



The importance of reading in nurturing emergent literacy skills in pre-school learners, with special emphasis on children from disadvantaged backgrounds

By  
Lisa Michelle Drennan



**The importance of reading in nurturing emergent  
literacy skills in pre-school learners, with special  
emphasis on children from disadvantaged  
backgrounds**

**By**

**Lisa Michelle Drennan**

**A dissertation submitted in accordance with the requirements for the  
MA degree in the Faculty of Humanities (Department of English) at the  
University of the Free State.**

**3 January 2011**

**Supervisor: Dr M. Brooks**



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>DECLARATION</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2: EARLY INTERVENTION</b>	<b>14</b>
2.1 Emergent literacy	14
2.2 School-readiness	17
2.3 Early stimulation is the key	21
2.4 Environmental issues	24
2.5 The ‘forgotten’ children	27
2.6 The correlation between reading difficulties and anti-social behaviour	30
2.7 Language of learning and teaching (LoLT)	34
2.8 Knowledge cannot be transmitted but should be constructed	42
<b>CHAPTER 3: NURTURING READING</b>	<b>46</b>
3.1 Parents’ attitude towards literacy	46
3.2 Home-based intervention before school is crucial	51
3.3 Reading aloud, ‘pretend reading’ and sustained silent reading	59
3.4 Nurturing reading in preschool	65

3.5	What the government could do to facilitate early literacy	71
3.6	Saturday Morning School	74
<b>CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY</b>		<b>77</b>
4.1	Qualitative Component	77
4.2	Research Design	78
4.3	Participating Schools	81
<b>CHAPTER 5: INTERPRETATION OF RESPONSES</b>		<b>83</b>
5.1	Can the learner listen with attention and enjoyment to a story?	83
	5.1.1 Occupational Therapist's View	85
	5.1.2 Result	86
5.2	Can the learner properly interact with printed material in terms of turning the pages of book and reading from left to right with return sweeps?	86
	5.2.1 Occupational Therapist's View	88
	5.2.2 Result	89
5.3	Can the learner recognise letters of the alphabet?	89
	5.3.1 Occupational Therapist's View	91
	5.3.2 Result	91
5.4	Can the learner recite simple nursery rhymes?	91
	5.4.1 Occupational Therapist's View	93
	5.4.2 Result	93
5.5	Can the learner follow a logical sequence using pictures?	94
	5.5.1 Occupational Therapist's View	96
	5.5.2 Result	97
5.6	Can the learner use simple reasoning to identify 'parts of a whole'?	97
	5.6.1 Occupational Therapist's View	100

5.6.2	Result	100
5.7	Can the learner use simple reasoning to differentiate between the largest/smallest or the odd one out?	100
5.7.1	Occupational Therapist's View	103
6.7.2	Result	103
5.8	Can the learner identify simple colours and shapes?	103
5.8.1	Occupational Therapist's	106
5.8.2	Result	106
5.9	Can the learner recognise numbers 1 to 10 and rote count to 30?	107
5.9.1	Occupational Therapist's View	109
5.9.2	Result	109
5.10	Can the learner copy and extend simple patterns using writing implements?	109
5.10.1	Occupational Therapist's View	112
5.10.2	Result	112
<b>CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS</b>		<b>113</b>
6.1	Variables that may influence the study	113
6.2	The results	114
6.3	Recommendations for future research	121
<b>CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION</b>		<b>128</b>
7.1	Concluding remarks	128
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>		<b>132</b>

## APPENDICES

<b>APPENDIX A:</b>	Questions to determine school-readiness	142
<b>Question 1</b>	Can the learner listen with attention and enjoyment to a story?	
<b>Question 2</b>	Can the learner properly interact with printed material in terms of turning the pages of book and reading from left right with return sweeps?	
<b>Question 3</b>	Can the learner recognise letters of the alphabet?	
<b>Question 4</b>	Can the learner recite simple nursery rhymes?	
<b>Question 5</b>	Can the learner follow a logical sequence using pictures?	
<b>Question 6</b>	Can the learner use simple reasoning to identify 'parts of a whole'?	
<b>Question 7</b>	Can the learner use simple reasoning to differentiate between the largest/smallest or the odd one out?	
<b>Question 8</b>	Can the learner identify simple colours and shapes?	
<b>Question 9</b>	Can the learner recognise numbers 1 to 10 and rote count to 30?	
<b>Question 10</b>	Can the learner copy and extend simple patterns using writing implements?	
<b>APPENDIX B:</b>	Quality Assurance Assessment Report	145
<b>APPENDIX C:</b>	Progress Report	148
<b>APPENDIX D:</b>	Example of patterns used in school-readiness study	150
<b>APPENDIX E:</b>	English letter to schools to request permission to undertake study	151
<b>APPENDIX F:</b>	Afrikaans letter to schools to request permission to undertake study	152
<b>APPENDIX G:</b>	Sesotho letter to schools to request permission to undertake study	153
<b>APPENDIX H:</b>	English consent letters to parents	154
<b>APPENDIX I:</b>	Afrikaans consent letter to parents	155
<b>APPENDIX J:</b>	Sesotho consent letter to parents	156

<b>APPENDIX K:</b>	Questionnaire for parents	157
<b>ABSTRACT</b>		<b>158</b>
<b>KEY TERMS</b>		<b>159</b>



## **DECLARATION**

This dissertation has been submitted in accordance with the requirements for the MA degree in the Faculty of Humanities, Department of English, at the University of the Free State. I declare that the dissertation handed in for the qualification of MA degree at the University of the Free State, is my own independent work and I have not previously submitted the same work for a qualification at/in another University/faculty.



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

First and foremost I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr M. Brooks, for her patience, enthusiasm and continual confidence in my work. Her generosity of spirit, constructive feedback and positive attitude were constant sources of motivation.

*"Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement, nothing can be done without hope and confidence."*

*- Helen Keller*

I would like to thank my wonderful parents, Keith and Marion, for their unwavering support and always allowing me to pursue and fulfill all my ambitions.

Last but not least I would like to thank my amazing husband Mark and daughter Alexis, without whose support my postgraduate studies would definitely not be possible, and who always stand behind me no matter what I endeavour to do.



## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This dissertation not only explores the importance of early literacy, but also investigates the necessity of nurturing emergent literacy skills. The advisability and advantages of early literacy intervention are increasingly gaining ground in academic and education circles. Many language practitioners (e.g. Snow, Barnes, Goodman, Chandler, and Hemphill 1991, Weinberger 1996, Gestwicki 1997, Krashen 2004, White 2005, Morrow 2007) concur and propagate the idea that waiting until a child enters school in order to introduce reading and teach literate behaviour is by far too late an intervention. In order for children to reach their full potential, stimulation should start early and should be a constant in the home (Auerbach and Roche 1971, Brierley 1987, Essa 2007, de Witt 2009). Results are deemed to be much improved if parents or caregivers read aloud to children on a regular basis (Trelease 1982, Gardner 1991, Goodwin 1999, Gamble and Yates 2002, Nelson and Nelson-Parish 2002, Ntuli and Pretorius 2005). Indeed, the danger exists that environmentally deprived children, who receive little or no stimulation around text in the home, will start school at a severe disadvantage (Hechinger 1966, Barbarin and Richter 2001, Arnold and Doctoroff 2003) compared to children from print-rich environments. Fortunately, with the right guidance, parents and preschools can alleviate this danger and assist more children in starting school with the necessary skills.

Children who grow up in educated households are exposed to a large selection of printed materials dispersed casually around the home. A continuous supply of stories, articles, educational television programmes, DVDs and toys is almost a prerequisite for any 'literate' house. In this regard, studies have shown that children born to middle-class, literate parents receive around 1000 hours of interaction involving texts *before* they even start school (Hart s.a). However, the scenario is dramatically different for impoverished children living in the townships or in informal housing settlements. Such children receive little or no interaction with texts, often sadly due to the fact that the parents or, in many cases, parent, are/is illiterate, respectively. Although this problem is rife in South Africa, such problems occur world-wide in lower socio-economic neighbourhoods. Arnold and

Doctoroff (2003: 518) report that in the USA” [c]hildren from low-SES [socio-economic situations] may receive, on average, a total of only 25 hours of one-on-one picture book reading by school entry, compared to 1000 to 1700 hours for middle-class children”. This obviously creates a huge discrepancy between what middle- and lower class children are exposed to before entering school.

Ntuli and Pretorius (2005: 91) refer to children’s behaviour toward, and knowledge of text and writing during their preschool years as ‘emergent literacy’. This behaviour includes “pretend storybook reading, pretend writing, oral storytelling that shows literate traits, beliefs about literacy and recognition of letters, logos, labels, and frequently encountered words” (Snow *et al.* 1991: 175). The belief here is that the more ‘emergently literate’ children are, the more successful they will be at adapting to school and in turn, this will positively influence their academic trajectory for years to come. Along with being mature enough in age to commence school, it is imperative for children to feel confident that they possess adequate skills in order to cope with their new, unfamiliar environment. Parental involvement plays a big part in advancing these skills and often the easiest way to aid ‘emergent literacy’ is to simply read storybooks aloud to children as “[r]esearch indicates that pre-school children whose parents read storybooks to them have a linguistic and literacy head start over other children when they start school” (Ntuli and Pretorius 2005: 91). Furthermore, Krashen (2004: 78) points out that:

[r]eading aloud has multiple effects on literacy development. It has an indirect effect – hearing stories and discussing stories encourages [sic] reading, which in turn promotes literacy development. Hearing stories seems to have a direct impact on literacy development as well. Short-term studies show that children make significant increases in vocabulary knowledge after just a few hearings of stories containing unfamiliar words.

The behaviour expected of children at school is specific and different to any other kind of behaviour expected of them before. Thus, simply being familiar with conventions such as turning pages, following words, and understanding basic narratives will be enormously beneficial (and comforting) for them as “the dissonance between experience at home and school can make tremendous demands on the child” (Gamble and Yates 2002: 8).

However, for the child who has illiterate parents, simply reading aloud to the child may prove to be problematic. In addition, many black children are faced with the unfortunate fact that there simply is no one available to read to them. This may be due to the fact that many children are orphaned because of the AIDS epidemic or simply due to the harsh economic reality of many parents/single mothers/single fathers who have to go to work as early as 4:30 in some cases and only return after dark. According to de Witt (2009), Arnold and Doctoroff (2003) and Barbarin and Richter (2001), it is not unusual for impoverished children to have to fend for themselves from a very young age, often with just a neighbour or older sibling to keep an eye on them. Since children cannot raise themselves, this creates a dilemma as extended families are often already overburdened and therefore unable to take on additional responsibilities. These children are thus often reduced to being by themselves in an environment that is “often somber and unattractive and characterised by monotony” (de Witt 2009: 318). If, for example, a mother is fortunate enough to be able to afford some kind of daycare facility, the care provided is often more custodial in nature and mainly centres around merely caring for children while their mothers are at work. This obviously stands in stark contrast to the brightly coloured preschool classrooms and houses in the suburbs, rich with fun educational materials and books. Therefore, it is all too easy to take for granted the literate childhood that most middle-class children in South Africa languish in.

Subsequently, a highly literate childhood breeds more parents who not only understand the importance of ‘emergent literacy’, but also endeavour to expose their children at every opportunity, even as early as birth, to literacy. It is important to keep in mind that literacy is believed to begin in infancy, “with picture book interest in children as young as 20 months predict[ing] later literacy achievement” (Arnold and Doctoroff 2003: 520). Snow *et al.* (1991:60) support this view by stating that, “[s]uch variables as number of books in the home, parents’ expressed interest in reading, and listening to stories told or read from books have been found to correlate significantly with children’s reading achievement scores” .

Conversely, parents with a lower socio-economic status might inadvertently devalue the importance of literacy due to the fact that the impetus of their day-to-day lives hinges not on academic prestige or on being or producing highly literate people, but simply on surviving and putting enough food on the table. Barbarin and Richter (2001: 158) report that “one in five African children experience [sic] significant hunger regularly and meet the criteria for moderate malnutrition” and thus, although most parents have their children’s best interests at heart, economic strains often dictate vastly different priorities. After waking up at 4 o’clock, walking miles to the bus stop, traveling and working for long hours and then commencing the arduous journey back home, many parents have little or no inclination after such endless and strenuous days to tell their children stories or to teach them nursery rhymes. Clearly, and completely understandably, the stresses and strains of supporting a child on a single salary are of far more importance or consequence than the child’s degree of literacy at school-going age.

Moreover, no matter how well-meaning parents and caregivers are, statistics unfortunately reveal that “socio-economic situations [are] a powerful predictor of children’s academic trajectories, and the influence of socio-economic situations on children’s academic skills begins very early” (Arnold and Doctoroff 2003: 520). Thus, if children are not provided with the necessary literacy skills with which to enter school, they will realize very early on that their attributes are somewhat lacking; they will fall behind; and, sooner or later, completely lose interest in school and drop out. Arnold and Doctoroff (2003: 521) found that “failure experiences seem likely to play an important role in interest trajectories”. In their study to determine which factors influence children to become fluent readers, Gamble and Yates (2002: 7) found that although the children came from varying backgrounds and had parents with varying levels of education, all participants that displayed fluency in reading had the following experiences in common:

- parents who valued education;
- were initially interested in print;
- commonly had an adult willing to read with and to them, and with whom they could discuss books

Morrow (2007: 25) concurs by stating that “[l]iteracy learning begins in infancy [and] [f]amilies need to provide a literacy-rich environment and literacy experiences at home to help children acquire skills”. Therefore, it is clear just how important it is to nurture these skills from an early age, and, furthermore, to equip parents and caregivers with the necessary abilities or expertise to provide their children with stimulation and interaction with text as “these parents are often ill equipped to offer their children the cultural educational learning experiences that will make them ready for formal learning” (de Witt 2009: 23).

Unfortunately, due to the high demands of modern-day living on most working households, imparting emergent literacy skills becomes the responsibility of the preschool. Most working parents (in the suburbs and township alike) spend long hours at work during the week and simply cannot manage to spend as much time with their children as they wish. No matter how well-meaning they might be or how aware they are of the importance of fostering emergent literacy skills at a young age, some parents simply do not possess the luxury of time. Fortunately, in many instances, preschools will compensate by teaching children the necessary skills in time for school. However if parents work long hours but can still not afford to send their children to a preschool, these children have to make do without crucial skills and will be ill-equipped for school.

In South Africa, the government has made Grade R mandatory for all children, yet the extreme importance of early education has been totally disregarded. Although the government plans on remedying this situation in the near-future by making the grade/grades prior to Grade R mandatory as well, it will take years to ensure that every child in South Africa (or at least the majority) has access to a quality preschool education prior to entering school.

To ascertain whether children who do not yet have this access to preschool will in fact be at a disadvantage upon commencing Grade R, this short study was conducted to establish whether: 1) all preschools cultivate more or less similar emergent literacy skills or whether any discrepancies exist amongst the five schools involved in the study and 2)

whether there in fact exists a solid foundation of emergency skills already in place in learners about to enter Grade R.

## CHAPTER 2: EARLY INTERVENTION

### 2.1. Emergent literacy

All children are presumably born equal as all infants possess a ‘tabula rasa’ or clean slate at birth. Sadly, this ‘clean slate status’ is no longer the case by the time children reach Grade R or enter formal schooling. Trelease (1982: 35) attributes this change to “parents who ‘raise’ their children, as opposed to parents who ‘watch’ them grow”. Although the latter may seem to be quite a harsh sentiment, in truth, from the moment children are born, their journey toward emergent literacy commences. Moffett (1994: xviii) expands upon this notion by stating that “literacy does not occur in a vacuum”, meaning that “literacy emerges in individuals only when they are immersed in a community of literacy” (Moffett 1994: xviii).

Lonigan, Burgess and Anthony (2000: 596) further conceptualise emergent literacy as “the acquisition of literacy as a developmental continuum with its origins in the life of a child, rather than as an all-or-none phenomenon that begins when children start school”. Thus, emergent literacy is a dynamic process that begins from birth and is ongoing until well past formal school-going age.

Children ultimately ‘discover’ literacy through interactions with their parents and the print world around them, which in turn forms a foundation for important practices that they will be required to harness in school. Although preschool plays a determining role in developing these skills and enabling children to eventually read and write, parental involvement is a key component as “[emergent] [l]iteracy is much broader than reading; and ways of achieving literacy-related competencies go beyond ‘methods of instruction’” (Wilson 2010:1). Children spend their childhood observing the adults around them and simple actions like reading newspapers and books, writing grocery lists, signing birthday cards or even buying the same food with familiar logos could start forming the basis of the increasing importance of literacy in their lives. These simple models of literate behaviour are very important because “obviously the more encounters with print children

have, with experienced readers on hand to answer questions or point things out, the more likely is their understanding about print to develop” (Weinberger 1996: 4). Conrad (2008: 112) stresses the importance of this parental involvement by stating that “the reading relationships between parents and their children are shaped by parental attitudes and beliefs about reading”. Bloch (2001: 14) affirms this by stating that “the term ‘emergent literacy’ can be used to describe becoming literate as a process, whereby children’s grasp of literacy develops with purposeful encounters with reading and writing”.

There are, therefore, many important associations with print that children need to make long before formal reading instruction actually begins. According to Minns (1990: 105), these associations include the following:

- Children need to know that print carries a message and that they can gain information by reading visual cues as well as text;
- Children need to understand the structure of English grammar, including the structure of stories, and how to use this knowledge to help them to predict key phrases and sentences and to memorise chunks of ‘book language’;
- Children need to know how to handle books and understand the conventions of print – turning pages from left to right, turning back to reread a particular section or to check an illustration from a previous page;
- Children need to be familiar with metalanguage – the language to talk about language, such as ‘word’, ‘sentence’, ‘letter’, ‘title’, ‘page’, ‘cover’;
- Children need to learn about the correspondence between letters and sounds and begin to discriminate between letter-shapes;
- Children need to recognise individual words.

Thus, harnessing all these crucial skills far precede the actual act of learning to read. It is clear that print knowledge is of the utmost importance and that the easiest way to expose print to young children is simply through reading aloud to them and shared storybook reading. Weinberger (1996: 9) emphasises the importance of reading to children as

“being read to from the continuous text of books, children have the chance to learn about the decontextualised nature of print, something that they cannot acquire from their encounters with environmental print”. Furthermore, reading aloud to children allows them to be the passive player in the exercise, with the result that “children have the opportunity to listen, recall information and share their own ideas” (Conrad 2008: 108) in a comfortable, safe environment. Many children thrive on this time spent reading with parents because “[w]hen parents read storybooks to their young children, they bring the print to life while sharing one-on-one time with their children” (Conrad 2008: 112). According to Krashen (2004: 78), the impact of reading aloud to children has demonstrated impressive results. In a recent study, involving more than 20 000 children, it was reported that “children who were read to at least three times a week prior to entering kindergarten did better than those read to less than three times a week on a measure of reading, given at the end of kindergarten and the end of first grade”.

However, at present in South Africa, threes of children are not fortunate enough to have parents or caregivers who are able to read to them. This is an immense problem as all children require the same emergent literacy skills upon commencing formal schooling, as the syllabus in Grade R is based on the premise that all the children entering that grade have at least a foundation of emergent literacy skills. Children are expected to be able to handle books, recognise letters of the alphabet and numbers 1 – 10, be familiar with songs and nursery rhymes and be comfortable enough with writing apparatus so that they can write their name, colour pictures within the borders and recognise and copy patterns and shapes (de Witt 2009: 11/12).

The National Research Council (1998: 137) asserts that:

[c]hildren who are particularly likely to have difficulty learning to read in the primary grades are those who begin school with less prior knowledge and skill in certain domains, most notably letter knowledge, phonological sensitivity, familiarity with the basic purposes and mechanisms of reading, and language ability.

