement and interest in reading by some learners. They are starting to value books more, but there is lots of work to be done.
- They have started feeling more comfortable, concentrate more and their work has improved.
- Learners are keen to get newspapers or any material and are not shy to ask.

Negative replies

- No answer (x5).
- Can't say (x1).
- No significant change(x1).

9. What is your attitude to reading?

Love reading	Moderate	Do not like reading	No reply
24	1	1	7

10. What do you read?

No rely	Nothing	Magazines	'Everything'	Magazines and books	Books	Other
4	1	10	4	8	3	1

11 Describe what reading material you have in your classroom for SSR (24 register classes)

No answer	Nothing	Magazines/newspapers	Magazines and books	Books
4	3	12	4	1

12. What else do you need for SSR?

8 (out of 24) no answer

Apart from requests for books and magazines, the following positive suggestions were made:

- Place of safekeeping for the books that will make it easier to access the books.

- More exposure on how to conduct the process properly.
- Stack of books for everyone so they could rotate and learners could experience the pleasure of reading by wanting to know what happens next.
- More books of high interest and that read easily.
- Books for beginners and special age groups.
- Ways to create more interest.

13. Suggestions to improve SSR

10 no answer

- Circulate magazines so that learners get new reading material.
- Reading competitions.
- Library should be made available.
- Short term goals in terms of progress e.g. questionnaires, debates on reading material, Olympiads to do with reading matter that has been provided to the classes
- Easy books.
- Books should be permanently available.

14. Describe what you understand by CBI

- Instructions based on the content of a subject.
- Understanding subject content.
- Explain difficult words and concepts.
- Resources problem.
- Instruct the content to understand it broadening the child's perception of issues
- Teaching language with the contents of other subjects like natural sciences *i.e.* the theme of the lesson and activities must relate to a certain content subject.
- The contents of a particular article are used to answer consecutive questions.
- I do not know.
- These are concepts and approaches that will work under conducive (sic) circumstances. Where there is pressure and need they will be problematic (sic).
- Let learners read content and discuss what they understand.
- Learners must know what they learn.

- Starting from the known and moving to the unknown matter through teaching. Facilitate teaching maximum learner involvement. Use a variety of methodologies in teaching.
- Break down difficult words by using different methods (x 2).
- Use subject to teach language.
- It's to read with understanding (x 3).
- Explain different words before continuing with the lesson.
- Content subjects also language instruction.
- Instructions based on subject content (x 2 answers).
- I only attended 1 meeting and am not well informed.

The only answers that indicated understanding of the training given were the following:

- Training in my subject area to promote the learners' ability to read and understand the content in order to learn the content and be able to apply what they have learned, and to be able to reproduce the content correctly and in comprehensible form.
- Applying reading comprehension skills whilst dealing with subject content.

15. Describe any value gained from the lectures by Drs van Wyk and Brinton

No answer: 22

One teacher did not attend Dr Brinton's lecture as she had a prior appointment. (This meeting had been scheduled two months in advance and the SMT undertook to ensure full attendance). There were several who did not arrive and offered no excuse.

Positive answers:

- Reminded me of what I learned at college on how to present a lesson
- Broadened my vision
- 'Reading for content is important'
- Excellent pictures dictionaries, visual stuff. Fill in exercises would work.
- How easily lesson presentation was simplified by integration of various methods to approach subject matter.
- Taught me a lot.

- In English they say, 'Back to basics'. Learners' thinking and skills are directly dependent on their reading skills as is their interpretation of information. Always bear the language barrier in mind in your subject.
- Reading forms the base for success.
- Making our lessons interesting and enjoyable.

Negative replies:

- None. It was just a reminder of what I already knew.
- Not yet achieved but it improves teaching
- Could work if learners looked up words in dictionaries.

16. Would you like more CBI training?

Yes	No	No answer	Undecided
8	11	11	2

17. Would you like to give a demonstration of a CBI lesson to the other teachers and Dr van Wyk for constructive criticism?