Consequently, even from the onset, children from disadvantaged backgrounds are already far behind their peers. As mentioned before, studies have shown explicitly that “waiting for children to acquire literacy when they start school may already be too late” (Ntuli and Pretorius 2005: 91). Coupled with often extreme environmental deprivation and acute poverty, many black children in South Africa seem to be waging a losing battle. Not only do they not have access to the print and material resources to compete with their more advantaged counterparts, they are often starving and on the brink of malnutrition. Furthermore, “mothers of young children are increasingly drawn into the labour market and engaged in work outside of the home” (Barbarin and Richter 2001: 20). According to Barbarin and Richter (2001: 20) women currently constitute 37% of the national labour force. Since many children are brought up exclusively by their mothers in single-parent households, this results in mothers not being able to spend any quality time at home with their children to stimulate them or/and to ensure that they acquire the skills necessary for school.

Although there are preschool options available to strained households, most are merely custodial in nature while the rest cater for parents in a slightly higher income bracket, the cost per month amounting to as much as R200. This amount, as well as the fact that daily snacks and meals need to be provided, is clearly unaffordable for most single-parent households - a domestic worker only earns in the range of R700 – R900 per month, and in some cases even less than this.

The only other option is that the government steps forward and makes provision for these children by subsidising programmes to ensure that all children have the necessary emergent literacy skills by the time they enter Grade R.

## **2.2 School readiness**

If the term ‘emergent literacy’ refers specifically to cognitive skills that children need to harness before entering school, then ‘school-readiness’ is the term that encompasses all skills - emotional, physical, social and intellectual - that children need to possess before

entering the school arena. De Witt (2009: 170) defines school-readiness as “the child’s total readiness to benefit from a very specific situation, namely formal schooling in a group context”. Children need to be able to cope in a school environment academically, as well as perform physically, socially and emotionally on the same level as the other students. If they are unable to do so, they will soon fall behind and often be expected to repeat the grade, which in turn leads to feelings of inadequacy and failure.

In the past, children were allowed to enter Grade 1 in the year that they turned six. Nowadays however, the government stipulates that children are prohibited from entering Grade 1 until they turn seven. The thought behind this stipulation is that it is more likely that children will be school-ready at this later age. Against this de Witt (2009: 170/180) explains that:

[a]ge is often regarded as an indicator of the stage when a child should be more or less ready for some form of progress or expectation, [h]owever, chronological age should not be used as a criterion for school readiness. In too many instances children are admitted to school when they are, in fact, not ready.

Mohlale (1993:41/2), based on the criteria set by de Witt (1988), lists the following aspects of school readiness that should be in place at the time formal school commences:

### **emotional readiness**

- the child asks questions and explores his/her world;
- the child is expected to make choices;
- the child is expected to show independence in spite of the presence of adults;
- the child must not be over anxious, but be able to take and/or hold his/ her place.

**social readiness**

- the child is expected to be able to communicate with other children and form relationships;
- a shift from egocentrism to altruism should be made, implying the child's ability to share with others;
- gradual conformation and identification with the peer group should be noticeable;
- a positive self-image should be present.

**physical readiness**

- the child should be able to run with ease;
- the child should be able to stand on one foot for five seconds and balance for a set period of time;
- the child should be able to walk on a straight line;
- the child should be able to catch and throw a ball;
- the child should be able to know that he/she is left-handed or right-handed;
- the child should be able to skip, hop and somersault.

**intellectual readiness**

- the child is expected to be able to count, do one-to-one pairing and recognize and copy different forms;
- the child is expected to be able to understand cause and results;
- the child is expected to do simple subtraction and division;
- the child is expected to be able to see certain similarities and differences;
- the child is expected to be able to differentiate between background and foreground;

- the child is expected to be able to estimate/plan and judge/assess/evaluate and have understanding of symbols.

Together with the above-mentioned skills, children are also expected to be able to function independently in a school environment, implying that they should be able to use the bathroom, blow their noses, dress themselves, use scissors and writing implements without aid and use eating utensils correctly (Hartgill 2008: 1-5).

However, Hartgill (2008: 1-5) emphasizes that, apart from the child demonstrating school maturity on several levels, many factors are at play here: “[t]he environment in which the child grows up in will give him or her particular advantages or disadvantages when it comes to school learning”. Factors like health and adequate nutrition may also influence a child’s school readiness. Malnutrition can influence children’s development to such an extent that they are far behind their peers, intellectually and physically. The effect of poverty is seen to be one of the major reasons why many children fail to achieve at school, as “economic hardship and resource inadequacy are among the most consistent predictors of poor outcomes in children” (Barbarin and Richter 2001: 175). This clearly indicates that children living in impoverished conditions may eventually suffer from depression, anxiety, aggression and attention deficits, to mention but a few. Untreated, these children can hardly be expected to excel at school, especially when keeping in mind that they are often also starving.

School readiness is therefore a crucial component of a successful early school career and needs to be nurtured by parents and preschools alike. It is clearly not something that can be left to chance. Van Zyl, le Roux and van Rensburg (2010: 1-6) stress that school readiness has a bigger impact than just being ready to enter school as “[t]he Grade 1 learner’s readiness indeed influences not only the learner’s performance in Grade 1, but impacts on his performance throughout his whole school career”. In a study undertaken by van Zyl *et al.* (2010:1-6), research was carried out to ascertain whether there was a correlation between learners who performed well in various sections of the school-

readiness test and their later school performance. The results showed empirical evidence that:

if the learner did not perform well on the school readiness test, he/she most probably will perform poorly in Home Language and Mathematics in Grade 1. If, on the other hand, he/she performs well on the school readiness test, he/she will most probably perform well in Grade 1 (van Zyl *et al.* 2010: 1-6).

The probability factor in the above results implies that a learner's performance is never an absolute, and that, with the correct measure of additional home-based or government intervention, any result can improve for the better.

### **2.3. Early stimulation is the key to success**

As mentioned previously, children are endowed with a wealth of potential at birth that needs to be actualised in order for them to be successful. As all children have the innate potential to be successful and are all born with a blank slate or *tabula rasa*, “[e]arly experiences have a radical impact on initial development and all spheres of the young child’s development must be stimulated in this sensitive period” (de Witt 2009: 312). Barbarin and Richter (2001: 185) report that “[i]t is widely accepted that early language development depends greatly on the level of stimulation and enrichment available to the child in the critical early stages of life”. Children who receive little or no stimulation are often irreparably damaged for life and no amount of love, interest or stimulation can make up for what they have lost in their first few years (Brierley 1987, Snow *et al.* 1991, de Witt 2009). Similarly, de Witt (2009: 312) points out that “children who lose out in the first two years will [n]ever recover from the backlog”.

Parents who do not heed this warning must face the consequences of their child perpetually lagging behind as “[s]timulation or deprivation in the environment will also negatively or positively affect all other learning activities” (de Witt 2009: 316). Instead of giving their children a head start in life, they are actively hindering or severely stunting their children’s performance. In fact, de Witt (2009: 174) points out that:

[t]he baby is thus born with huge potential. However, it is important to bear in mind that this potential will only be actualised through the necessary stimulation or practice. The environment plays a role in the type of experience that brings about the unfolding of the inherited possibilities of the child. So, for instance, it is acknowledged that neural pathways must be reinforced. If not, the favourable period will pass and the brain cells which do not form synapses will die.

This could account for the difference in the brain size of severely neglected children. Due to a lack of stimulation, the dendrites and axons in their brains cannot form the compact or rich connections that would otherwise be possible. This in turn creates much less synaptic activity and therefore less powerful impulses from one cell to the next (de Witt 2009: 174). These impulses are vital in allowing faster and more complex brain activity and thus, “[e]arly stimulation brings about structural changes in the brain, also in respect of size and chemical function” (de Witt 2009: 174). All children exhibit a learning ‘window’ in which “maximum learning takes place with minimum effort” (de Witt 2009: 84). Children have a huge capacity for new knowledge and are able to absorb new information in an almost sponge-like fashion. If parents do not take advantage of this ‘window’, which occurs roughly from birth to age six when the brain has already reached about 90% of its complete adult mass, the child will forever miss out on being stimulated in this critical learning period, the result often being that they will struggle to reach their full academic potential.

Stimulation copies a snowball effect: highly educated parents will probably continually stimulate their children throughout their preschool years. They will make sure to read to them, speak to them, teach them nursery rhymes, teach them shapes and colours, answer all their questions, take them on many outings and generally spend copious amounts of time building them up to be more than ‘school ready’. In turn, when they start school, they will be ahead of the other children, be familiar with all the concepts being taught, and the teacher will most likely consider them to be ‘clever’ or even ‘gifted’, providing them with even more stimulation to prevent boredom. Eventually they will get used to being labeled as ‘clever’ and naturally live up to their ‘special’ status, excelling all through school and eventually at university, just as their parents had envisaged.

Conversely, an alternative situation is easy to imagine: the children of poorly educated and poverty stricken parents get absolutely no early stimulation at home or from the environment, with mothers mostly away from home and working to provide money and food. Upon entering school, these children often feel disorientated, do not know what is going on and are often starving, finding it very difficult to concentrate. They are slower to respond and adapt than the others and therefore their teacher treats them as ‘slow’ or even ‘stupid’. These children soon become used to this label and give up trying to change the teacher’s opinion of them. After a few years, they completely lose interest in school and drop out, failing to see the need for further education.

Thus, even for the busy parent or parents working away from home, a measure of strategic early stimulation is better than nothing and certainly will go a long way to helping children reach their full potential. One of the best and easiest ways to stimulate children is to read aloud to them or show them pictures. De Witt (2009: 177) recommends that “even babies should be introduced to storybooks as naming things [is] very important at this stage since these are the first words a child will use”.

Jensen (1995: 32) is quick to point out that the three most critical stages of learning are:

- acquisition
- elaboration
- memory formation

In each stage, something crucial happens inside the brain that facilitates learning. The first stage of acquisition is the most vital as this is when new synaptic connections form and it is important to note that “if the input is incoherent, only weak connections (if any) will be made, [h]owever, if the input is familiar, existing connections get strengthened and learning results” (Jensen 1995: 33). As a result, if a child learns something new that is built on pre-existing or prior knowledge, optimal learning will take place. However, if no prior knowledge exists, the information gained will make no sense to the brain and in turn, no meaningful synaptic connection will occur. This is all the more reason why it is

important for parents to stimulate their children in any way possible so that by the time they enter preschool or school, they already have a wealth of prior knowledge including words, pictures and the environment around them.

#### **2.4. Environmental issues can seriously impede early literacy**

There seems to be a widening gap in South Africa between advantaged people who spend quality time with their children, equipping them with the various skills that they will need for school, and disadvantaged people, who work long hours and can hardly afford to put food on the table, let alone buy their children expensive educational toys, books and magazines. Unfortunately, the latter by far make up the larger group, implying that “many children from socio-economically disadvantaged areas come from homes where there are few or no books and in many [homes] parents have low literacy levels.” (Ntuli and Pretorius 2005: 94). Their problems are merely compounded by the fact that preschool is too expensive and when parents can afford it, it is often sub-standard, overcrowded and taught by teachers who have dubious or no qualifications. These children often spend their formative years at home or in a preschool situation which is hardly conducive to furthering early literacy or equipping children with the necessary skills needed for formal schooling, the result being that “[b]y the time these children enter Grade 1 they have little or no exposure to literate practices and rich language experiences taken for granted in more privileged areas, where there are better qualified caregivers and more plentiful educational resources” (Ntuli and Pretorius 2005: 94).

Undeniably, extreme poverty is a reality for many people in South Africa and their situation is a desperate and frantic fight for survival. Barbarin and Richter (2001: 173) offer the following explanation of what ‘poverty’ entails in the South African context:

[t]o be poor and South African usually means [sic] to be unemployed with no dependable means of support, to live with a single mother or Grandmother, and to survive primarily on the grandmother’s pension. To be poor is to experience hunger frequently, to live on a diet of tea and bread without milk or sugar and to be grateful to have cabbage soup at night. It means living in a one-room shack without electricity, heat, a refrigerator, or a television, and relying on candles for light at night. It means having to rely on taxis for transportation when you can

afford it, and to go places by foot when there is no money. Poverty means children being left at home by parents who must leave for work before they wake up, with the children getting themselves up on their own and out to school without breakfast.

Subsequently, education, or in particular early education, is not seen as vital because children need to grow up quickly and assume their share of household duties to ease the burden of the parents, single mother or grandmother. Another prevalent problem sweeping through the populace is teenage pregnancy which is seen to “significantly disrupt the education of young mothers, leaving them vulnerable to unemployment or employment limited to the unskilled domestic sector” (Barbarin and Richter 2001: 101). Literacy needs to be nurtured and sustained from an early age, and unfortunately poverty often becomes a cycle that is perpetuated: an unwed single mother who possesses a limited education is therefore very likely to have children that follow in her footsteps. Snow *et al.* (1991: 2) concur by stating that “literacy levels of adults in poor families are being replicated among the children who fail to learn to read, [and] can [therefore] hardly aspire to more remunerative jobs or higher levels of education than their parents have achieved”. A mother who is not literate often feels that schooling is a luxury and that children should rather obtain employment, usually in the unskilled labour market, to increase the family budget. Furthermore, de Witt (2009: 318) adds that such children have an additional handicap as “[e]nvironmentally deprived parents also fail to demonstrate a positive attitude toward the education and upbringing of their children, [thus] inhibit[ing] the child’s chances of being school ready on entering formal education”.

Teen pregnancy seems to be an accurate indicator of a future fraught with difficulties as “[s]tudies show that unless teen mothers can return to school and delay having more children, they are likely to become socio-economically disadvantaged” (Barbarin and Richter 2001: 101). These teen mothers often give birth to premature or low birth weight babies which, if not counterbalanced by positive postnatal factors like healthy eating, regular checkups and good healthcare, will surely influence later, vital functions such as “psychomotor skills, language, social competence, psychological adjustment, and, in

time, also academic achievement” (Barbarin and Richter 2001: 103). In truth, many crucial complex neural connections are made in the brain in early infancy and physical growth is a prerequisite for these connections to occur. If a child is not given sufficient food rich in proteins and other nutrients in their early years, the damage done will be pervasive and will affect their development in many different spheres. The solution here is that South Africa should have well-run state funded preschools that give all students at least one nutritious meal a day. This might ensure that these toddlers at least have an opportunity to develop normally as, sadly enough, “early childhood is undermined for the majority of black children in South Africa, and the most vulnerable period affecting growth is between birth and four to five years of age” (Barbarin and Richter 2001: 108).

The present government originally endeavoured to overcome these problems by introducing food schemes at schools as “children could not take the best advantage of educational opportunities if they came to school hungry” (Barbarin and Richter 2001: 269). Schools in areas most severely stricken by poverty were targeted first and were initially given a degree of autonomy to decide what food they wanted to serve. Most schools opted for a standardised breakfast consisting of a peanut butter sandwich and a single banana. Although these initiatives are believed to have reached over 3 million children, corruption is still widespread because “provincial control has been retained over finances when the intention was to give this control and discretion to parent-teacher committees” (Barbarin and Richter 2001: 269).

Hunger is not the only factor that impedes academic achievement. Due to work commitments, single mothers especially do not always have the time to provide their children with much-needed love and nurturing, which may be “seriously detrimental to the development of the preschooler because this situation does not promote feelings of safety and security” (de Witt 2009: 318). Women are becoming a steadily increasing part of the unskilled labour force, forcing them to leave their children alone at home every day, a situation that might be very unsettling for young children. If such mothers are not fortunate enough to have a grandparent or older sibling to watch over the children, these youngsters will have to fend for themselves from a very young age. The neighbourhood

is often fraught with peril, constantly making the children feel unsafe and unsure. Studies have shown that young children need an environment in which they have a routine to feel secure in order to perform to the best of their ability, and “the type of experience that the child is exposed to here does not equip the child for successful school entry or school success in later years” (de Witt 2009: 317). Thus, for environmentally deprived children, the early years are often times of hardship, loneliness and unquestionable hunger. Their reality is a far cry from their suburban neighbours whose formative years are characterised by love and affection, constant stimulation and a choice of the most delicious and nutritious food.

## **2.5. The ‘forgotten’ children**

In South Africa, as in most countries around the world, school is by law considered to be compulsory, yet in South Africa there are still alarming numbers of children who simply do not attend any school. The government has stipulated that children should be school-going until at least the age of nine, yet monitoring the situation is impossible as there are simply too many poverty-stricken households in South Africa. These children are often orphaned as a result of AIDS or their parents have simply abandoned them and, as a result, they are in an even more precarious position than children from single-parent households who are left in the care of others during the day.

Miss M. Phakoe, a social worker at Child Welfare in Bloemfontein, says this problem is exacerbated by the fact that “most families only take orphaned children in because of the child grant that they receive and have no real interest in caring for the child, resulting in the child running back to their deceased parents’ house and having to then look after themselves”. They are left entirely to their own devices during the day, with the result that they are bored and often resort to criminal activities to make money to survive.

These children can be referred to as ‘the forgotten children’ as they fly so low under the radar that social workers and other officials are often not aware of their debilitating circumstances or, even worse, their existence. Although Child Welfare employs many

volunteers to go into impoverished areas to identify people or children who have the most need for assistance, many still escape unnoticed. Upon entering a township or informal settlement, a person is keenly aware of the children – preschool and primary school-aged – who are simply milling around in groups or with older siblings that have long-since left school. These ‘child-headed households’ often take responsibility for many ‘mouths’, making additional payments for siblings to attend preschool or for older children who require uniforms and textbooks for primary school simply unfeasible. Barbarin and Richter (2001: 21) assert that “[c]hildren as young as ten years old are forced to care for two or three younger siblings by begging for food from neighbours and scavenging”.

The government has set up various Early Childhood Development Centres to cater specifically for people and children such as these, but as most of these centres are not subsidised by government, most people simply do not have enough money to send their children or siblings there. It is grossly unfair that children should have to shoulder this responsibility and although the government is obviously trying to intervene, resources and money are, as usual, in short supply. There seems to be little hope for these children as life without schooling and literacy equals menial labour jobs for most. There is no way to rise out of such circumstances without a few years of schooling. Ultimately, every child in South Africa should aim to complete the full 12 years of school but the sad reality is that most only manage a few years.

A possible solution to this growing epidemic could be government- or privately-funded mobile crèches. Mobile crèches have been very successful in rural parts of India and Turkey. These countries face similar third-world poverty issues as South Africa. Large parts of these countries are made up of very poor people who live in sub-standard housing with little food and almost no access to proper healthcare, sanitation and education. As the name suggests, mobile crèches are buses that have been donated and turned into preschools that tour around certain areas, stopping in the same places everyday for a few months or even a year. The premise here is that if children cannot come to school, then the school should go to the children.

In their study in Turkey, Isikoglu and Ivrendi (2007: 228) mention that up to date, mobile crèches have been successfully established in eight Turkish cities and have helped more than 831 children, aged mainly between 3 – 5 years. Isikoglu and Ivrendi (2007: 228) cite the goals of mobile crèches as the following:

- to increase the availability of early childhood education for children and families in poverty;
- to support the development and education of children who do not attend any early childhood educational facility;
- to educate parents;
- to prepare children for primary school;
- to provide health services.

The mobile crèches thus attempt to supply all the services that a conventional preschool would, only with the added advantage of being conveniently close. In addition to serving as a classroom, mobile crèches can also take children on field trips to museums and parks, or to the clinic to have vaccinations.

In South Africa this would provide an ideal solution to rural children who live far away from preschools and other amenities. Such children suffer by losing out on a preschool education, and when they eventually enter formal schooling they have fallen so far behind that future academic success might actually prove to be an unattainable goal (Hechinger 1966: 4). It is often rural children that suffer the greatest in this context and mobile crèches are perhaps the only way to ensure that they too have the opportunity to develop at least basic literacy skills. It is realistic to assume that if there was a quality preschool available nearby which offered education free of charge, most parents would want their children to attend and would also concede that mobile crèches definitely do meet an existing educational need.

Such mobile crèches could ideally reach two different areas or even three different areas daily. Classes could be presented from 8:00 to 10:30 in one area, from 11:00 to 14:30 in

the next and finally from 15:00 to 17:30 in the last remaining area. In this way, the mobile crèche could reach three individual groups of children daily. Alternatively, the bus could park in one area from 9:00 to 12:00 and then move to the next area from 14:00 to 17:00. Suitably qualified teachers should be appointed and could work on a one day on, one day off basis or rotate the morning or afternoon shifts.

The bus should be fitted out much like a conventional classroom with chairs and tables in the center of the bus that can be used as an eating area or work and activity area. For children to engage in free play, the tables and chairs should be shifted to the side and all the toys, blocks, books and puzzles moved to the center where the children can see them. Circle time and shared reading should also take part in the center, with the teacher sitting on a small chair and the children in a half-circle around him/her. The back of the bus should contain a small reading corner, comfortably lined with cushions and pillows so that children can lie comfortably and engage with various reading materials. Although it can obviously be demanding to work constantly in such a small work environment, teachers and children could venture outside for class on days that the weather permits.

In order for this initiative to work in South Africa, the government would have to donate buses and nominate the organisation or department under which the administrative side of mobile crèches would fall. It would be advisable that mobile crèches should rather remain a separate, private entity from the government, with a separate board that makes decisions that best benefit the mobile crèche and rural children. This initiative has worked well in other impoverished countries, and, with meticulous planning and careful execution, there is no reason why mobile crèches could not be as successful in South Africa.

## **2.6. The correlation between reading difficulties and anti-social behaviour**

Children who lag behind in reading are more likely to face a multitude of problems later in life. However, there is still cause for debate as to whether reading problems are in

themselves causal factors in conduct problems (Bennett, Brown, Boyle, Racine and Offord 2003) or whether conduct problems are merely a latent result of children who grow up in poverty and are not school-ready when they enter school (Barbarin and Richter, 2001; Sylva, Scott, Totsika, Ereky-Stevens and Crook, 2008). The absence of school readiness often results in children never fully catching up or being able to read properly and this, in turn, influences other spheres of their school work. Such children often find the work in later grades to be too strenuous and eventually drop out of school altogether. Stanovich (1986:318) refers to the latter occurrence as the ‘Matthew effect’ where “children who do experience early difficulties in learning to read are likely to continue to experience reading problems throughout the schools years” (Lonigan, Burgess and Anthony 2000: 596). These difficulties are often the result of children being ill-prepared for the rigours of school, which often impedes learning in other areas that also require reading to acquire specialist knowledge of the subject. Unfortunately, this seems to set a precedent for school achievement and these children often lose interest in school completely, resulting in truancy and other behavioural problems. These behavioural problems are often of an antisocial nature as children look for alternative ways to occupy their time, which should ideally be spent on school learning.

Barbarin and Richter (2001: 197) report that poverty often goes hand-in-hand with such behaviours as:

[p]overty increases conduct problems by contributing to instability of household composition and effective task performance, [i]t also creates a social climate in neighbourhoods in which violence and crime are rampant and antisocial norms become a standard. Community and neighbourhood norms may give form to a child’s proclivity to engage in antisocial acts and provide opportunity to enact those proclivities.

In a study conducted abroad by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Early Child Care Research Network (2005: 795), it was found that “[c]hronically poor families provided lower quality childbearing environments, and children in these families showed lower cognitive performance and more behaviour problems than did other children”. Barbarin and Richter (2001: 174) concur by stating

that “[studies] have shown that conduct and emotional problems occur more frequently among poor than nonpoor families” and go on further to state that:

[e]conomically disadvantaged children often exhibit difficulty on dimensions of psychological disorders such as anxiety, depression, somatic problems, shyness, attention deficits, aggression, oppositional behaviour, and thought disorders.

These disorders are frequently prevalent at school and such children are often given the unfortunate label of ‘problem child’ or ‘deviant’, a label that may stay attached to children throughout their school careers. The danger inherent in labeling children is that they may start to feel useless and inadequate and often unwittingly live up to the label assigned to them. Jensen (1995: 86) defines this phenomenon as Personal Agency Beliefs (PAB), which can be explained as “a term used to describe a person’s capability beliefs about him or herself”. If teachers, for instance, constantly reinforce good qualities in a student, the student may adopt these as his/her own PABs and live up to them. However, the converse is also true. If a teacher constantly labels a student a ‘troublemaker’, that student may start exhibiting troublemaker tendencies as they adopt that as their own PABs about themselves.

Malnourishment and poverty are prevailing problems for most South African children and hold potentially devastating consequences. The most crucial years for children, growth-wise, are from birth to the ages of four or five years (Barbarin and Richter 2001: 108) and failure to receive adequate nutrition during these years could result not only in stunted growth but also in many other afflictions that may manifest only later in life. Barbarin and Richter (2001: 108) point out that “[t]he effect of poor growth on children’s development is pervasive and extends to health status, psychological development, and social capacity”. It is therefore clear that poverty, coupled with the devastating effects that accompany it, can lead to children not achieving the results they otherwise could at school. For any child fortunate enough to come from an advantaged background, the work required of them in Grade R will be straightforward and the transition into Grade 1 and formal schooling, effortless.

Most of these children will probably know how to read by Grade 1, and all the work required of them will be undemanding and unproblematic.

However, for children who are raised in poverty, the start of a school career is drastically different. Harnessing reading without any prior knowledge of reading or book behaviour may take some time, which could cause children who lack this crucial knowledge to fall behind the rest of the class. As mentioned before, such children may already be struggling to overcome adverse psychological disorders such as anxiety, depression, aggression and attention deficits due to poverty and facing school for the first time, they may feel unprepared, confused and inadequate. Barbarin and Richter (2001: 175) state that “[d]ata show that an even stronger case can be made linking poverty to children’s conduct problems and academic failure than has been made for emotional problems”. Sylva *et al.* (2008: 436) bring to our attention to the fact that longitudinal studies have shown that “children who go on to develop reading difficulties often have behavioural problems at the beginning of school and these lead on to poor reading performance”.

Although poverty in itself is a huge variant, lack of/or inconsistent discipline at home, lack of parental control and weak parent-child attachment are also seen to be huge contributing factors in conduct problems (Barbarin and Richter 2001: 196). Children who are raised in poverty rarely see their parents due to long working hours in their efforts to provide basic food stuffs for the family. Such parents are not able to adequately supervise their children and often lack the funds to send them to preschool or to take the time to prepare their children for school. Even though some of these parents may have the time to spend with their children, “poverty-related events give rise to parental distress and depression that drains [sic] parental energy and reduces [sic] their involvement in the monitoring, nurturing and guiding of [their] children”(Barbarin and Richter 2001: 195).

Thus, even if this lack of parental support is incidental, the consequences for the children are profound and may stay with them all through their school career. In

conclusion, Barbarin and Richter (2001: 177) emphasise that “a lethal combination of economic hardship and limited access to supportive services combine to disadvantage poor children and place obstacles in the way of their continued academic development”.

## **2.7. Language of learning and teaching (LoLT)**

South Africa experienced turbulent times in deciding which language should be used as its official language of learning and teaching (LoLT). It is a well documented fact that, during the apartheid years, students were expected to study in their second or even third language, completely disregarding their language of preference and/or their home languages. It is obvious that studying or being taught in a foreign language seriously impedes learning on many different levels.

However, this was only one of the problems facing South Africa at the time. Heugh (2002: 172) points out that “[s]egregated education, a language policy designed for separate development, unequal resources, and a cognitively impoverished curriculum has [sic] resulted in the massive under-education of the majority of the population”. In 1994, a newly democratic South Africa freed itself from apartheid for once and all, and became a multicultural and multilingual South Africa by declaring official status for all eleven languages, including:

- English
- Afrikaans
- isiZulu
- isiXhosa
- isiNdebele
- SiSwati
- Sesotho
- Setswana
- Sepedi

- Xitsonga
- Tshivenda

This was a huge step in elevating and promoting African languages to be used in higher domains such as education, media and government (Kamwangamalu 2004: 131.2). Therefore, in South Africa today, the Constitution and the new Language-in-Education Policy (LiEP) of 1997 are attempting to right the wrongs of the past. They are doing so by making sure that every learner is given quality education, preferably in their home language as it is believed to be the most beneficial. It has often been stated that “mother tongue (or the language used most proficiently at home) is the most appropriate language of learning around the world” (Heugh 2001: 174). At least this is what the government is aiming to achieve but the reality of the situation is that there is still a debate raging over whether educating someone in their home language, at the expense of losing English proficiency, is really the best solution.

Many researchers and language practitioners alike are adamant that English proficiency is not at stake as “all pupils will [still] need a very strong proficiency in at least one other language, and for most pupils English will be a language of high priority” (Heugh 2001: 174). De Klerk (2002: 2) supports this claim by maintaining that “in our multilingual society we need a curriculum and a language-in-education policy which adequately caters for an early literacy and language development in the mother tongue while at the same time ensuring that everyone has equal access to English”.

Even so, there is still a high percentage of African parents opting for English as official language of instruction as they regard it as the key towards upward mobility as well as a global language that would be more valuable to their children in the long run (Ridge 2004). Nonetheless, no matter what the ultimate motives of such parents are, “it is argued that the lack of a good [mother tongue] curriculum has forced this elite group of parents to make decisions which will probably result in the rapid and complete Anglicisation of their children” (de Klerk 2002: 2). However Ridge (2000: 166) asserts that:

[t]he dominant position of English in South Africa is not, in fact, decreed from or the product of an international EFL conspiracy, but it is rather the choice of a non-English majority, who have real needs which they see as met through the language. They deserve to be taken seriously. Failure to accord them this respect is evidence of neo-colonial attitudes.

Webb (2004: 147) goes on to explain that in South Africa “the high prestige of English and the negative social meaning of the African languages in high-function public contexts has [sic] led to a strong preference for English as the medium of instruction”. This is confirmed by the fact that many high-ranking public officials prefer to address their audience in English, which does little to elevate the status of African languages. De Wet (2002: 120) brings forth statistics that reveal that out of all the debates in parliament, English is used in 85% of all Parliamentary debates, Afrikaans in 10% and IALs only in 5% of these debates. In fact, the President of South Africa more often addresses the public in English as this is seen to be a language that reaches the most people across the broadest spectrum. Alexander (1999: 3) describes this as “the ever-expanding global hegemony of the English language and the apparently inexorable corollary marginalization of local, national and regional languages”. Probyn (2005: 369) blames the government for marginalising African languages even further by concentrating too much on implementing the new curriculum, with the result that “English remains firmly entrenched as the official LoLT from Grade 4 for the majority of learners in township and rural schools, despite the fact that this is the home language for less than 9% of the population”. Heugh (2001: 180) acknowledges this problem but still believes that “an attachment to and high value accorded English does not negate an attachment to indigenous languages in a multilingual society”.

Although scores of opinions are divided on the issue stemming mostly from ideological implications, most researchers and language practitioners are not divided on the issue about whether or not home language instruction is more advantageous for the learners themselves. De Wet (2002: 119) strongly supports the use of mother tongue as the LoLT as “the home language is the most appropriate medium for imparting the skills of reading and writing, particularly in the initial years of schooling”. It is felt that if learners first develop a capability to learn, think and master language in their home language, they will

then carry over these strategies to learning a second language. De Wet (2002: 119) indicates that it is vital for learners to “learn to think and function in their home language up to CALP (cognitive/academic language proficiency)” before transferring to a new language. Rodseth (2002: 101) adds that “[t]here has been the related belief that advancing the main language accelerates and does not retard the acquisition of an additional language”.

Another factor that is seen to play a role in determining English as not being a viable option for the LoLT, is that many teachers are barely proficient in the language themselves, and therefore cannot adequately impart knowledge to their learners. This often results in “a breakdown between school policy and classroom practice, with extensive code-switching by teachers and learners, particularly in areas where there is a shared home language” (Probyn 2005: 370). Many learners, especially those living in rural areas, are not exposed to English in any other realm of their daily life and this thus makes learning English in the classroom almost like learning a foreign language. Their access to English outside the classroom is limited and “most learners use their home language in family and community contexts and demographics limit opportunity for interaction with mother tongue speakers of English (Probyn 2005: 370).

Heugh (2002: 183) concurs by stating that “[i]t is a serious mistake to believe that teaching and learning is [sic] taking place through English in township or rural schools where the majority of pupils are from African-language speaking communities”. These students are barely proficient in their own language and “are expected to swap a concentration on learning the relationship between familiar oral sounds and words with their printed form, for new and strange [English] sounds and words with their printed form” (Bloch 2002: 68). Obanya (2004: 10/17) sums up the disadvantages of learning in a language other than the first language or mother tongue as follows:

- learning is hampered because teaching is done in a language in which neither the teacher nor the learner has an appropriate level of mastery;

- the practiced curriculum differs widely from the official curriculum, as teachers constantly resort to code-switching to get linguistically and psychologically closer to learners;
- linguistic failures (i.e. language problems) are mistaken for academic failure (i.e. real inability to learn), as language becomes the barrier to learning;
- teaching and learning in a non-first language has [sic] the effect of creating teacher-dominated classrooms, where ‘talking and chalking’ replaces genuine teaching and learning

It is clear from the above-mentioned that the solution lies in either 1) mother tongue education with quality English instruction being added gradually once learners are familiar enough with their mother tongue (additive bilingualism) or 2) multilingual or dual-medium instruction in the classroom where all learners get equal access to their mother tongue and an additional language at the same time. Heugh (2002: 183) favours the first approach as she cites a national socio-linguistic survey conducted in 1999 by the Pan South African Language Board (PANSALB) to ascertain people’s views towards languages, which clearly showed that “the majority of people, at least 88% favour the maintenance of the home language throughout education or the maintenance of the home language alongside a second language/English”. Because of the diversity found in South Africa and the global hegemony of English, “[k]nown parental preferences suggest that a dual-medium approach is likely to be more acceptable to parents and learners compared to the use of mother tongue as the medium of instruction” (Working Group on Values in Education, 2000). The Language-in-Education (LiEP) policy drawn up in 1997 promotes additive bilingualism or multilingualism, “with the underlying principle of maintaining home languages and gives the example of teaching through the home language and learning additional languages as subjects, with dual-medium instruction as a possible option” (Probyn 2005: 369).

There is an overwhelming amount of evidence (Bloch 2002; De Klerk 2002; De Wet 2002, Heugh 2002; Obanya 2004; Webb 2004; Dalvit and de Klerk 2005; Prinsloo 2007) which suggests the benefits of additive bilingualism or dual-medium instruction over a

monolingual school system. In a study conducted in the Eastern Cape to ascertain which language parents would prefer their children to be taught in, de Klerk (2002: 12) found that although an overwhelming number of parents preferred their children to be taught in English, this was mainly because “Xhosa-medium schools offered such poor quality education and made little or no effort to support the use of African languages”. Clearly, if parents are afforded the opportunity to send their children to good quality schools that maintain a good English programme yet at the same time teach in their home language, then their choice might be somewhat different (de Klerk 2002: 9).

At present, the systems in place regarding LoLT, can be typically divided up as one of three choices, namely: 1) learners are educated in English as their 1<sup>st</sup> language and may at a later date take their home language as a 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> additional language, 2) learners are educated in their home language and are gradually introduced to English as a 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> additional language later in high school or 3) learners are educated in their home language up to Grade 4 and thereafter taught in English. Each system shares a common denominator of having an additional language introduced at a much later stage or, in the case of option 3, at a stage where most students are barely literate in their own language. Plüddemann (2002: 48) very much doubts the efficacy of the third option as “[r]esearch conducted has shown that even four years of MTE [mother-tongue education] with English as a subject were inadequate in preparing African-language speaking pupils for the abrupt transition to English”. In fact, none of the above are seen to be the most effective method as evidence clearly shows that “bilingual learners who began to learn through two languages on entry to school are shown to outperform monolingual learners on standardized tests after five years of schooling” (Burkett, Clegg, Landon, Reilly and Verster 2001: 151). Introducing a second language at high school level severely limits acquisition and the term ‘bilingual’ can actually encompass varying degrees of language ability. Ultimately, a true ‘bilingual’ student is thought to be able to speak, understand, read and write with equal ease in both languages, but there is also a second view which argues that “the bilingual is not the sum of two complete or incomplete monolinguals, but that he or she has a unique linguistic profile (Baker 2001: 7). Therefore not all bilinguals are seen to be the same in terms of their language abilities.

Singh (2001: 33) lists the following as various types of 'bilingualism' that have come to be accepted:

- one who is able to speak the second language very well but is unable to read and write (in the language);
- one who is able to understand, read and write in the second language but cannot speak (in the language);
- one who is able to speak the first language but is unable to read and write (in it);
- one who can speak in his/her mother tongue but can read and write in the second language as well.

It is clear from the above that none of the four examples come close to the original concept of bilingualism as meaning extreme, overall competency in two languages or rather 'two monolinguals in one person' (Gorjean 1985 and 1992). Research indicates that the only way to achieve such native-like competency is to learn the second language alongside your mother tongue from a very young age.

Bloch (2002: 69) encountered extraordinary progress with students who began learning in their home language and English simultaneously in the early grades of primary school. The study encouraged the following approach:

- emphasis was put on showing the children that the two teachers had faith in them and how they tackled their own learning;
- simultaneous exposure was given to Xhosa and English;
- many encounters were provided with print in both languages;
- emphasis was put on promoting an ethos that values reading and writing as powerful, useful and enjoyable practices;
- encouraging meaning making and risk taking, especially with writing;
- developing understandings about the possibilities and potentials of translating and interpreting.

At the core of this study was the ample opportunity given to students by the two teachers to immerse themselves in books and reading experiences in both languages. Bloch (2002: 70) goes on to explain:

[w]e give children many and regular opportunities to ‘wallow in books’, allowing them to develop concepts about print in their own time, and in their own way, in Xhosa and in English. They have time to choose their own books and read alone or with friends and the children help each other to read books in the other language. They are also encouraged to join the library, and to bring books to school to share and the teachers read daily stories with the children in one or both languages.

Thus, this wonderful two-tiered approach not only helps children to become proficient in two languages simultaneously but also allows children access to and opportunity to start reading and exploring books in their mother tongue and 1<sup>st</sup> additional language from a very early age. This is a huge move away from children, who are barely proficient in their own language, suddenly having to understand foreign words and concepts in a language they do not yet understand and also, children who were never really able to just ‘wallow in books’ freely in their home language at such an early age.

Sadly, South Africa seemingly has a long way to go before the above-mentioned study may become commonplace classroom practice. Although the Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa (PRAESA) has put forward various initiatives, such as the Multilingual Demonstration School (MLDS) as an example of a successful, workable multilingual classroom model for present day South Africa, these initiatives have yet to be seriously implemented in classrooms around South Africa. Whether this is due to the government lagging behind in the actual implementation of these policies (Heugh 2002: 171) or school governing bodies lacking crucial information to make informed decisions (Webb 2004: 149), this is still a hotly contested issue.

Heugh (2002: 171) postulates the reason for the above as being the following:

The policy [LiEP] has not been accompanied or followed by any significant government initiated plan. It has, however, been met with several arguments against its implementation and these have found their way into publications which have been used to deflect government's responsibility regarding implementation. While government remains inert on the matter, the discriminatory policy of the former apartheid government continues, by default, to be practiced in school

## **2.8. Knowledge cannot be transmitted but should be constructed**

Education still has a long way to go if teacher-fronted classrooms are to be done away with all together. Teachers (especially in the lower grades) still tend to think that standing in front of the class, writing on the board and exercising tight control over everything the students do or say in the classroom are indicative of learning taking place, although "it is widely accepted early childhood wisdom, backed up by substantial studies, that children are 'knowers and doers'" (Bloch 2002:12).