Yes	No	No answer	Undecided
2	18	11	1 not confident

18. If you would, would you be prepared to organise it?

Yes	No	No answer	Undecided
2	20	11	

19. Which of the teaching aids that have been provided by Raubex construction's donation have you used?

Diction-aries	OHP and Screen	Data project-tor	Books in read-ing room	Read-ing room	Not-ice board	CD play-er	Read-a-long	No-thing
17	5	4	4	0	5	1	1	4

No reply: 6

One teacher has used 'computers' which were not provided and another, 'All those teaching that have been provided by Raubex'.

20. What problems, comments and suggestions do you have for the use of the apparatus and teaching aids?

Valuable suggestions were the following:

- Stationery OHP not easily available (x 7)
- I would love to learn about data projectors, power point etc.
- We need a safe place to keep them nearby that is easily accessible.

No comments: 14.

One comment: 'We need more OHPs'.

'Are they readily available?' (sic)

21. What else do you require to improve your teaching?

- Afrikaans dictionaries and bilingual dictionaries.
- Textbooks.
- Resources.
- Internet.
- Mathematics dictionaries.
- Sets of crayons, stationery.
- Motivated learners.
- More effective scientific apparatus.
- White board and extended laboratory.
- More data projectors.
- OHP.
- More teaching time rather than time wasted on assessment, policy problems cannot be ignored.
- More assistance.
- Time.

22. What do you understand by the term a *culture of reading*?

- Attitude towards reading

- Learners and teachers must develop a love of reading. More reading should be done.
- Having reading as part of one's living routine.
- Reading must become a habit: a reading nation is a winning nation.
- Read to gain knowledge.
- Making reading part of daily life routine. Reading daily.
- Reading develops your mind/ perceptions of life.
- Learners must learn to read earlier.
- Learners must read every day. They must be eager to read anything and be able to read.
- Love to read anything.
- Instilling in every child the culture of reading as a way of entertainment, also teachers. Through reading one can access any learning area as it also improves any individual's performance.
- To make learners aware of different culture by reading (sic).
- To love reading.
- It refers to the habit of reading and a natural normal desire to achieve enrichment and knowledge by means of reading, whether for pleasure or intellectual enrichment.
- School must have culture reading of its own. Must be a priority.
- Where everybody read and be motivated to read.
- To eat sleep and drink reading to read with a passion.
- Conducive environment for reading.
- Reading not under force but form love and habit.
- Everybody at school should be eager to read and time must be set aside to inculcate a culture of reading.
- Learners must enjoy reading as a way of life.
- Reading is like breathing.
- Reading for pleasure.
- Atmosphere of learning where reading is deemed to be an essential part of everyday life.
- Teach learners from young to read regularly.
- It is part of who you are.

- Learners must read more frequently.

23. What efforts of the researcher to cultivate a culture of reading in the school are you aware of?

- Reads to learners during break. Motivates teachers to read so that the learners follow their examples.
- Reading to learners.
- Shows positive interest.
- Motivates learners.
- The researcher takes a lot of trouble and visits the school regularly, reads every Friday makes books available.
- Opening a mini library and inviting learners to read.
- She has the children's development of reading at heart.
- She has done a lot for the learners.
- Reading room, books, SSR.
- Reading to learners during break. Demonstrations during assembly.
- We know that in the SSR we can just sit and read.
- Reading during intervals. Established a reading room for learners. Inspired teachers to read. Addressed learners during assemblies and rewarding learners who attended reading as a way of motivation.
- Making reading material available and motivating learners. Creating an awareness of the importance of reading. Making learners aware of reading techniques in all subjects.
- Dedicated reading during break. Creative in approach and gets others involved I have seen her with other people on two or three occasions.
- Reading hour. Aids to make reading more fun. *Readucate* classes. Supplied reading material. Investing her own time.
- Putting up notices. talk to learners during assemblies, different classes and SSR.
- I don't know. The group that she reads to at Mrs H's class ?