The following represents an encounter that Bloch (2002: 12) observed between a teacher and her learners in a Grade R classroom. The activity involved a worksheet that had five animals on one side with corresponding products on the other. The task was to draw a line linking the animal to the relevant product. The teacher explains that the children must first use their finger to draw the line and then only a crayon. She does the first example and asks the children to follow suit so that they can 'do' the exercise together:

**Teacher:** Which animal is next?

**Children:** The cow.

**Teacher:** Now watch, who's not watching? From the cow to the milk with your finger, with your finger...slowly. Eyes on the board. Which animal is next?

**Child 1:** Teacher, what about the...

**Teacher:** I'm busy with the board, you see you're not listening. Sit up. Pull your chair in.

**Child 2:** Teacher, he's stealing crayons (points to child seated opposite her)

**Teacher:** Not stealing, taking that's right. Now you may colour your different animal's different colours. What colour can a cow be? Brown or?

**Children:** Black

**Teacher:** Yes

The children begin to work

**Teacher:** Now now, somebody's crayons are talking and it looks like Faried's. Vukile, what must Loyiso and Siphon talk?

(The two children are chatting quietly together in Xhosa)

Vukile makes no reply.

**Teacher** (lowering head down to Loyiso's level): English, talk English to each other.

It is clear from the above extract that "the focus is on a very particular form of collaboration between teacher and pupils with little or no opportunities for conversational type exchanges or initiative from the children" (Bloch 2002: 13).

In the following extract, also observed by Bloch (2002: 18), the teacher yet again exercises tight control over her class and discourages any form of initiative taken by the children. The children are copying letters off the board and the teacher is walking around looking at what they are doing:

**Teacher:** Zuki is doing it her own way.

The teacher goes to the board, and demonstrates what Zuki had done with the letter 'p' and how she wants it done.

**Teacher:** Down, up and around, not around first. Did I say we do it like this (she writes the 'incorrect' way on the board)?

**Children:** (chorus): No!

This antiquated way of teaching that focuses on the teacher writing information on the board and the children neatly copying or repeating the information word for word, is seen to be outdated and not very useful. Wells (1987: 218) verifies that:

[k]nowledge cannot be transmitted. It has to be constructed afresh by each individual knower on the basis of what is already known and by means of strategies developed over the whole of that individual's life, both outside and inside the classroom.

Teachers who stand in front of the class simply feeding information to their students are doing them a great disservice in that they do not allow students to be agents in their own learning and “they do not place educational value on what children bring to the classroom from their homes and communities” (Bloch 2002: 17). Unfortunately this system is still entrenched in South Africa today, especially when it comes to early literacy. Jensen (1995: 31) lists the five stages of (optimal) learning as occurring in the following sequence:

1. **pre-exposure or preparation stage** – this stage provides a framework for the new learning and primes the learner’s brain with possible connections (may include an overview of the subject or a visual representation or related topics)
2. **acquisition** – this can be either achieved through direct means (handouts) or indirect means (putting up related visuals)
3. **elaboration** – this stage explores the interconnectedness of topics and encourages depth of understanding
4. **memory formation** – this stage cements the learning
5. **functional integration** – this stage reminds the learner to use the new learning so that it is further reinforced and expanded upon

It is clear from the above-mentioned information that learning is an intricate process that requires constant elaboration and reinforcement, and not just a single-tiered approach. Yet still for some inane reason, it is felt that the best way to teach young children the foundation of literacy is to get them to memorise and repeat different sounds (phonics) and words repeatedly, instead of giving them the tools and means to ‘decode’ these words for themselves, and to integrate them into their well of knowledge. Bloch (2002: 23) points out that:

[a] characteristic of fluent early readers is that often they have a strong phonological awareness, meaning that they have a well-developed understanding of how sounds fit together. This understanding has usually come about through *playful and incidental* interactions with a wide variety of texts.

In a study done by Wells (1987) in England to ascertain which activities promoted school readiness and early literacy, out of the following four activities: looking at a picture book and talking about it; listening to stories; drawing and colouring; writing or pretending to write, it was found that listening to stories was the most noteworthy in promoting early literacy. Unfortunately, many teachers in South Africa are not always given information on what a powerful tool storybook reading can become in promoting literacy and they therefore “tend to prioritise texts which repeat the same phonically regular words and short sentences in the belief that this is what will provide the necessary tools for reading” (Bloch 2002: 21).

Unfortunately storybook reading is often seen more of an indulgent activity that should only be performed if there is time left over at the end of the class. This is largely due to the misconception that formal learning is the only learning that has educational value for children (Bloch 2002: 12). In formal learning the emphasis is placed strongly on exercises that are seen to be appropriate for learning how to read and write and any deviation from the norm is not viewed as desirable. Another problem is that the syllabus is crammed so full of work that even if teachers wanted to implement more storybook reading, time would simply not permit it.

A teacher interviewed by Bloch (2002: 27) had the following to say on the subject:

*In the beginning I was really slack and thought, let's just read stories to them and have a bit of role play and acting. I started like that in my first year because we did the second language teaching method that says always do fun things. And I started doing that but it takes time, and you don't get through all the other things you need to get through. The worst thing is that now the pressure's on, because the [Grade 2] teacher starts saying to the [Grade 1] teacher: 'So how far are you...?' This work load and the fact that classes are so big, makes the teachers' task so onerous.*

## CHAPTER 3: NURTURING READING

### 3.1 Parents' attitudes towards literacy

Reading to children encourages them to regard books and reading as positive, fun activities, which may also later encourage them to become avid readers. Gardner (1997: 211) postulates that very few children read because they are asked to do so, but rather because “they see adults around them reading, enjoying their reading and using that reading productively for their own purposes”. Furthermore, it is up to parents to introduce their children to reading because “[c]hildren learn about language and literacy by being apprenticed into these [very] adult literacy events” (Gamble and Yates 2002: 8). The parents' behaviour towards reading and print therefore has a tremendous impact on children and “[t]he values, attitudes, and expectations held by parents and caregivers with respect to literacy are likely to have a lasting effect on a child's attitude about learning to read” (National Research Council 1998: 138).

Thus, if children often view their parents reading simply for enjoyment purposes, this may subconsciously assist them in realizing that reading has functions outside of school and this in turn may influence their literary experiences. The National Research Council (1998: 138) asserts that “the parents' attitudes and beliefs about reading, the children's motivation for reading, the opportunity parents provide their children and their actual behaviours with them, and the parents' own reading and literacy levels” are all factors that play a vital part in how children later view reading and literacy. It would therefore be counterproductive to urge your child to join the library and continually stress the importance of reading, but your child has yet to see you open a book and read simply because you enjoy it. Sending out these mixed signals regarding literacy will do more to convince children that reading is nothing but a boring activity that is relegated only to school and bears no relevance outside of the classroom. For such a child who has never encountered meaningful, enjoyable experiences with print in the home, his/her first taste of ‘reading’ at school may give him/her a very negative impression as “[t]he danger is

that, with nothing to compare it to, the child begins to think *this* is what reading is all about: skills sheets, workbooks, flash cards, and test scores” (Trelease 1992: 14).

Children who are brought up in homes which are ‘print-friendly’, including “[s]uch variables as the number of books in the home, parents’ expressed interest in reading and listening to stories or reading from books have been found to correlate significantly with children’s reading achievement scores” (Snow *et al.* 1991: 60). Therefore, the number of books available around the home has a positive influence on children’s inclination to read. Krashen (2004: 57) agrees by noting that “when books are readily available, when the print environment is enriched, more reading is done”. Adams (1992: 5) succinctly states that “[i]f we want children to read well, we must find a way to induce them to read lots”. The most obvious way to achieve this would be to instill in them a desire to read and to ensure that they have free access to print in abundance as well as provide ample time and space for them to indulge in this pastime. Weinberger (1996: 30) lists the following processes which are vitally important in the home:

- the availability of literacy materials at home;
- parents creating literacy learning opportunities outside the home;
- parental encouragement of literacy;
- frequency with which parents read with their children and taught them about literacy;
- frequency of library visits;
- extent of book ownership and the variety of print materials in the home;
- the literacy environment generally of the home and parents reading themselves;
- the child’s knowledge of letters [sic] preschool;
- the frequency of storytelling at home.

Weinberger (1996: 30/1) goes on to say that, strangely enough, the class and educational levels of parents have little to do with children who become early readers, and that the most striking feature was that all the parents of early readers regularly engaged and interacted with them (around) printed matter. In an interesting study mentioned by

Trelease (1992: 17/8), thirty men from working-class, blue-collar families growing up in similar circumstances and having experienced similar traumas like family alcoholism, divorce, death, and so forth were interviewed. Fifteen out of these men went on to become university professors but fifteen remained working blue-collar jobs. These men all rose out of exactly the same circumstances yet half managed to become very successful financially and in their careers. The results were astounding:

- 12 of the 15 professors were read to or told stories by their parents, compared to only 4 of the blue-collar workers;
- 14 out of the 15 professors came from homes where books and print were plentiful; whereas, among the blue-collar men, only 4 had books;
- 13 of the college professors' mothers and 12 of the fathers were identified as frequent readers of newspapers, magazines, or books; blue-collar workers identified only 6 mothers and 4 fathers with similar inclinations;
- All the 15 professors, compared with only 3 of the blue-collar workers, were encouraged to read as children.

Unfortunately, children growing up in homes where the availability and accessibility to print are limited, and where parents either do not regard reading as significant or do not read because they are too busy or illiterate, inadvertently receive negative messages regarding the importance of reading. Parents in said homes unfortunately deprive their children of vital stimulation in the form of essential literacy rituals, such as bedtime stories or stories before naptime in the afternoons, the very rituals which children so often grow to love and enjoy. Trelease (1982: xv) explains the motivation behind the ritual of reading to his children every night:

[b]ack in the 1960s, I was a young father of two children and working as an artist and writer for a daily newspaper. I was reading to my daughter and son each night, unaware of any cognitive or emotional benefits that would come of it. I had no idea what it would do to their vocabulary, attention span, or interest in books. I read to them for one reason – *not* because of any education courses I took in college, and *not* because the pediatrician or principal told me to. I read because *my* father had read to me. And because he'd read to me, when my time

came I knew intuitively there was a torch that is supposed to be passed from one generation to the next.

Sadly, many parents are unaware that research shows that parents who fail to expose their young children to literature or fail to encourage them to read, run the risk of setting in place a very negative future academic trajectory for their children as “[r]eading is a powerful means of developing reading comprehension ability, writing style, vocabulary, grammar and spelling” (Krashen 2004: 37). So although no one can dispute the obvious enjoyment that children derive from their bed-time story rituals, reading aloud does in fact have educational significance as it “improves their reading, writing, speaking, listening – and best of all, their attitudes about reading” (Trelease 1992: xvii).

Parents exert an enormous influence over their children, especially during the first years of children’s lives as parents are their most important role-models. Toddlers and preschoolers learn mostly by mimicry and copying adults (de Witt 2009: 17/33). Children not only copy actions but are equally susceptible to attitudes. It is therefore crucial that parents or caregivers convey a positive message to children, not only regarding the importance of literacy but also the importance of school. It is pointless for parents to stress the importance of learning and going to school, but to allow their children to be late or keep them home intentionally in order to do chores around the house. Being late or absent not only means that the children miss out on crucial instructional time, the teacher also fosters lower expectations and a negative impression of such children (Snow *et al.* 1991: 118). School should be seen as a priority and children should not be allowed to be absent unless they are ill. Teachers often cannot desist from stereotyping children. Children that miss substantial school time or are tardy unavoidably send a message that they simply do not care about school and this could result in the teacher not becoming as involved or concerned about the children’s progress as they otherwise would be. In addition, “[a] child’s regular attendance may also signal to the teacher that the family is concerned about the child’s progress in school” (Snow *et al.* 1991: 129).

The same principle also applies to homework. Parents should realise that it is important for children to do their homework daily and should therefore allocate a specific time and

a place in which they are able to work quietly without any distractions. In so doing, parents send a message to children that what they are doing is important and requires special attention away from all other disturbances. As mentioned before, life for children living in the township is very hard. Parents work long hours and food and money are often very scarce. However, despite these hardships, parents should prioritise school as this is unquestionably the only way for their children to rise above difficult circumstances and attain a better life one day. Miss M. Phake, a social worker from Child Welfare in Bloemfontein, contends that their biggest problem is parents who are uneducated and thus fail to understand the significance of their child completing school. If they do not consider school to be of utmost importance themselves, why should their children think otherwise? The mere fact that a child can read and write competently will ensure that he/she qualifies for jobs which three quarters of South Africans could never even consider. This realm of possibility already puts him/her in a more favourable position, making him/her an agent of his/her own destiny, as opposed to feeling hopeless and having to accept any menial job just to survive. Despite this, many parents still fail to see the importance of education and this could also be partly due to the fact that the government has been sluggish at best in promoting the supreme importance of education, especially in rural areas.

A new country-wide initiative needs to be launched in which parents are encouraged and perhaps given incentives if their children complete the full twelve years of schooling. Disturbing statistics show that, under apartheid, “25% of African children who enter[ed] the first year of primary school, dropped out after just one year” (Padayachie, Atmore, Biersteker, King, Mathube, Muthayan, Naidoo, Plaatjies and Evans 1994: 5). It is fifteen years since apartheid has been abolished and still African children have an alarmingly low rate of school completion. The government is trying to redress problems in education and one successful strategy already implemented was to include a compulsory year of preschool for every child. However, at the time of implementation, various recommendations were made which included that “[a] Reception Year for five year olds should not be implemented in isolation, [i]t must be linked to reform within Junior Primary [and in addition] alternative ways of reaching those under 5 need to continue to

be explored” (Padayachie *et al.* 1994: v). Clearly these two recommendations have never been met and fifteen years later it has now become critical for government to take more aggressive action concerning literacy in South Africa as the majority of our children never finish primary school. This is mainly due to the fact that literacy is not encouraged or developed in the early years, and “[what] this means is that for the large majority of children there is an abrupt introduction to formal learning when they enter school, which often results in frustration, poor learning, school failure [and] dropping out” (Padayachie *et al.* 1994: 6). One of the best and most direct ways to improve this situation would be to ensure parents’ realisation that literacy is an important priority for their child, and that literacy should be nurtured from a very young age, commencing with a positive attitude demonstrated by the parents.

### **3.2 Home-based intervention before school is crucial**

‘Emergent literacy’ refers to “the process of gradually becoming literate” (Arnold and Doctoroff 2003: 520). Children are not born with the ability to read and write. It is a slow and arduous process which they have to harness, and this process will probably take most of their primary, if not also high school years, to perfect. It includes such behaviour as pretend storybook reading, pretend writing, turning pages, following and identifying words, recognising numbers and shapes by name and following simple story narratives. It has been considered acceptable in past years for children merely to possess rudimentary skills before entering school and to commence classes or “big-school” before learning how to read and write.

Nowadays, however, the situation is dramatically different. Due to the competitive and fast-paced nature of life in general, children are forced to acquire certain skills at increasingly younger ages. In today’s world, preschool children are not allowed to just play or occupy themselves. They are expected to start the long road toward literacy at ages as young as two or three. There is an obvious danger inherent in this tendency. Only children whose parents are aware of this trend and take the utmost care in ensuring that their children are familiar with particular conventions upon entering school will succeed.

Unfortunately, impoverished children in the township, whose parents are unaware of this tendency or are illiterate and thus unable to assist, will suffer in the long run. These children are immediately at a disadvantage and “[o]bviously if some children arrive at school much more advanced than others in these emergent literacy skills, they will build upon these skills and make progress in literacy more easily than other children who are not “emergently literate” (Snow *et al.* 1991: 175).

De Witt (2009: 182/3) lists the following necessary early learning skills that children of today require before entering formal schooling:

- visual literacy, including finding one’s way and following instructions;
- visual discrimination;
- auditory discrimination;
- retelling a story;
- predicting sequence – saying what will happen next;
- cause-and-effect organization;
- picture reading – telling a story or answering questions from a picture;
- matching what is the same or spotting the difference;
- recognition of similarities and differences;
- focusing on details – in the classroom or in books;
- sound awareness of the beginning sound, end sound and what sounds the same;
- rhyme awareness;
- knowing letter names and letter sounds – beginning of phonic knowledge;
- being able to read their names;
- pattern recognition;
- phonic awareness;
- spatial orientation – ability to distinguish between left, right, top, bottom, down, up, inside, outside and the like.

Even before *starting* school, there is a myriad of concepts that children need not only be aware of but also familiar with to prevent school from leaving them feeling confused and inept, thus making it most difficult for them to settle into the daily school routine. In a questionnaire handed out to a preschool in Bloemfontein to ascertain how much time working parents are able to spend with their children on literacy activities (see Appendix K), almost 75% responded that they spend from 1-4 hours per week reading to their child. The other 25% responses ranged from reading to their child for less than 1 hour per week, to not reading to their child at all. Of the 75% respondents who stated that they read to their child regularly, it is interesting to note that only one parent admitted that they themselves never read on a daily or weekly basis. All the other parents read books/novels, newspapers and/or magazines on a regular basis, which demonstrates that these children often see their parents reading for pleasure and this in turn helps to develop a culture of literacy in the home. The types of reading materials which most parents preferred included simply reading a story aloud, although 25% reported engaging in choral reading and re-reading stories. Furthermore, 100% of the responses cited that in order for a child to become literate, it will take a combination of school and home intervention.

Although most educated, working parents are aware that the current trend towards literacy includes school, together with home reinforcement, many parents from households with a low economic-status are often oblivious to this fact, and:

they often lack the educational knowledge pertaining to school readiness [the result being that] [i]f a child has not experienced a home-life that nurtures pre-readiness and basic academic skills, the learner is at a disadvantage as soon as he [sic] steps inside the school building (de Witt 2009: 316).

The skills and concepts being referred to are usually included in most preschool curricula, and it is therefore vital that children attend a decent, certified preschool, or, failing that, parents be made aware of and teach children what they most need to know or else find someone who can.

De Witt (2009: 183) suggests that these concepts should include the following:

TABLE 1.1

<u>READING READINESS</u>	<u>TEACHERS</u>
1. Oral vocabulary	Encourage talking, learning new words and phrases, singing, finger play and remembering
2. Curiosity about/for reading	Provide a separate area for books and language games
3. Auditory discrimination	Create sound discrimination boxes, guessing games with musical instruments, activities that teach letter sounds by using children's names
4. Visual discrimination	Support directionality: left and right (hokey pokey), up and down, top and bottom
5. Awareness of print	Help the children name and label the classroom, encourage children to help print their names on creative works, write group newsletters to send home

Obviously, poor families that lack the necessary resources find it difficult to assist children in developing these 'emergent literacy' skills, which presents quite an obstacle. In such instances it is up to the family or single parent to *create* as many learning opportunities for their children as possible. Learning therefore does not necessarily involve spending money. Time and effort are equally important, as the following case study shows:

Snow *et al.* (1991: 59) describe such a family as an Educating Family and go on to say that "[f]amilies are most effective when they function directly as education agents". However, if the family is unable to do this because they are either absent or, more likely, illiterate, the family must move on to become what the authors describe as the Resilient Family (Snow *et al.* 1991: 91). Rather than directly teaching the child, the Resilient Family "provides an environment within which the child can become a good learner, and thus is more likely to benefit from any teaching situation" (Snow *et al.* 1991: 91). Such an environment would include freedom from domestic disruptions, adequate food, love,

security and shelter and, failing this, enrolling the child in a daycare facility that can provide all the above needs every day. A high-quality preschool not only gives the child the added advantage of acquiring strong language and literacy skills, but is also “extremely important for social, emotional, physical and cognitive development [which in turn] translate into academic and social competence” (Morrow 2007: 21).

A few years ago, mothers in the township often sent children as young as four or five to school. The unfortunate reality is that school is much cheaper than daycare or preschool facilities. However, the government amended their policy by stipulating that children will only be school ready by the age of seven years, as “most of these early-entry children were so underage that they could not stay awake for the full school morning and fell asleep in the classroom” (Barbarin and Richter 2001: 270). Obviously the government was hoping that increasing the school-going age and including a compulsory preschool year would give children more time to acquire the necessary skills to be ‘school ready’ upon entering school. However, this policy has not had the desired effect as no measurements were taken to educating poor children during the vital years that lead up to Grade R.