24. What do you do to help create and nurture a culture of reading? Give specific examples.

No reply: 6

- Read with learners. Tell them about books that I have read and that may interest them. Ask them about what they are reading. Bring different kinds of newspapers/ magazines to school.
- Anything I am asked and expected to do like giving *Readucate* lessons.
- Bring books and encourage learners to join library.
- Refer to interesting stories, and clever use of language.
- Motivate learners to read at home and during free time.
- Encourage learners to read in class quietly.
- I only work with figures.
- Force learners to read other material than textbooks during SSR. Let them read case studies during periods and read their answers in class.
- I bought books. I read to them. I am an example.
- By bringing it in my lessons. Show the difference and teach them to accept others.
- Library in class: make old books magazines and newspapers available.
- Motivating a culture of reading and providing reading material in SSR. Develop the importance of understanding of the subject matter.
- In Mathematical Literacy learners have to concentrate to understand what they read and are being asked.
- Use magazines as learning aids.
- Create situations for reading. Encourage discussions on written materials also graffiti on walls and desks.
- Make learners aware of newspapers in office. Make newspapers and reading material available in my classroom'
- Make sure SSR is effective.
- Do some CBI, motivate learners by giving them texts to prepare for next day.

25. What problems, comments and suggestions do you have in order to improve the culture of reading?

No reply: 6

- Encourage reading in all subjects. Give learners books that interest them. Ask what they have read, even comics. Problem: magazines too difficult for them to read for an hour.
- Parents should buy books so learners can read at home.
- In a few cases of bad discipline. to visit learners; form a book club.
- Make the library functional (x 2), allow learners to read in class quietly at least once a week and encourage them to take books for interest.
- Read aloud to class.
- Should start reading earlier.
- ‘People checking up on teachers as if they are children. Walking into your class without knocking to spy on you (the teacher). It makes you angry and lowers your morale’.
- I want to buy books, they are too expensive.
- A 100% culture of reading would be realised if every member of staff could understand the importance of contributing towards making a difference in every learner’s life. But given time an improvement will be achieved.
- Particularly in grade 10 there are serious reading problems also writing problems. Learners must develop their own reading culture themselves.
- Show the importance of reading and not just say ‘read, read, read’.
- A lack of SeSotho material.
- More interesting reading material.
- Ask learners what they are reading. Bring enjoyable topics to class.
- DoE should employ 3 extra teachers to teach illiterate learners. and
- Learners should have their own dictionaries.

26. What is your impression of the *Readucate* programme?

No Reply: 8

Comments:

- Good but too elementary; for primary school.
- Benefits the school.
- It can help the readers who struggle.
- It teaches them sounds and words.
- The *Readucate* programme is in progress.

- Good but target primary schools.
- It tries to improve reading by teaching the basic sounds and reading techniques.
- Helps to improve learning and to achieve more.
- It really helps teaching and learners really participate in activities.
- Not taken seriously.
- Could be good if done by trained people.
- Could work.
- Love the programme. Learners eager though the progress is slow.
- Could work if learners and teachers cooperate.
- I like it. Now I can teach a learner to read which I couldn't do before.
- Good but learners do not always want to go to basics. Prefer stories.
- Fantastic. Now I understand why learners cannot read and can identify problems.

27. If you do not teach *Readucate*, say what you do with learners during the *Readucate* period.

No reply: 12.

- Allow them to read quietly.
- Quiet reading reflecting at end.
- Follow instructions.
- Study.
- Read to them, encourage reading.
- Write journals.

28. Do you notice any improvement if the learners' reading? If you do, what would you attribute this to?

No reply: 7.

Negative replies:

- Not really, no ...; and
- Too soon to say

Comments:

- As a result of outside help.

- SSR (3).
- Gr 12 comprehension is better.
- I see them as are but they do read faster and more accurately.
- As a result of lots of reading.
- Pronunciation is better.
- Motivate them to start reading for at least 10 min more.
- Read regularly.
- Learner's attitude has changed: e.g. schoolwork is getting attention where it received none in the past.
- In my language lessons I notice if the I find books interesting and then they read better.
- Yes, those who attend have improved.
- Culture of reading slowly becoming effective (SSR).

29. In order for the reading programme to be successful it needs to be sustainable.

Write a few sentences on each of the interventions listed below to indicate the *problems* and *how you would be prepared to help* to help build sustainability into the programme.