The two main problems that disadvantaged parents are faced with are: a) illiteracy and b) lack of funds. However, both of these problems can be overcome if parents are resourceful and determined. Parents tend to believe that their lack of reading ability renders them incapable of assisting their children to acquire literacy. This is a misconception. Being able to read is but one facet of so-called ‘literate behaviour’. Other aspects include turning pages, pretend reading and writing, following words from left to right, following a basic story narrative, understanding that a story has a beginning, middle and an end and recognising frequently seen logos, pictures and letters.

Christie, Enz and Vukelich (2003: 185) identify the following as important aspects of ‘reading’ that young children should be able to do:

- look at the picture of an object in a book and realize it is a symbol for the real object;
- handle a book without attempting to eat or chew it;
- identify the front, back, top, and bottom of a book;
- turn the pages correctly;
- point to the print when asked, “What do people look at when they read?”;
- point to where a reader begins reading;
- point to a book’s title;
- point to a book’s author;
- recognize specific books by their covers.

Just because an illiterate parent cannot read stories aloud to their children does not mean that they cannot assist them with all these other aspects of literacy. It is crucial for preschool children to be familiar with all these aspects of print *before* they start school. It is understandable that illiterate parents may fail to see the need to buy books and that their homes may therefore lack visible reading materials. Obviously many parents are unable to purchase an array of books for their children to read. One possible solution would be to join the local library. The library is free and if parents work all week, they can accompany their children to the library on Saturday mornings. The children should then choose books that they are interested in, preferably ones that contain many pictures. Even if parents are unable to read the books to their children, they are still able to page through the books together and can discuss the pictures or if parents feel particularly creative, even make up their own story to ‘read’ to the child. Even this simple exercise is hugely beneficial as “[r]esearch reveals a connection between the amount of time adults spend reading storybooks to children and the level of children’s oral language development [as] [t]he stories, pictures, and accompanying adult-to-child interactions facilitate language use and increase expressive and receptive vocabulary” (Christie *et al.* 2003: 57). Parents and caregivers can then encourage responses from young children by asking them open-ended questions about the pictures in the books. For example, “What do you think the girl in the picture is feeling?” or “What do you think the bears enjoy doing?” Afterwards parents should give children the opportunity to go through the book

themselves as many times as they wish, and to ‘pretend’ read the story for themselves. Exploring books independently is an important facet of developing early literacy for the young child. In doing so, they will learn how to handle books properly and get used to retelling stories through the use of pictures (Morrow 2007: 5).

However, as some families live in rural areas and have no access to a library, a possible solution for this problem would be to *make* storybooks for their children. This would only acquire paper and crayons, which are relatively inexpensive. Parents could even request used paper from their employer or ask preschools for leftover/broken crayons. White (2005: 96/7) cites the following as three possible methods for constructing your own book:

- zig-zag book – fold a strip of paper into a concertina to create separate ‘pages’;
- ribbon book – make a hole in the top left hand corner of all the pages, use a ribbon or string to then tie all the pages together;
- staple book – fold rectangles of paper down the middle to create pages and staple the crease.

Once the book has been completed, children or parents can draw pictures on the pages. Parents can ‘page’ through the book with children, making up stories about all the pictures or get children to describe their own stories involving all the pictures. This is a wonderful way to familiarise children with the world of books and stories. This exercise is especially beneficial for very young children as parents can draw one object per page and then page through the book, pointing at and naming each object individually.

Another innovative way for parents to foster literacy without spending any money would be to bring more environmental print into the home. Environmental print can be classified as any print found in the environment, for example labels on cans or tins, cereal or tea boxes, packets containing rice or maize, soda cans and bottles, take-out restaurant menus and road signs. Parents should keep and collect as many of these as possible. Christie *et al.* (2003: 127) feel that this type of print is very useful for young children who are

acquiring literacy because “the situation gives clues to the print’s meaning, [therefore making] environmental print the first type of print that young children can recognize and understand”. This stands to reason as young children will already be aware of what the packaging describes, making it easier to assume the context and meaning of the written words.

Exposing children to environmental print is preferable to not being exposed to any print at all. Parents can cut out various pictures and stick them in their constructed books, in this way ‘constructing’ stories for their children through the use of pictures. Alternatively, parents could create ‘theme’ books incorporating only one kind of item, for example a pizza book, toothpaste book or cereal book (Christie *et al.* 2003: 128). Children have to collect as many advertisements, coupons and packaging as they can. Parents can ask a literate person to write their child’s name on a paper, and then copy it onto their constructed books as often as possible.

The above suggestions may seem degrading to parents who are unwilling to beg scraps of paper or crayons from strangers, too time-consuming because of work commitments or just plain pointless when considering the sophisticated and elaborate books that middle-class children have access to. However, the point here is that this is better than *no exposure* to print, which is usually the fate of most children in the township. At least by utilising some of these suggestions parents can act proactively and may realise that even a relatively small effort on their part can make a huge difference in their children’s academic career. A little imagination and initiative go a long way as “parents can indirectly [and directly] facilitate their children’s learning in many ways” (Snow *et al.* 1991: 62). If parents are unable to facilitate reading themselves, it is their responsibility to expose their children to someone who can, for instance an older sibling, a family member or a teacher. Snow *et al.* (1991: 62) admonish parents who claim that they have no time:

[e]ven parents whose full-time work and other obligations prohibit them from spending a lot of time with their children may ensure that their children spend time with other adults who can function as role models and provide information,

interesting conversation, knowledge about the world, aid with homework and emotional support.

Although many parents have to cope with severe environmental deprivation and long working hours, it is encouraging to note that if a parent *really* wants to break the cycle, it certainly is possible. De Witt (2009: 314) suggests a possible solution in the form of “parental guidance and adequate education, along with the realisation that preschool education can contribute substantially to the preparation of preschoolers for the formal education system”. Most parents, regardless of social status or race, truly want only the best for their children and therefore need to be given viable advice and alternatives regarding promoting early literacy.

### **3.3 Reading aloud ,‘pretend reading’ and sustained silent reading**

As alluded to previously, research has shown that reading aloud to children during their preschool years has many hidden benefits which positively influence later academic achievement. Nelson and Nelson-Parish (2002: v) strongly affirm that:

[s]ome of the most dramatic results were seen in studies of children whose parents or caregivers read to them on a regular basis. Indeed, when the national Commission on Reading issued its 1985 report, reading aloud to children was singled out as the single most important activity to ensure future classroom success for the child.

Furthermore, Gardner (1997), Krashen (2004) and White (2005) all contend that reading aloud to children as well as ‘shared’ reading experiences between an adult and a child not only enhance their intelligence and “visual intimacy with print”(Goodwin 1999: 1), but also help them exhibit advanced language skills and gains in vocabulary. Snow *et al.* (1991: 172) stress that “[n]ot just reading but *rereading* books can be an important route for children to the kind of fluency in reading that becomes increasingly important to academic success as children get older”. McLane and McNamee (1990: 6) reinforce the importance of reading by pointing out that reading teaches children that “written words can create imaginary worlds beyond the immediate here and now [and] that written

language has its own rhythms and conventions”. These conventions taught in storybook reading are unlike any other conventions learnt as these are specific to book language and Weinberger (1998: 6) brings to our attention that:

[u]nderstanding these conventions can only be arrived at through experience with written language. This particular aspect of literacy learning is learned socially and culturally, and is not a form of learning that arises developmentally from within the child. The language in which books are written is often not the same way as we speak. The text is decontextualised, which is to say that it does not arise directly from the child’s own experiences, but has its own logic and internal meanings. Children need to be able to make sense of it in their own right. Once children have had experience of a number of books, they may be able to guess what might happen next, using the context of what has gone before, and how the author might write about it, which helps them to make sense of new texts.

McLane and McNamee (1990: 75) concur by pointing out that the language found in storybooks is often not the same as the language spoken every day, such sentences as ‘once upon a time’ or ‘they lived happily ever after’ are unique to storybooks and “children begin to pay close attention to language itself. This becomes evident when they object to a reader’s attempts to change the words in a favorite book, and when they incorporate storybook language into their pretend play”.

Ntuli and Pretorius (2005: 105) provide empirical evidence in their study proving that certain Grade R learners who had Zulu storybooks read aloud to them every day by their parents for a year, “would subsequently start school with stronger emergent literacy skills than their Grade 1 counterparts had done the year before”. Thus they found that storybook reading had a profound effect on the language, literacy and discourse development of students.

Ntuli and Pretorius (2005: 93) list the following highly desirable skills which children acquired when parents read to them:

- they knew how to handle books;
- they knew how to turn pages;

- they knew how to follow words on a page from left to right;
- they acquired a sense of narrative structure or story schema;
- their visual literacy developed;
- their attention spans increased and they were able to sit for longer periods without fidgeting.

Ntuli and Pretorius (2005: 93) conclude that, in addition to all the necessary literacy skills that reading provides, “storytelling sessions [also] stimulate the imagination and provide children with a rich source of oral language input”. Reading aloud to your child also “creates a comforting, private time to talk together [and] [i]n addition establishes a foundation for children to become successful readers” (Christie *et al.* 2003: 57). This provides a unique opportunity for a parent to provide a ‘scaffold’ in an environment which is relaxed and comfortable, often the child is not actually aware that he/she is being ‘taught’ in any way. This ‘scaffolded’ learning experience can be especially effective as “the adult supports the child’s current abilities and provides help for them to move on to the next stage” (Weinberger 1998: 9).

Therefore, reading aloud to your child clearly has enormous beneficial properties for ensuring school readiness and even later academic achievement. McLane and McNamee (1990: 6) confirm that “[a] considerable body of research has confirmed the link between being read to and later learning to read successfully in school”. This is where Stanovich’s (1986) ‘Matthew’s effect’ again comes into play, so named after the gospel according to Matthew (XXV:29) which states that “For unto everyone that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath”. Therefore to draw parallels to the verse, Stanovich (1986: 381) hypothesises that:

[t]he very children who are reading well and who have good vocabularies will read more, learn more word meanings, and hence read even better, [however] [c]hildren with inadequate vocabularies – who read slowly and without enjoyment – read less, and as a result have slower development of vocabulary knowledge, which inhibits further growth in reading ability.

Unfortunately, the only way to improve reading is to read *more* and subsequently children who experience positive and advantageous early academic achievement are able to utilise these experiences more efficiently across the board in all their academic school subjects (Stanovich 1986: 381).

It is not only read-aloud storybooks that are seen to be beneficial. Books containing nursery rhymes or Dr Seuss/Roald Dahl-type rhyming books are also seen to have a huge educational impact for young children. Researchers Bradley and Bryant (1983) and Weinberger (1996) indicate that reading and saying nursery rhymes actually benefit children in two ways: it aids phonological awareness and also helps significantly with ‘sequencing’.

An occupational therapist at the University of the Free State, Mrs. van Jaarsveld (personal interview: 2 December 2010) explains that ‘sequencing’ can be defined as the ability to decipher what comes next and that this ability actually begins in infancy when babies have to suck, swallow, breathe – in that order – and continues throughout childhood in many different forms. Nursery rhymes are considered an important ‘sequencing’ tool as children have to decide as they are speaking which comes next, be it the rhyming sound such as ‘Jack n’ Jill went up the hill’ or simply which event comes next: ‘the cow jumps over the moon and not the moon jumps over the cow’. Phonological awareness on the other hand deals with different sounds and “children need to be able to distinguish separate sounds within the stream of language they hear when people talk and read aloud” (Weinberger 1998: 5). Furthermore, Weinberger (1998: 33) goes on to add that nursery rhymes actually assist with all three types of phonological awareness:

1. syllables – such as hol-i-day (three syllables);
2. phonemes – the ‘f’ as in ‘fill’, which could change with the help of just one phoneme to become ‘pill’;
3. intra-syllabic units – the unit of sound which lies between the syllable and the phoneme.

Research done by language practitioners such as Stanovich (1986) and Weinberger (1998) indicates that there is a strong connection between nursery rhymes, phonological awareness and children that are classified as ‘early readers’. Stanovich (1986: 363) goes on to say that “[i]t is apparently important that the prerequisite phonological awareness and skill at spelling-to-sound mapping be in place *early* in the child’s development, because their absence can initiate a causal chain of escalating negative side-effects”.

However, it should be re-emphasised that all the above-mentioned information poses major problems for illiterate parents. These days it is perhaps all too easy to take our own literacy for granted as we live in a world where we are constantly inundated with visual stimuli. We read newspapers, books, magazines; we use computers, iPads, notebooks, cellular phones. The world has become a global community and everything revolves around reading. It is difficult to comprehend that there are countless South Africans who live a completely different life far removed from emails, faxes, text messages, e-books and that their world often revolves around getting through the day being unable to read street signs, crucial documents, their children’s school books, important forms, salary slips and so on. Imagine your angst and frustration if you suddenly woke up in China to be surrounded by writing and information that were inaccessible and simply had no meaning to you. Such is daily life for people who are illiterate.

A possible solution to assist illiterate parents would be to create a variety of storybooks that have an audio component. Parents and children could page through the book together and look at the pictures while listening to the story on an audio cassette or disk. The audio cassette or disk could inform parents when to turn the pages. The book would closely follow a comic book format in which the story is unravelled through a series of pictures. This would even allow an illiterate parent to closely follow the storyline. Krashen (2004: 103) strongly advocates the use of comic books as reading tool because it is believed that comic books can act as a conduit to book reading as many pictures and little text seem to be a motivating factor in getting children to read. Therefore, by closely following a comic format without words, parents would be able to spend quality time

with children every night, ‘reading’ storybooks together. The content of such a storybook could involve two distinct possibilities:

1. English fairytales or commonplace English stories learnt at preschool, or
2. Stories of African legends and fairytales told in the mother tongue.

The first option could be beneficial if children are already familiar with these stories, and would create a time in which they could practice English away from preschool. The disadvantage could be that parents might not at all be familiar with these stories and those who are unable to speak English would not understand what was going on. This could limit the extent to which parents engage with children during this time.

The second option could be interesting because many parents should already be familiar with these tales as African culture has a rich history of oral storytelling. This could also present parents with a unique opportunity to teach folklore to their children. Emphasis on the African tradition is becoming increasingly important as many people feel that African folklore may become obsolete as many modern children think that oral storytelling and cultural tales have no bearing on ‘civilized’ literate society and thus have little motivation to engage with these tales (Ntuli and Pretorius 2005: 95). This could result in the new generations being totally unfamiliar with all the rich tales and folklore which relate to their people.

Research shows that either by having stories read to them or told to them, “children unconsciously acquire the discourse skills of how to tell a story, the notion of story schema and how stories function in their particular culture” (Ntuli and Pretorius 2005: 95). This notion is important as children need to develop storytelling competence from an early age.

Parents and schools should also not discount the value of independent reading or sustained silent reading. This is applicable to preschool and primary/high school learners alike. Preschool learners should be given an opportunity every day to simply page

through books and ‘pretend read’ and older learners should be given additional time every day, if only 15 minutes, to read simply for the sake of enjoyment. Joubert, Bester and Meyer (2008: 97) caution against basing all reading activities around worksheets or tasks as “the so-called worksheets and reading-related activities have a negative effect on the learner’s appetite for reading [because] [f]or a learner who has difficulty completing worksheets, reading is then associated with an unpleasant experience”. The object is rather to assign quality time to reading every day and Joubert *et al.* (2008: 102) stress that “[t]he outcome envisaged with silent reading is: READ FOR PLEASURE!”

In order to optimise this reading time, Joubert *et al.* (2008: 97/8) make the following suggestions:

- Start with a very short period in which silent reading is done in a sustained manner;
- Everyone must be engaged in reading, including the teacher;
- Structure a time for independent reading at the same time every day;
- Take care that everyone understands that discipline and silence are essential for effective silent reading.

It should be stressed that preschool children also be given an opportunity every day for independent reading or to ‘pretend read’ as “[y]oung children’s independent efforts to read books demonstrate the wealth of knowledge about books, print, and narratives they acquire while being read to” (McLane and McNamee 1990: 81).

### **3.4 Nurturing reading at preschool**

Those children fortunate enough to attend preschool are at a great advantage as they are “more likely to acquire strong language and literacy skills that translate into achievement in the early grades and throughout their schooling” (Morrow 2007: 22). Moreover, “[t]he processes of teaching and learning that take place in these settings look quite different from those in children’s homes and neighbourhoods, and also different from those in

elementary school, where teachers provide lessons and children work quietly at their desks” (McLane and McNamee 1990: 115). Preschool should provide children with ample opportunity to have many encounters with literacy and print. This is particularly important as children are expected to start Grade R with a foundation of skills revolving around literacy already set in place. McLane and McNamee (1990: 117/8) cite the following as common ingredients in preschools and daycares that support early literacy:

1. children have opportunities for fantasy play: play with other children and play with various kinds of materials (sand, water, clay, paints, paper);
2. children can have extended open-ended conversations with teachers and peers;
3. there is usually a library area of the classroom with picture books displayed on shelves where children can see and read them;
4. there is often a comfortable place to sit and read nearby;
5. children are given time during the day to look at books and read them;
6. there is a table for drawing and writing in a central place, equipped with paper, crayons, markers, scissors;
7. children are read to – they listen to a range of good stories.

Although most teachers, and in fact principals of preschools, are aware of the above, it should however be stated that the quality of education provided at preschools varies greatly. Many preschools, especially in the township, are understaffed, over-populated and lack the necessary funds. As mentioned before, many of these preschools or daycare facilities assume more of a custodial role as parents are frequently more concerned about the physical well-being of their children rather than the degree of exposure to education. Preschool presents the ideal opportunity for children to acquire vital literacy skills before they enter school. The following are a few simple suggestions for preschools to foster a much more meaningful learning and literary experience:

## 1. Big Book reading and shared reading

There is a vast amount of research (Christie *et al.* 2003, Goodwin 1999, White 2005, Morrow 2007) that supports the importance of teachers reading aloud to their classes every day and encouraging the students to ask questions and become involved with the story. Shared reading can also involve children “chanting a repetitive phrase or rhyme while the teacher tracks the print from left to right with a pointer” (Morrow 2007: 4). Preschool teachers, especially in the townships, should be informed of the above and be given helpful suggestions to incorporate these techniques into their everyday class routine.

Big Books should be an important part of any preschool literacy programme. Big Books are oversized storybooks that measure from 14” x 20” up to 24” x 30” (Morrow 2007: 146). The oversized print and pictures allow all the children to follow the story as the teacher is reading. The teacher usually faces the children, holding the big book up to face the front or placing it on a stand and following the print with a pointer. Big Books can be purchased or made. Morrow (2007: 146) suggests that “[w]hen they are made, children become even more aware of book concepts because they are engaged in creating a book”.

Morrow (2007: 146) continues by explaining the following easy steps for teachers to create their own Big Book:

### *Materials needed:*

- 2 pieces of thick cardboard for the covers (14” x 20” to 20” x 30”)
- 10 pieces of newsprint the same size as the cardboard for the pages
- 6 loose-leaf rings (1”)
- Hole punch

### *Directions for making the Big Book:*

- Punch 3 sets of holes in the top, middle and bottom of the cover and pages
- Insert a loose-leaf ring in each hole – the Big Book should have about 10 pages
- Print should be 1” to 2” high

Once the book has been completed, the teacher can rewrite a simple story from any children's book and attempt to hand-draw the illustrations or ask an artistic person to do it. Big Books are highly regarded because "[they] permit all children to see the print, [and] [t]ypically, teachers use a pointer to point to words and invite children to read along, particularly to the words in a familiar text or refrain in a book" (Christie *et al.* 2003: 143). This has the added benefit of making children aware that reading follows from left to right on a page, with return sweeps and progressing from top to bottom.

Before starting to read the Big Book to the class, White (2005: 92) suggests taking the following into consideration in order to maximise the Big Book experience:

- Seat the children so that they are on either side of the teacher. This enables them to see the print and pictures as the teacher reads;
- The teacher should learn to read upside down so that he/she can hold the book in their lap;
- Give the children plenty of time to study the pictures and only turn the pages when their attention has shifted;
- Encourage the children to talk about the book by responding positively and fully to any comments or questions;
- Plan an open-ended stretch of time for the session. Once certain children realise that conversation is a part of book sharing, the session can last a very long time;
- If the teacher has to wind up the session before they have finished the book, they should paraphrase the pages and read the end of the story. This ensures that the children do not miss out on this important aspect of story structure;
- The teacher should make a note of all the stories read and repeat the favourites as often as possible;
- As the teacher repeats books, the children should pay attention to the same questions and topics of conversation emerging with each reading.

The children will engage more with the story if the teacher involves them as much as possible while reading. The teacher can firstly repeatedly bring their attention to the title

and author before starting to read the story. Occasionally during the story the teacher may stop and ask the children questions such as “What do think will happen now?” or “What do you think the bears will find?” Children in general have vivid imaginations and like nothing more than to speculate about what might happen, or what they might do in a similar situation. At the end of the story, the teacher has a wonderful opportunity to get children to share their thoughts on the story, their favourite part or their favourite character. If the story has a moral lesson to be learnt, this would be an ideal time to discuss it. All the children should be given a turn to speak. Going around the circle works well but if presented with a reticent child that refuses to speak, it is best just to move on without pressing him/her.

For older children, the teacher can use Big Book time to bring their attention to different letters, words that start with the same letters, words that end with the same group of letters (rhyming words) and letter-sound relationships (phonics) (Christie *et al.* 2003: 143). Older children should be encouraged to identify all the words or sounds that they are already familiar with. The teacher could create an entirely new lesson to encourage children to suggest other words that rhyme or start with the same sound.

## **2. Making a comfortable and inviting reading corner**

In addition to reading to children every day, preschools should also make sure that they have a well-stocked, comfortable reading area in the classroom where children engage in independent reading whenever they have free time. Krashen (2004: 58) found that

[e]nriching the print environments in classrooms has been shown to result in more reading. [I]n installing well-designed library corners in kindergarten classes that previously did not have them resulted in more use of books and other “literature activities” by children during free play time. In addition, children did more free reading when the books in the library corner were more physically accessible [and] when they were within the children’s reach.

Independent reading is an important stepping stone to functional reading. During free time, children will often play with books and pretend to read them. Children are adept at

learning through copying so they will often mimic adult literate behaviour. For example, pretending to read aloud to their friends as the teacher reads to the class or pretending to read a book or newspaper as they have seen their parents or relatives do at home. Such behaviour is considered “one of the most important factors promoting early literacy acquisition” (Holdaway 1979, as cited in Christie *et al.* 2003: 110).

In order to facilitate independent reading, preschools should be encouraged to create a comfortable place in the classroom where children will want to sit and read. Holt (2007: 39) describes a book corner as a place in the classroom that includes the following:

- it should consist of an area that is friendly and welcoming and should have some comfy cushions and, if space allows, an armchair;
- it should contain bought books comprising stories (some with only pictures and some with words and pictures), poems, songs and rhymes;
- it should include other reading material such as magazines, notepads and brochures;
- it should house story props, like puppets, so that children can re-enact their favourite story with friends;
- if space allows, some writing equipment like paper and crayons should also be available so that children can create their own books.

A book corner should not just be an area in the classroom that consists of various shelves with books. A well-designed book corner is partitioned or cordoned off from the rest of the class and is supplied with comfortable pillows and cushions, allowing children to read quietly without any distractions. In her study, Morrow (1982: 341) found that due to the physical conditions of badly designed library corners in most preschools, only 2.37 of the children in the classroom were using the library corners daily. Most teachers felt that the school already housed a central library and that an additional classroom book corner was unnecessary. Morrow (1982: 339) refutes this by stating that “[a] total literature program provides regularly prepared literature activities, an attractively designed library corner, and a time when children have the opportunity to select books to look at and read”.

### **3.5 What the government could do to facilitate early literacy**

Parents and schools can do much to improve early literacy but ultimately it depends on the government to re-assess this dire situation and come up with some feasible ideas to improve early literacy. It is pointless wasting countless resources and huge amounts of money on improving primary school conditions, without sparing any thought whatsoever on how children can improve their emergent literacy skills during the vital learning ages of two to five years.

Fortunately, according to Mrs. Bann, a social worker from the Department of Social Development (personal interview: 15 December 2010), the national priorities of the government have changed drastically over the last two years and the government has made some important changes regarding early literacy. Firstly, an executive manager is now in charge of all the ECD programmes. The job entails overseeing all the ECD (Early Childhood Development) Centres in each province, as well as being in charge of funding. The government has realised that intervention must start before a child reaches school-going age because, “[i]f there is appropriate treatment and care, this can often reverse the effects of deprivation and support the development of innate potential” (Department of Social Development/Unicef Booklet, 2007: 13). The government plans to implement another compulsory year of preschool (Grade 0) for all children in South Africa, as well as putting in place stringent restrictions for any ECD centre that wishes to cater for 7 or more children. The staff must receive adequate training which the government now provides. At this moment in the Motheo district, which includes Bloemfontein, Botshabelo and Thaba ‘Nchu, 45 ECD centres have trained practitioners who are able to teach children up to Grade R.

According to the Children’s Act 38 of 2005 (Children’s Act 2005: 31), any applicant for registration of an early childhood development programme must possess the following qualifications, skills and training:

- The National Certificate in Early Childhood Development at National Qualification Framework (NQF) Level 1 to 6 of the South African Qualifications Authority;
- or
- An appropriate early childhood development qualification;
- or
- A minimum of three years' working experience in the early childhood development field;
  - Appropriate knowledge about early childhood development;
  - The ability to identify, record and report on the progress and developmental needs of the child to inform early childhood developmental opportunities and interventions;
  - The ability to design and produce stimulating indoor and outdoor activities and routines according to the developmental needs of the children;
  - The ability to stimulate, extend and promote all-round development through appropriate adult-child, adult-adult and child-child interactions to enhance emotional, cognitive, spiritual, physical and social development;
  - The ability to create awareness of, promote and ensure the all-round safety, protection, security, rights and development of the child according to his or her needs in conjunction with community resources;
  - The ability to provide early childhood developmental programmes that are appropriate to the needs of the children to whom the services are provided, including children with disabilities, chronic illness or other special needs; and
  - The ability to implement systems, policies and procedures and to manage physical, financial and human resources.

In addition to adhering to the above-mentioned guidelines, persons authorised by the government will be entitled to visit these centres as often as they feel is adequate to give a Quality Assurance Review (see Appendix B). The scale to which the ECD centre will be assessed falls under the following three headings: not acceptable, acceptable but with a few adaptations and acceptable. According to the Department of Social Development,

“[t]he top of the scale, i.e. acceptable, is the level to be aimed at for registration according to the minimum requirements” (Department of Social Development/Unicef Booklet, 2007:97).

However, the biggest hurdle the government faces at this point is acquiring the necessary funding to support and run all these ECD centres. Most centres can charge parents up to R100-R200 per child and as the people who most need these services are often the ones who cannot afford it, this creates a huge dilemma. Of the known 761 registered ECD centres in the Motheo District, only 236 are subsidised by the Department of Social Development. The government enforces strict rules regarding the subsidy and how it should be spent. This subsidy is loosely divided up as follows:

- 50 % must be spent on food for the children;
- 25% must be spent on educational development (toys and teaching aids);
- 25% must be used as an administrative budget for running costs and salaries.

In addition, the government has set up an Inter-Sectoral Committee, which includes representatives from the Department of Social Development, Education, Health, Public Works, to strategise and co-ordinate future plans for ECD centres in South Africa. The logic behind this is that “[a] holistic approach places the child at the centre of a protective and enabling environment that brings together the elements needed for the full development of that child” (Department of Social Development/Unicef Booklet, 2007:13). Nonetheless, the government should not be solely responsible for early literacy. Community-based projects and NGOs are equally important. A possible solution could be initiatives like Saturday Morning School or mobile crèches. The social worker representative from the Department of Social Development, Mrs. Bann (personal interview: 15 December 2010) agrees that such initiatives might be of great value and that, in fact, similar projects are already in place in the Western Cape and the Free State. The Western Cape is attempting to start after-school and weekend programmes that include parents and in the Free State, Lesedi Edu-care is piloting a programme that

involves a school bus or mobile crèche that actually visits children in the Gariiep and Qwa Qwa districts.

The obvious stumbling block for the above-mentioned initiatives is to find adequate staff. Perhaps a compulsory period of community service for all Foundation Phase teachers and social workers at Saturday Morning School or mobile crèches upon completion of their studies could solve this problem. This period of community service could comprise a brief stint of teaching. This would not only afford teachers and social workers the opportunity to perform valuable community service, but also assist them in gaining crucial work experience in their chosen profession.

### **3.6 Saturday morning School**

Although the idea of Saturday Morning School was introduced more than four decades ago, there is still much merit in the basic premise and Lipchik's (1964) concept could be very useful in the South African context, particularly in the Free State.

Lipchik (1964: 137) based Saturday morning school for mothers and preschoolers on the opinion that "a small child's dream might be a school where he [sic] attends voluntarily one morning a week, where he never experiences failure, and where his mother is not only not far away but may be sitting right in the same classroom with him". Such children would have no anxiety about being separated from their mothers and if those children were unable to attend preschool for whatever reason during the week, a regulated programme consisting of one morning a week for three years would certainly go a long way in aiding basic literacy. It would also have the added benefit of mothers witnessing their children's education while receiving invaluable advice at the same time.

Lipchik's (1964: 137) original school had its inception in Washington D.C in 1964. The staff was made up of two preschool teachers, three elementary school teachers and a social worker. At the time, all the staff members were volunteers. The school commenced every Saturday at 10:00 in the morning until twelve noon. There was one coffee and milk

break between. The school catered for mainly lower/working class families, intending to “help ready these four- and five- year-olds for entry into kindergarten and first grade as [m]any of the children lack[ed] basic concepts and attitudes which are important to school success” (Lipchik 1964: 137/8). The staff created their own curriculum, basing it on nine desirable skills, habits and attitudes that four- and five-year-old children needed to acquire. Literacy was considered important and “[b]eginnings [were] made in literary interests by teaching the children to handle books carefully and respect them, [t]hrough storytelling hours, the pupils learn[ed] to enjoy stories and to look at pictures with more discernment” (Lipchik 1966: 138).

Lipchik (1966: 138/9) describes a typical Saturday as consisting of the following:

- Children spend the first fifteen minutes deciding what they want to do and then move off toward different interest areas. Teachers plan in advance for many varied activities, using a number of different materials;
- Activities to choose from included block-building, painting at the easel, dramatic play, drawing with large crayons, looking at books in the library, working with clay, and many indoor and outdoor activities;
- The second segment, after break-time, consists of group activities such as singing, experimenting with rhythm instruments or listening to stories and music.

Mothers were encouraged to become closely involved in all the activities at the school. In the beginning, mothers were informed that, because their children missed out on preschool instruction throughout the week, it would be incumbent on them to reinforce at home the various skills that the children acquired every Saturday. The school endeavoured to help the mothers as much as possible, teaching them about the “early stages of a child’s development and discuss[ing] aspects of behaviour which concern[ed] or puzzle[d] them” (Lipchik 1966: 139). The mothers also regularly met with the resident social worker to discuss problems concerning their children, and to be advised on various stages of early childhood development.

The school undertook a trip to the local library where parents and children registered for library cards, received a lesson devoted to the city's most important monuments and buildings, and experienced a visiting artist who gave a painting lesson and even provided a lesson in folk dancing. The school thus attempted to give the children an exciting and varied school programme every Saturday to get the children enthusiastic about reading and learning. When observing the children, a regular kindergarten teacher likened their behaviour after seven sessions to that of her regular kindergarten class after nine weeks (Lipchik 1966: 142).

Lipchik (1966: 142) attributes the reason for the school's success rate to the fact that "the mothers had taken seriously their home role in the children's school life and made everyday application of the suggestions offered by the staff".

It is clear from the above that Saturday morning school for mothers and preschoolers was quite successful in its own right. The programme could easily be adapted in its original format to suit South African mothers and children. Saturday morning school is the perfect solution as it is free of charge and mothers are afforded the opportunity to bond with their children, take part in their learning and observe ways of improving future assistance to their children.



## CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 The Qualitative Component

The year preceding Grade 1, also referred to as Grade R or Reception Year, has been made compulsory by the South African government for all learners. However, it remains parents' choice whether they wish to enroll their children in preschool (years 2 – 5 years) or not. Most preschools are aware of the fact that Grade R has its own syllabus stipulated by the government and have thus tailored their own syllabi accordingly. Most preschools therefore now have what they call Grade 0 or Grade 00, which are the Grades preceding Grade R. Consequently, as the situation stands today, some learners have preschool knowledge from ages 2 or 3 years onwards while others have no formal preschool knowledge at all.

Therefore, in order to ascertain whether learners who have had no access to preschool and/or who have illiterate parents are at a distinct disadvantage once they start Grade R, a qualitative study was included in this dissertation. Twenty-five learners from five different schools in the Bloemfontein region were asked ten pertinent questions regarding emergent literacy. The learners were chosen randomly by the teacher as it was specifically requested that the learners reflect a cross-section of the class. These questions were administered by the researcher and a story was also read to the same learners to establish whether they were familiar with 'book behaviour' and if they could listen with attention and enjoyment to a story. Interviews were intentionally left until the end of the school year to ascertain whether all participants in the study had acquired the knowledge necessary for Grade R studies. It should be noted that much consideration was put into whether or not to include township schools as this would have added a vital component to this dissertation. However, township schools were omitted only for the simple reason that communication between the researcher and the learners would have been problematic. All the township preschools in the Bloemfontein district that the researcher could have gained access to teach in Sesotho and this would have resulted in the questions having to be posed through an intermediary person (teacher or principal). As this would have made

gauging learners' original responses very difficult and probably statistically unreliable, it was considered a better research option to include only Afrikaans- and English medium schools. However, considerable care was taken to include learners from all races and socio-economic backgrounds.

As was mentioned previously, the qualitative component in this dissertation establishes: 1) whether any discrepancies exist amongst these five schools as all the children involved in this study are to start Grade R the following year (2012) and will all be expected to demonstrate comparable emergent literacy skills and 2) whether there is in fact a solid foundation of emergent literacy skills already in place. Children who do not have this foundation will therefore be at a distinct disadvantage starting Grade R.

## **4.2 Research design**

Questions (cf. Appendix A) were compiled based on the skills identified throughout this thesis as essential or desired literate behaviour for preschoolers (de Witt 2009) and all five school principals were asked if these were indeed the skills considered essential for all learners about to enter Grade R. All five principals explicitly agreed that except for the skill described in question (3) would require some basic knowledge and recognition of the alphabet, all the other skills *should* be basic knowledge for any learner about to enter Grade R. It should be mentioned that schools A, C, D and E loosely work from syllabi compiled by themselves, based on the government syllabus for Grade R. School B, however, works from a syllabus compiled by a mother, who is an occupational therapist (see Appendix C).

Learners were asked the following questions (see Appendix A):

### **1) Can the learner listen with attention and enjoyment to a story?**

A story was read to participating learners. The English learners had a choice between 'Peppa's Party' and 'Little Dolly' and the Afrikaans learners heard 'Uitkamp in die Bos'.

Before reading commenced, the learners were asked to identify pictures on the cover of the book and afterwards learners were questioned on events that happened in the story.

**2) Can the learner properly interact with printed matter in terms of turning the pages of a book and reading from left to right with return sweeps?**

During the individual interviews, learners were given a book, asked if they could recognize it and asked if they knew what it is used for. Upon opening the book, the learners were asked what one is supposed to do with a book and how one 'reads' it or where their teacher or parents would begin to read from.

**3) Can the learner recognise letters of the alphabet?**

Learners were given a page containing all the letters of the alphabet, along with accompanying pictures for each letter. Learners were then asked to identify as many letters as they could.

**4) Can the learner recite simple nursery rhymes?**

Learners were asked if they could recite any nursery rhymes. If they were unsure, a prompt was given, for example "Twinkle twinkle..."

**5) Can the learner follow a logical sequence using pictures?**

Five pictures from a book entitled '*Pooh hunts for honey*' were cut out and arranged on the table. The first picture was explained to learners and they were then asked: what would be Pooh do next? It should be obvious from the pictures that Pooh Bear was looking for more honey to eat. Learners were asked to motivate their choices.

**6) Can the learner use simple reasoning to identify "parts of a whole"?**

A picture of a basketball was cut up into 4 pieces and learners were asked to 'build' it again. They were allowed to look at the picture of the 'whole ball' whilst assembling their own version. They were also asked to study a picture of a teddy bear. Another picture of a teddy bear without arms, legs or a head was given to them to 'build'.

**7) Can the learner use simple reasoning to differentiate between the largest/smallest or the odd one out?**

Learners were given a picture of four objects with varying sizes. They were then asked to identify the largest and the smallest objects. Learners were then given a picture of four objects, one obviously not matching the others. They were asked to identify the 'odd one out'.

**8) Can the learner identify simple shapes and colours?**

Learners were asked to identify various shapes such as triangles, squares, circles, and rectangles. They were also asked to identify primary colours in some of the pictures.

**9) Can the learner recognise numbers 1 to 10 and rote count to 30?**

Learner were asked to identify letters 1 to 10 (in order) and to rote count to 30.

**10) Can the learner copy and extend simple patterns using writing implements?**

Learners were given a pattern and then asked to copy and extend the pattern on their own (see Appendix D).

Each learner was rewarded a mark out of (2) upon the completion of the question. If the learner answered the question correctly, they received 2/2. If they partially answered the question they received 1/2 and if they could not answer the question at all, they received 0/2. It was specifically requested that the learners be selected randomly and not according to aptitude so it can be assumed that the learners included in this study range from high aptitudes to lower aptitudes and therefore an inability to answer a question could be contributed to the latter variant. However, this study does not focus on testing intellectual ability but rather presents an observational study of which emergent literacy skills preschoolers possess. Although aptitude could be viewed as an important contributing factor for successful studies, exposure to preschool teaching and literary experiences is regarded here to be of far greater significance than whether learners could answer the questions or not.

In addition, an occupational therapist (Mrs. van Jaarsveld, personal interview: 2 December 2010) was consulted afterwards to obtain an expert opinion specifically relating to whether the findings in fact reflect learners' lack of emergent literacy skills or if more serious problems, for example relating to motor, visual or spatial abilities, might be at hand. It should be duly noted that since the questions were aimed at gathering information about emergent literacy skills and not school-readiness, none of the questions pertain specifically to motor skills. However, the latter should be kept in mind as failure to answer a question could indeed stem from a deeper source, such as a fine-motor problem, and is therefore not necessarily a reflection of emergent literacy skills at all.

### **4.3 Participating schools**

Information letters in English and Afrikaans and Sesotho were sent in advance to participating schools to explain the aim of the study (see Appendices E, F and G). However, the questionnaires were not sent to schools in advance as the aim of the study was exactly to test which skills learners possessed without being ‘coached’ beforehand. The schools were chosen to represent and include all demographic groups. Table 4.3.1 outlines the profiles of the schools:

*Table 4.3.1 Profiles of schools*

<b>SCHOOL</b>	<b>MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION</b>	<b>SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS</b>	<b>RACIAL DEMOGRAPHIC</b>	<b>OTHER</b>
School A	Afrikaans	Upper/middle class	Mainly White (85-90%)*	- Affluent parents - Exclusive - waiting list
School B	English	Mixed	Mixed (Black, White, Coloured & Indian)	- Ranked ‘top’ school in Bloemfontein - attached to primary and high school
School C	English	Mixed	Black	- ‘Private school’ - fees very expensive - Not all affluent parents though - attached to primary and high school
School D	Afrikaans	Lower/working Class	Mainly White (85-90%)*	- Located in low socio-economic area - attached to primary

				and high school
School E	English	Mixed	Mixed (Black, White & Coloured)	- Fees moderately more expensive than most preschools

\* The 85-90% figure is not an official statistic given by the school but merely my observation of the racial demographic observed whilst visiting the schools in question.