No reply: 15

- We need an teacher full time full time for reading.
- I will encourage learners to read.
- Absence of the teachers is a problem.
- It is good, continue.

30. Sustained Silent Reading: (a) problems (b) what I will and can do

No reply: 10

Comments

- Some learners come without books.
- Provide books.
- Involve parents.
- Problems: classes without teachers. SMT must put them in hall and invigilate during SSR.
- I still have bored readers.

- Encourage readers to read/ bring along own books. get ideas from them/ share what I am reading and allow them to do so too. Suggest to SMT to monitor and reward teachers who keep consistency or sustainability in SSR.
- Encourage learners to read.
- I can continue to keep reading materials in the classroom and influence learners to be positive about reading.
- Learners cannot concentrate for the hour. Start with half an hour and add on more time.
- I can ask for a stack form the library but only for a certain time.
- Absence of the teachers: Classes can be divided.
- I think our classrooms should be more like libraries happy spaces which encourage learning and reading. Many are drab dreary rigid spaces.
- Shortage of reading materials. Collect magazines and books.

31. Content based instruction: (a) problems (b) what I will and can do

No reply: 18

Comments:

- Keep on reading in class.
- Difficult verbs/ simplify them.
- I try it and it works but sometimes I do not spend enough time to prepare that... try harder, it does work.
- Invite Dr van Wyk for support in CBI when need arises/ to implement CBI in my teaching.
- Keep on doing what I am as I know it all
- I can explain the content of the reading material, and emphasise how to classify and spell words.
- I have no knowledge of this CBI.
- Sometimes takes too much time. Keep going with CBI.
- Can be improved- less assessment.
- Can only work if learners have dictionaries.
- Non-attendance of learners: motivate parents and learners.

32. Teaching apparatus and teaching aids: (a) problems (b) what I will and can do

No replies: 14

- Not enough. Share and make own. Let learners help.
- Apparatus not always available set up financial means to buy apparatus.
- OHPs too few/ share.
- I use the OHP.
- Difficult to fully utilise the apparatus and aids.
- Difficult to get aids.
- I can try to extend the range of teaching aids for use in class despite difficulties.
- Use what is available.
- Have no apparatus. Will have to hire or borrow.
- Teachers need training and should be encouraged to use different teaching methodologies and strategies to keep learners interested.

33. A culture of reading: (a) problems (b) what I will and can do

No reply: 15

Comments:

- Learners not used to culture of reading. Teachers set example.
- Noisy learners/ discipline, motivate.
- I do a lot.
- Assembly, staff meetings, notice board, parent involvement. Learners talk.
- enough material available.
- Set example, motivate. Put positive information on the notice board and in the classroom.
- Buy reading books that will interest learners. There are no reading books, only newspapers and magazines.
- Be a role model.
- Motivate learners to read out of school.
- Not enough books.
- Better content selection and listen to the learners. The reading that the learners do in grades 8 and 9 is very important. I sometimes feel that we are paying too

much attention to the non-readers and not enough to develop the writing ability of the readers. Many write well- let's develop that.

34. Write any comment or suggestion you might have.

No replies: 16

- Programme benefits the learners; their attitude is beginning to change.
- Some SMT members should stop to spy on teachers , maybe some teachers will then enjoy reading and it will happen naturally.
- You have to be disciplined to read and I feel that if you are not interested in what goes on around you, you will not care about what your learners read and do.
- There is a definite need by learners for study skills, help with summaries, the ability to identify important facts, doing projects and bibliographies.
- Wonderful programme.
- Learners that can read show progress.
- Helps with discipline and learners show progress in their school work.
- Involve people without forcing them get their human interest going.
- CBI to be more communicated to staff.
- Thank you for your input into reading. I realise that if we all pull together and make a success it would improve our learners' capabilities a lot.
- *Reeducate* teachers should teach reading in first half hour of SSR. Then read on own. Once a week not enough.
- Teachers do not always have the time to sustain such programmes. I teach 40 out of 47 periods. Have to take care of absent teachers' classes, administration, afternoon study etc.
- Programme benefitted the school and should be maintained and continued