## CHAPTER 5: INTERPRETATION OF RESPONSES

Ten standardised questions were compiled and posed to all the learners. The findings are as follows:

### 5.1 “Can the learner listen with attention and enjoyment to a story?”

**School A** – All five learners seemed to enjoy the story, were attentive and asked questions throughout. All five learners were able to recount exactly what happened in the story without being prompted:

Michael was more withdrawn but answered questions freely afterwards.	2/2
Janko listened attentively and with enjoyment.	2/2
Ruaan listened attentively.	2/2
Nina remarked that she already had the book at home and knew the story.	2/2
Jeannie was the only one that seemed distracted by the construction noise going on outside.	1/2

#### **SCHOOL TOTAL: 9/10**

**School B** – All five learners were very excited at the prospect of being read to and actually requested the ‘*Little Dolly*’ book. They all listened attentively and with obvious enjoyment and were happy to oblige and answer questions regarding the story. All five admitted that their parents read to them on a regular basis:

Jasmine was the first to recount the entire story back exactly as it happened.	2/2
Michelle listened attentively and with enjoyment.	2/2
Saina was already familiar with the ‘ <i>Peppa’s Party</i> ’ book.	2/2
Nicola was quieter than the rest but still seemed to enjoy the story.	2/2
Illiana started telling her own story whilst the story was being read to her, such a disruption often results in the other children losing their concentration too.	1/2

**SCHOOL TOTAL: 9/10**

**School C** – All five learners listened attentively and with obvious enjoyment and they all asked questions throughout. When asked, none of their parents read to them at home. They thoroughly enjoyed being read to and actually wanted to know if this was to become a regular feature every week and seemed very disappointed when told this was only a once-off:

Teboho listened with attention and enjoyment.	2/2
Oageug listened with attention and enjoyment	2/2
Ratoai was more reserved than the rest but still enjoyed the story.	2/2
Renkantse listened with attention and enjoyment.	2/2
Kgalalelo was already familiar with the ' <i>Peppa's Party</i> ' book from the television and knew all the pigs' names.	2/2

**SCHOOL TOTAL: 10/10**

**School D** – All five learners were excited at the prospect of being read to and listened attentively:

Nicolas was quiet but could answer questions afterwards.	2/2
Jaden said that his parents didn't read to him but seemed very excited about the story and listened carefully and was quick to recount the story afterwards.	2/2
Michelle seemed slightly more distracted throughout but could answer questions afterwards.	1/2
Juanize listened with attention and enjoyment.	2/2
John B seemed to be listening but could not recount the entire story when questioned. (any possibility of a hearing disorder was already eliminated beforehand)	1/2

**SCHOOL TOTAL: 8/10**

**School E** – All five learners were very excited at the prospect of being read to. All of them, except Boysie, asked questions throughout, could easily recount the story afterwards and listened attentively and with obvious enjoyment:

Boysie listened with attention and enjoyment.	2/2
Kelebogile pointed to all the pictures on the cover without being prompted. She said that her mother read to her on a regular basis and actually pointed out when an incorrect word was said during the story!	2/2
Kamo listened attentively and stayed afterwards to look through the other books.	2/2
Cherise was excited and grabbed the book beforehand to look through and actually stayed afterwards just to page through all the books. She said that nobody wanted to read to her at home but that her sister often read to her.	2/2
Michelle listened with attention and enjoyment.	2/2

**SCHOOL TOTAL: 10/10**

### **5.1.1 The Occupational Therapist's view**

The concentration levels of children this age should be as follows:

Ages 4 – 6 should be able to concentrate 5 -10 minutes at a time

Ages 6 -7 should be able to concentrate 10 – 15 minutes at a time and

Age 7 should be able to concentrate for 20 – 30 minutes at a time

All the learners in the study (who are all five-years old) should easily be able to listen with enjoyment and attention to a story. At this age they should be able to modulate all sensory components, implying an ability to shut out any distracting noise to concentrate on the task at hand. Therefore, a learner who had no previous exposure to preschool, should, upon entering Grade R, take between 3 to 7 days to adjust and learn how to concentrate on one task. If the learner takes longer, a more serious problem (the nervous system cannot inhibit irrelevant stimuli) is in place.

### 5.1.2 Result

Concentration is not a learnt behaviour and any five-year old should be mature enough to sit still for 5 to 10 minutes without a problem, even after an initial period (3 to 7 days) of adjustment.

## 5.2 “Can the learner properly interact with printed matter in terms of turning the pages of a book and reading from left to right with return sweeps?”

### School A –

Michael was unsure of what to do next once the book was opened.	1/2
Janko knew to turn the pages but was unsure of how to start ‘reading’.	1/2
Ruaan knew to turn pages and that pictures were used to tell the story and was aware of the fact that reading takes place from left to right with return sweeps.	2/2
Nina knew to turn pages but was unsure where or how to starting ‘reading’.	1/2
Jeannie knew to turn the pages and that reading takes place from left to right with return sweeps.	2/2

### SCHOOL TOTAL: 7/10

### School B –

Jasmine knew to open the book and turn the pages and knew that the teacher started at the ‘top’ but was unsure of where to go from there.	1/2
Michelle was very familiar with all book conventions. She knew to open the book, turn the pages and read the words from left to right with return sweeps.	2/2
Saina was aware that books were read by using the words and reading from left to right with return sweeps.	2/2
Nicola knew to open a book and turn the pages but thought that the teacher ‘read’ by referring to pictures (nothing was said about the words).	1/2

Illiana knew to open a book and turn the pages but also thought 'reading' was done by using the pictures. 1/2

**SCHOOL TOTAL: 7/10**

**School C -**

Teboho knew that the teacher 'reads' the book by using the words but did not identify that it was done from left to right with return sweeps. 1/2

Oageug answered that it was 'Christmas' and didn't seem to understand the concept of what was being asked and what was meant by 'read' 0/2

Ratsoai knew to turn the pages but didn't really understand the question of how the teacher 'reads' the book. 1/2

Renkantse knew to turn pages but thought that the teacher 'read' by using the pictures. 1/2

Kgalalelo was the only one who knew to turn the pages and read the words from left to right with return sweeps. 2/2

**SCHOOL TOTAL: 5/10**

**School D –**

Nicolas had to be prompted to say that first you had to open the book and seemed unsure of where to go from there. 0/2

Jaden knew to open the book and turn the pages but was unsure of how to 'read'. 1/2

Michelle knew to open the book and turn the pages but was the only one who said that you 'read' using the pictures. 1/2

Juanize knew to open the book and turn the pages. 1/2

John B knew to open the book and turn the pages but didn't connect print or pictures with 'reading'. 1/2

**SCHOOL TOTAL: 4/10**

**School E –**

- Boysie was shy to speak, distracted by the other children playing outside and had to be prompted to explain how you read, although he knew to open the book and turn the pages. 1/2
- Kelebogile knew to open the book, turn the pages but thought ‘reading’ took place using the pictures. She started making up her own story, going from picture to picture throughout the book, and was not at all concerned with the words. 1/2
- Kamo were very familiar with reading conventions and knew to open the book, turn the pages and ‘read’ using the words from left to right with return sweeps. 2/2
- Cherise was also very familiar with reading conventions and also was aware of the fact that reading takes place from left to right with return sweeps. 2/2
- Michelle knew to open the book but was unsure how or where to start ‘reading’. 1/2

**SCHOOL TOTAL: 7/10**

### **5.2.1 The Occupational Therapist’s view**

If a child is developmentally sound, they shouldn’t have a problem learning how to handle books and, after being read to, should be able to get a fair idea of how reading takes place. A potential problem here may be if they struggle with their three-point pincor grip (needed to turn pages), a grip that any five-year old should already have developed. It could also be a motivational problem, for instance, an abused child may simply have no motivation to look through a book.

However, children who are aware that reading takes place from left to right are at a distinct advantage because they will be required to write from left to right at school. They will already be able to orientate themselves if, for instance, the teacher says: ‘ok, we’ll start writing, start on your LEFT side, the side next to the BIG window’. Children aware of reading conventions will automatically orientate themselves accordingly but children who are unaware of these conventions might be left feeling very confused. The occupational therapist likened it to the teacher speaking in Greek to them. They would be

totally perplexed as to what was expected of them. It is well-documented that the Montessori-style of teaching uses copious amounts of activities specifically designed from left to right to help children to orientate themselves in school.

### **5.2.2 Result**

Book behaviour is a learnt behaviour and can be caught up or learnt over time. However, two, three, four or even five years of handling and observing print will definitely put children at a distinct advantage in Grade R.

### **5.3 “Can the learner recognise letters of the alphabet?”**

Although all but one principal (from School D) agreed that this knowledge is not necessary for successful entering into Grade R, the question was nonetheless posed to test how many learners are familiar with letters of the alphabet.

As this is not required knowledge for learners entering Grade R, no mark was allocated.

#### **School A –**

Michael knew ‘A’ but was unsure of the rest.

Janko recognised ‘A’ and ‘P’ only.

Ruaan recognised letters ‘A’, ‘P’ and ‘S’ quite easily without much prompting.

Nina was unsure of the exact letter but could name the picture and was familiar with most of the sounds

Jeannie was unsure of all the letters.

#### **School B –**

Jasmine could only identify ‘A’ and ‘M’.

Michelle recognised ‘A’ and ‘F’ easily and with prompting could identify ‘E’, ‘O’, ‘S’ and ‘R’. She also could spell ‘d-o-g’.

Saina knew 'A' and 'S' but was unsure of the others.

Nicola was unsure of all the letters.

Illiana knew the sounds for 'd' and 'e' but not the name of the letters.

### **School C –**

Teboho could name the pictures but had no idea what letters actually were there for. He said that 'A' was a 'half' and that 'S' was 'cheetah'.

Oageug didn't recognise any letters.

Ratsoai confused 'S' with 'I' and was unsure of the others.

Renkantse didn't recognise any of the letters.

Kgalalelo identified all the pictures first but didn't recognise any letters. She did know, however, that letters are somehow used to 'read'.

### **School D –**

Nicolas knew the pictures but didn't recognise any of the letters. He did however see the connection because he said that he did not know any letters because he doesn't know how to 'read' yet.

Jaden could identify the pictures but not any of the letters.

Michelle didn't recognise any letters.

Juanize knew the 'a' sound but none of the letters.

John B said that a letter is a 'name' but couldn't identify any.

### **School E –**

Boysie only knew the sounds for 'a' and 'b'.

Kelebogile could identify all the pictures and letters 'Z', 'O' and 'M'. She said that her mother had told her the names of the letters.

Kamo could not identify any letters.

Cherise identified 'A' and 'C' but confused 'I' with 'T'.

Michelle identified the sounds for 'a', 'd' and 'm'. She knew that her name started with an 'M'.

### 5.3.1 The Occupational Therapist's view

The occupational therapist's view was not obtained on this question as this ability is not perceived as requisite knowledge for a learner of this age-group.

### 5.3.2 Result

Although alphabet recognition is not required knowledge for Grade R and is therefore not taught as such in Grade 0 or 00, it is clear that those children, who have had the opportunity to associate with print either through preschool or their parents, have picked up knowledge about letters and/or sounds. Clearly this knowledge was acquired on some unconscious level through storybook reading and experiences with printed matter; only one learner remarked that she knew the names of letters because her mother had told her. Learners who have alphabet awareness upon entering Grade R will be at a definite advantage, although actual alphabet learning is considered learnt behaviour that any learner should be able pick up in a short space of time.

## 5.4 “Can the learner recite simple nursery rhymes?”

### School A –

The principal was asked to translate ‘nursery rhyme’ into Afrikaans and she responded by saying that the children knew it as a “gediggie”. When questioned, the children responded by reciting a short Afrikaans story (about 2 to 3 lines long), and it is thus unknown if the school actually teaches any rhyming verses at all:

Michael recited a few lines of an Afrikaans story.	0/2
Janko recited a few lines of an Afrikaans story.	0/2
Ruaan recited a few lines of an Afrikaans story.	0/2
Nina recited a few lines of an Afrikaans story.	0/2
Jeannie told her own very imaginative story about catching tadpoles.	1/2

**SCHOOL TOTAL: 1/10****School B –**

Jasmine easily recited ‘Twinkle twinkle little star’.	2/2
Michelle sang ‘Merry Christmas’ and knew a little of ‘Baa baa black sheep’.	1/2
After a bit of prompting, Saina could recite ‘Jack ‘n Jill’.	2/2
Nicola could not remember any nursery rhymes.	0/2
Illiana could easily recite ‘Baa baa black sheep’ in both English and Afrikaans.	2/2

**SCHOOL TOTAL: 7/10****School C –**

Teboho thought he could recite ‘Baa baa black sheep’ but gave up after the first line.	1/2
Oageug said that he could recite ‘Twinkle twinkle little star’ but was unsure of any words after the first line and gave up after the first line and said and he couldn’t remember.	1/2
Rantsoai said that she could recite ‘Twinkle twinkle little star’ but was unsure of what came after the first line.	1/2
Renkantse could recite ‘Twinkle twinkle little star’ after some prompting.	1/2
Kgalalelo could easily recite ‘Twinkle twinkle little star’.	2/2

**SCHOOL TOTAL: 6/10****School D –**

The same occurred here as at School A - most of the children simply recited a short Afrikaans story:

Nicolas recited a short Afrikaans story.	1/2
Jaden couldn’t remember any stories.	0/2
Michelle told a Bible story.	0/2
Juanize recited a short story, but her story was very random with seemingly no point to it.	0/2
John B couldn’t remember any stories.	0/2

**SCHOOL TOTAL: 1/10****School E –**

Boysie could recite ‘Baa baa black sheep’.	2/2
Kelebogile exuberantly sang ‘Twinkle twinkle little star’.	2/2
Kamo could easily recite ‘Twinkle twinkle little star’ without any prompting.	2/2
Cherise said that she knew a lot of nursery rhymes and easily sang ‘Baa baa black sheep’.	2/2
Michelle could only recite the first and second sentence of ‘Jack ‘n Jill’.	1/2

**SCHOOL TOTAL: 9/10****5.4.1 The Occupational Therapist’s view**

Nursery rhymes are crucial for children to learn for a variety of reasons. Not only does this skill assist with phonological awareness and therefore aid language ability, it is also seen to be a vital sequencing tool. Sequencing is learnt at birth and is continually reinforced throughout childhood. Children of this age need to be able to figure out what comes after what and nursery rhymes are therefore very helpful because children have to figure out which sound or event comes next. Nursery rhymes accompanied by music are especially helpful because the music acts as a vector to the words.

**5.4.2 Result**

It would seem that nowadays preschools do not consider nursery rhymes to be as important as they were considered to be in the past. Most of the English children could not even recite more than one and the Afrikaans children did not even seem to be very familiar with rhyming verse at all. Thus it is a shame that preschools are neglecting a tool that can be helpful in so many ways.

### 5.5 “Can the learner follow a logical sequence using pictures?”

#### School A –

Michael understood that Pooh had to follow the bee to the “bees’ house” to get more honey and then put it in a dish to eat. He figured it out slowly by himself without any prompting. He understood that Pooh had to follow the bee first, before he could get the honey. 2/2

Janko also saw that Pooh had to follow the bee first to get the honey before he could put it in a bowl and eat it. 2/2

Ruaan saw that Pooh was looking for more honey to eat in the tree before he could empty the honey into a bowl and eat it but didn’t see the connection to the bees. 1/2

Nina had to be prompted about what Pooh wanted to do. She saw that he wanted more honey but didn’t connect it to the bees. 1/2

Jeannie knew that Pooh had to follow the bee to get more honey in the tree. She used her own initiative to fill in that Pooh first had to fetch a bowl to put on the floor before he climbed the tree to get more honey. 2/2

#### SCHOOL TOTAL: 8/10

#### School B –

Jasmine first pointed to the last picture of Pooh eating the honey and said that he wanted more. She easily made the connection that Pooh must follow the bee to get more honey. 2/2

Michelle said that Pooh must climb the tree to get more honey but, using the last picture, made up her own story about Pooh not understanding where pollen comes from. 1/2

Saina knew that Pooh had to climb the tree to get more honey and climb down again but didn’t make any connection to following the bee to the tree first. 1/2

Nicola saw that Pooh had to climb the tree to get more honey and then he ate it but also didn’t see the importance of following the bee to the tree first. 1/2

Illiana only saw that Pooh had to climb the tree to get honey and then ate it. She asked what the extra pictures, that she didn’t use, were for. 1/2

**SCHOOL TOTAL: 6/10****School C –**

Teboho didn't recognise 'Pooh Bear' but said that he knew 'honey'. He said that Pooh was going to get honey from the bees and that he was going to eat the honey afterwards. He didn't mention following the bee but was aware that honey comes from bees. 1/2

Oageug didn't recognise 'Pooh Bear' or 'honey'. He said that Pooh wanted to climb the tree because squirrels live there and then he said that Pooh wanted food. He didn't know what kind of food or where Pooh would get it from. 0/2

Ratsoai said that Pooh wanted food but didn't understand where Pooh would get it from. 0/2

Renkantse said that Pooh must follow the bee to get food but made no connection between bees and honey. She went on to make up her own story from each picture. 0/2

Kgalalelo said that Pooh should climb the tree to get more honey and then put it in a bowl and eat it but didn't see the connection with following the bee first. 1/2

**SCHOOL TOTAL: 2/10****School D –**

Nicolas said that the bees were eating all Pooh's honey and that he was looking for more in the tree because the bees had eaten it all. 0/2

Jaden said that Pooh must go and look for more honey from the bees and that he had to climb the tree to get more. He didn't see any connection to following the bees though. 1/2

Michelle said that Pooh must get the bee's honey and eat it but didn't see that he must follow the bee first. 1/2

Juanize said that Pooh must climb the tree to look for the honey and then he must eat it. 1/2

John B said that Pooh must climb the tree and fall out, then he must walk using his feet and that he was going to eat the "stuff" in the jar. He doesn't see any connection between the bees and the honey. 0/2

**SCHOOL TOTAL: 3/10****School E –**

Boysie said that Pooh must climb the tree because he wanted to eat honey, asked what honey was again and was unsure of what would happen next. 1/2

Kelebogile mentioned that Pooh first had to think what to do next, which was quite apt since in the picture Pooh seemed to be indeed thinking. She said that bees made honey and that if he wanted more, he must go to where the bees lived, although didn't see connection with following the bees. 1/2

Kamo also mentioned that Pooh must first think about what he wanted to do and then he must follow the bees because bees liked honey. 2/2

Cherise said that Pooh must climb the tree to get more honey because he knew that bees made honey. She then went on to say that Pooh fell out of the tree, climbed it again to get more honey to eat, although she didn't see the connection between following bees and getting more honey. 1/2

Michelle immediately saw that after Pooh discovered that he had no more honey, he had to follow the bees to get more in the tree. 2/2

**SCHOOL TOTAL: 8/10****5.5.1 The Occupational Therapist's view**

Once again, sequencing is at the heart of this task. A learner should be able to look at all the pictures and decide logically what comes next or the order in which the events unfold. However, once a child is exposed to tasks like this, they should be able to catch up fairly quickly. Sequencing can be 'taught' to a degree – a teacher can 'teach' a learner to build puzzles whereby he/she is taught to start with the corners, then the edges and finally the middle. Activities like these help learners to realise the order in which things happen.

### 5.5.2 Result

Although most learners did not put the pictures into the exact same sequence as in the book, most of them nonetheless managed to arrange the pictures into a logical sequence. Learners' life-experiences often influence the way in which they view the world and as a result two learners might arrange the same pictures completely differently. However, any learner who is school-ready should be able to complete a task such as this fairly easily once the teacher has exposed them to several such tasks.

### 5.6 “Can the learner use simple reasoning to identify ‘parts of a whole’?”

#### School A –

Michael took longer to figure out how to build the two pictures but in the end he built them perfectly. 2/2

Janko built the ball very quickly but took longer to build the bear. He built his bear with the feet facing the wrong direction. 1/2

Ruaan built the ball and bear very easily, and matched them up exactly to the examples given. 2/2

Nina easily built the ball and the bear and matched the two pictures exactly with their examples. 2/2

Jeannie built the ball and bear very quickly and carefully made sure they were exactly like the examples given. 2/2

**SCHOOL TOTAL: 9/10**

#### School B –

Jasmine took time to try and match up the pictures exactly but in the end the lines of the ball weren't aligned and the bear's feet were facing the wrong direction but she seemed happy with the end product. 1/2

Michelle built the ball quickly and was careful to match it up exactly but she didn't seem to care as much about the bear being exactly the same as the example. 1/2

Saina had a bit of trouble building the ball but in the end managed to match it up exactly. She built the bear quickly but didn't match up the arms. 1/2

Nicola built the ball and the bear quickly but didn't match up the stripes of the ball or the arms of the bear. 1/2

Illiana took a while to figure out how to build the ball and the bear, she didn't match up the lines of the ball exactly but by asking questions ('do the feet go here?', 'is the head in the right place?') managed to build the bear exactly. 1/2

**SCHOOL TOTAL: 5/10**

**School C –**

Teboho built the ball with one piece facing completely the wrong way and built the bear with the body the wrong way around, with the body parts attached quite randomly onto it. 0/2

Oageug didn't match up the stripes on the ball and completed building it with one piece facing completely the wrong way but didn't seem to notice. He said the bear was a 'puppy' and finished building it with the hands facing the wrong way. 0/2

Ratsoai built the ball but didn't match up the stripes although she looked carefully at the example throughout. She took some time to build the bear and had to be prompted to attach the legs and couldn't quite figure out where the legs belonged. 0/2

Renkantse was careful to match both pictures up exactly to their examples. 2/2

Kgalalelo easily built the ball and matched up the lines exactly but used the body of the bear upside down and seemed satisfied although it clearly didn't look like the example given. 1/2

**SCHOOL TOTAL: 3/10**

**School D –**

Nicolas built both fairly easily and although he matched up the bear exactly, didn't match the lines on the ball. 1/2

Jaden built both quickly but didn't care about matching the lines on the ball or the arms or legs of the bear. He put the bear's legs on upside down. 0/2

Michelle carefully matched up the lines on the ball but put the bear's arms on upside down. 1/2

Juanize built both easily but didn't match up the lines on the ball nor the arms or legs on the bear. 0/2

John B easily built the ball but didn't worry about matching up the lines. He attempted to build the bear by putting on the arms and legs first, but finally managed to attach them to the body although the arms were facing the wrong direction and the legs were upside down. 0/2

**SCHOOL TOTAL: 2/10****School E –**

Boysie built the ball very slowly and asked for help attaching the last two pieces. He fitted the last piece facing completely in the wrong direction. He asked for help building the bear too and finally finished, but with one arm the wrong way around and one foot upside down. 0/2

Kelebogile carefully built the ball, meticulously matching up all the lines. She built the bear quickly and even noticed when one arm was missing under the table. 2/2

Kamo built both quickly yet carefully but did not match up the stripes on the ball and both legs of the bear faced the wrong direction. 0/2

Cherise built both extremely quickly but didn't match up the lines on the ball or the legs and arms of the bear. 0/2

Michelle built both very quickly and perfectly, in fact mentioning that it was 'easy peasy'. 2/2

**SCHOOL TOTAL: 4/10**

### **5.6.1 The Occupational Therapist's view**

This is known as 'analysis and synthesis' where something is taken apart and put back together again. This is an important part of development and any five-year old should be able to build a 5-piece puzzle without much trouble. Even a child that has not been exposed to preschool should be able to do this after being given a few days and a few examples. Children of this age should also be aware of body parts and where they belong. If a learner struggles with an activity such as this, it is usually indicative of a serious underlying problem and such a learner should be tested immediately.

### **5.6.2 Result**

Failure to complete this task thus seems to rather be of a developmental nature than an emergent literacy issue. All five-year olds should be capable of building a 5-piece puzzle and if they are unable to perform this task it is often not a question of lacking the emergent skills to accomplish this task, but more a question of not being on the same developmental level as their peers. Usually, this problem is of a more serious nature.

## **5.7 "Can the learner use simple reasoning to differentiate between the largest/smallest or the odd one out?"**

### **School A –**

Michael at first had trouble understanding the concept of 'odd one out' but after an explanation he was able to identify that the 'lolly' was not the same as the cars. He easily identified smallest/largest from the picture given. 1/2

Janko easily identified that the 'bee' was not the same as the flowers and understood the concept of smallest/largest. 2/2

Ruaan easily identified that the 'bear' was the odd one out and understood the concept of smallest/largest. 2/2

Nina had to be prompted before she identified that the 'goose' was the odd one out but easily pointed out smallest/largest from the picture. 1/2

Jeannie knew instantly that the 'goose' didn't fit in with the clothes and understood the concept of smallest/largest. 2/2

### **SCHOOL TOTAL: 8/10**

#### **School B -**

Jasmine couldn't grasp the concept of 'odd one out', even after being prompted, but she managed to easily identify smallest/largest from the picture given. 1/2

Michelle immediately identified that the 'bear' was the odd one out and could easily see the difference between smallest/largest. 2/2

Saina immediately identified that the 'bee' was not the same as the flowers and had no trouble pointing out smallest/largest. 2/2

Nicola was already very familiar with the concept of 'odd one out' as she said that she had the same book at home and had been doing it since she was three-years old. She could easily identify smallest/largest from the picture given. 2/2

Illiana easily identified that the 'lolly' was the odd one out and could also easily identify smallest/largest. 2/2

### **SCHOOL TOTAL: 9/10**

#### **School C –**

Teboho couldn't understand the concept of 'odd one out', and even after it had been explained several times, he still said that the 'goose' was one goose. He could, however, identify smallest/largest from the picture given. 1/2

Oageug initially didn't understand the concept of 'odd one out' but after being prompted he identified that the 'bee' was not the same as the flowers. He could easily identify smallest/largest. 1/2

Ratsoai didn't understand the concept of 'odd one out' or smallest/largest. She pointed to the 'apple' and 'peach' and commented that you could eat them both. After being

prompted she still pointed to the 'apple' and the 'peach' as the odd one out. She also couldn't discriminate between smallest/largest as she pointed to the medium ball as the largest and the smaller medium ball as the smallest. 0/2

Renkantse could identify the 'odd one out' but couldn't differentiate between smallest/largest, and seemed to only understand the concept of small/large. 1/2

Kgalalelo couldn't understand the concept of 'odd one out', and first pointed to the 'orange' and then the 'apple' but couldn't explain why she thought they didn't fit in with the rest. She could however distinguish between smallest/largest from the picture given.

1/2

### **SCHOOL TOTAL: 4/10**

#### **School D –**

Nicolas easily identified that the 'goose' was the odd one out because it was not the same as clothes and could easily distinguish between smallest/largest. 2/2

Jaden immediately saw that the 'lolly' was not the same as the cars and could easily identify smallest/largest from the picture given. 2/2

Michelle could identify the odd one out and could immediately distinguish between smallest/largest. 2/2

Juanize identified the 'bee' as the odd one out but even after being prompted, couldn't seem to fathom why. She could easily distinguish between smallest/largest. 1/2

John B couldn't understand the concept of 'odd one out', even after being prompted he still pointed to the 'apple'. He easily identified smallest/largest though. 1/2

### **SCHOOL TOTAL: 8/10**

#### **School E –**

Boysie couldn't grasp the concept of 'odd one out'. He pointed to the 'car' first and after being prompted, pointed to the 'car' again. He also had some trouble differentiating between smallest/largest. He first pointed to the medium elephant as the largest and then to the medium strawberry as the largest. 0/2

- Kelebogile identified the 'bear' as the odd one out but couldn't reason why, even after being prompted. She could easily distinguish between smallest/largest. 1/2
- Kamo easily identified the odd one out and smallest/largest. 2/2
- Cherise had trouble identifying the odd one out. She first pointed to the 'jacket' and only after being prompted chose the 'goose' and reasoned that it was the odd one out because you couldn't put it on like the others. She could easily distinguish between smallest/largest. 1/2
- Michelle easily identified the odd one out and smallest/largest from the picture given. 2/2

**SCHOOL TOTAL: 6/10**

### **5.7.1 The Occupational Therapist's view**

This is known as visual discrimination and any five-year old learner should easily be able to discriminate between different objects if the concept has been explained to them. Obviously they will first need to understand the concept of **smallest** and **largest** as opposed to just **small** and **large**.

### **5.7.2 Result**

If the concept has been made clear and if the learner is developmentally on par with the other learners, they should have reasonably little difficulty coming to terms with these concepts. The more practice they are required to do, the more familiar they will become with differentiating between different objects.

## **5.8 "Can the learner identify simple shapes and colours?"**

### **School A –**

Michael could easily identify a circle, square, star, heart and the colours red, yellow, blue and pink. 2/2

Janko identified a circle, rectangle and star but confused a square with a triangle. He instantly identified red, yellow, blue and green. 1/2

Ruaan could easily identify a circle, square, rectangle, star and colours red, yellow, green and purple. 2/2

Nina could easily identify a circle, rectangle, heart, star and colours yellow, red and blue. 2/2

Jeannie could easily identify a circle, square, triangle, heart and colours red, yellow, green and pink. 2/2

### **SCHOOL TOTAL: 9/10**

#### **School B –**

Jasmine could easily identify a circle, square, rectangle, star and colours red, yellow, blue and green. 2/2

Michelle could easily identify a circle, square, rectangle, diamond and colours red, yellow, blue and purple. 2/2

Saina easily identified a circle and triangle but confused a rectangle with a square. She easily identified colours red, yellow, blue and pink. 1/2

Nicola easily identified a circle, triangle, square, star and colours red, yellow, blue and pink. 2/2

Illiana easily identified a circle and star but confused a triangle with a square. She easily identified red, yellow, blue and green and even added that she thought they were actually 'light' blue and 'light' green 1/2

### **SCHOOL TOTAL: 8/10**

#### **School C –**

Teboho easily identified a square, circle, triangle, heart and colours red, yellow, blue and green. 2/2

Oageug easily identified a circle, square, triangle, star and colours red, yellow, blue and green. 2/2

Ratsoai easily identified a square, triangle, circle, heart and colours red, green and blue but was unsure of yellow. 1/2

Renkantse easily identified a triangle, square, circle, star and went on to name a diamond and rectangle too. She identified colours red, yellow, blue and pink. 2/2

Kgalalelo easily identified a circle, square, heart, and triangle and also went on to name a diamond and star too. She identified colours red, yellow, blue and green. 2/2

### **SCHOOL TOTAL: 9/10**

#### **School D –**

Nicolas easily identified a square, circle, heart, triangle and colours red, yellow, blue and pink. 2/2

Jaden easily identified a circle, triangle, square, rectangle and colours red, yellow, blue and green. 2/2

Michelle easily identified a circle, square, triangle, star and colours red, yellow, blue and purple. 2/2

Juanize easily identified a triangle, circle, heart but was unsure of the name of a square. She identified colours red, yellow, blue and pink. 1/2

John B had to be prompted but then managed to identify a circle, square, triangle, star and colours red, yellow, blue and green. 2/2

### **SCHOOL TOTAL: 9/10**

#### **School E –**

Boysie easily identified a circle and triangle but confused a rectangle with a square. He could identify colours red, yellow, blue and green. 1/2

Kelebogile easily identified a circle, square, triangle, star and colours red, yellow, blue and purple. 2/2

Kamo could easily identify a square, circle and triangle but was unsure of the rectangle. She identified colours red, yellow, blue and pink. 1/2

Cherise identified a circle but then confused a triangle and square with an oval and a rectangle. She identified colours red, yellow, blue and pink. 1/2

Michelle easily identified a circle, triangle, square, rectangle and colours red, yellow, blue and green. 2/2

**SCHOOL TOTAL: 7/10**

### **5.8.1 The Occupational Therapist's view**

According to the occupational therapist's developmental guide, all learners at the age of five years should be able to name the following shapes: circle, square, triangle, star, moon, oval, diamond, cross and rectangle and recognize at least 5 to 6 colours. Recognising colours is a learnt behaviour and is generally taught using three phases:

- start by matching up the same colours;
- then ask 'which one is the red one?';
- finally match and name the same colour;

### **5.8.2 Result**

Learning shapes and colours is a learnt behaviour and learners should be able to catch up quickly once they are constantly exposed to the shapes and colour names in a classroom situation. However, since most of the other learners will already be knowledgeable about quite an array of shapes and colours, any learner not aware of these names might at first find the continual references to shapes and colours very confusing.

## 5.9 “Can the learner recognise numbers 1 to 10 and rote count to 30?”

### School A –

Michael could easily recognise the letters 1-10 but needed a little bit of prompting to count to 30.	1/2
Janko could easily recognise letters 1-10 and count to 30.	2/2
Ruaan could easily recognise letters 1-10 and count to 30.	2/2
Nina could easily recognise letters 1-10 and count to 30.	2/2
Jeannie could easily recognise letters 1-10 but got a bit confused when counting from 21-30.	1/2

**SCHOOL TOTAL: 8/10**

### School B –

Jasmine could easily recognise letters 1-10 but counted incorrectly from 21-30.	1/2
Michelle could easily recognise letters 1-10 but was confused when counting from 21-30.	1/2
Saina could easily recognise letters 1-10 but said that she was unable to count beyond the number 10.	1/2
Nicola could easily recognise letters 1-10 but got a bit distracted when counting from 20 upwards.	1/2
Illiana could easily recognise letters 1-10 and count to 30. She said that she was able to count to 100.	2/2

**SCHOOL TOTAL: 6/10**

### School C –

Teboho could easily recognise letters 1-10 and count to 30.	2/2
Oageug could easily recognise letters 1-10 but had a bit of trouble counting from 15 upwards.	1/2

Ratsoai recognised letters 1-9 but said that 10 was 2. She was unsure of how to count from 15 upwards. 0/2

Renkantse could easily recognise letters 1-10 but could only count from 1-29, unsure of the name for 30. 1/2

Kgalalelo could easily recognise letters 1-10 and count to 30. 2/2

**SCHOOL TOTAL: 6/10**

**School D –**

Nicolas could easily recognise letters 1-10 but was unsure of how to count from 15 upwards. 1/2

Jaden could easily recognise letters 1-10 but was a bit confused counting from 21-30. 1/2

Michelle could easily recognise letters 1-10 and count to 30. 2/2

Juanize was confused even before she got to 10. Her counting from 7-13 was completely wrong. 0/2

John B could easily recognise letters 1-10 and count to 30. 2/2

**SCHOOL TOTAL: 6/10**

**School E –**

Boysie could easily recognise letters 1-10 but when counting to 30, skipped out 28. 1/2

Kelebogile could easily recognise letters 1-10 but when counting to 29, didn't know what came next. 1/2

Kamo could easily recognise letters 1-10 but was a bit confused about what came after 20. 1/2

Cherise could easily recognise letters 1-10 but when counting to 30, instead of saying 30 she said 20. 1/2

Michelle could easily recognise letters 1-10 but could only manage to count up to 28. 1/2

**SCHOOL TOTAL: 5/10**

### 5.9.1 The Occupational Therapist's view

According to the occupational therapist, five-year-old learners should be able to do the following counting exercises:

- rote count to 30;
- count objects from 0 – more than 10;
- play around with the number 5 e.g. here are 5 apples, I take 3, how many are left?

### 5.9.2 Result

Learning numbers and counting are activities that take a considerable amount of time to learn and teach. Presumably the Grade R teacher might assume that all the learners are basically on the same level and, if this is not the case, the teacher will have to spend a considerable amount of time teaching the basic concepts of numbers and counting that all the other learners are already very familiar with. Considering the large classes and time constraints put on most Grade R teachers nowadays, the amount of time that can be spent teaching individual learners basic concepts is probably very limited.

### 5.10 “Can the learner copy and extend simple patterns using writing implements?”

#### School A –

Michael easily extended the pattern given but struggled to copy the exact pattern on his own.	1/2
Janko easily extended the pattern given and was able to easily copy the pattern on his own.	2/2
Ruaan easily extended the pattern given and was able to easily copy the pattern on his own.	2/2

Nina easily extended the pattern given and did an excellent job of copying the pattern by herself. 2/2

Jeannie easily extended the pattern given and was able to copy the pattern easily by herself, although she did not use a fluid movement. 2/2

**SCHOOL TOTAL: 9/10**

**School B –**

Jasmine was easily able to extend the pattern given but did not copy the pattern exactly, but rather started making her own pattern. 1/2

Michelle extended the pattern easily enough although she didn't use a fluid movement. She copied the pattern perfectly by herself but again did not use a fluid movement. 2/2

Saina extended the pattern perfectly by herself using a fluid movement but struggled a little to copy the pattern exactly. 1/2

Nicola easily extended the pattern using a fluid movement but struggled to copy the exact pattern on her own. 1/2

Illiana was easily able to extend the pattern given and after requesting an explanation on how to copy the pattern, had no trouble copying the pattern perfectly. 2/2

**SCHOOL TOTAL: 7/10**

**School C –**

Teboho was easily able to extend the pattern on his own but struggled to copy the exact pattern. 1/2

Oageug was easily able to extend the pattern given and copy the pattern on his own. 2/2

Ratsoai struggled to extend the pattern on her own and could not copy the pattern given on her own either. 0/2

Renkantse was easily able to extend the pattern given, in fact she said that it was 'easy peasy' and although she didn't use a fluid movement, copied the pattern on her own perfectly. 2/2

Kgalalelo slowly extended the pattern, moving the page around instead of using a fluid movement but copied the pattern well on her own. 2/2

**SCHOOL TOTAL: 7/10**

**School D –**

Nicolas was easily able to extend and copy the pattern perfectly on his own. 2/2

Jaden was easily able to extend the pattern although he didn't use a fluid movement and was not as sure of the strokes as all the others. He had difficulty copying the pattern on his own though. 1/2

Michelle was easily able to extend the pattern given but could not copy the exact pattern on her own. 1/2

Juanize was easily able to extend the pattern but could not copy the exact pattern on her own. 1/2

John B carefully extended the pattern given but could not copy the exact pattern on his own. 1/2

**SCHOOL TOTAL: 6/10**

**School E –**

Boysie was easily able to extend the pattern given but had a little difficulty copying the exact pattern on his own. 1/2

Kelebogile was easily able to extend and copy the pattern given on her own. 2/2

Kamo was easily able to extend the pattern given and perfectly copied the pattern on her own. 2/2

Cherise was easily able to extend the pattern, although not using a fluid movement. She copied the pattern very carefully but struggled to copy it exactly the same as the pattern given. 1/2

Michelle was easily able to extend and copy the pattern given. 2/2

**SCHOOL TOTAL: 8/10**

### **5.10.1 The Occupational Therapist's view**

This activity consists of two vital components: a cognitive component and a motor component. The motor component is a vital factor to this activity and consists of learners being aware of the following: hand-function (dynamic 3-point pincers grip), right/left hand dominance, movement of hand and/or shoulder only (not entire body) and differentiation between movements. Therefore, if a learner's motor skills are on par with other learners his/her age, he/she should have no problem learning to extend and copy patterns in a short space of time. However, if a learner is still unable to do so even after being taught or coached by the teacher, then a more serious underlying problem is present. The cognitive component again consists of being able to sequence, knowing that a certain pattern is repeated over and over again, and in the exact same order.

### **5.10.2 Result**

If the teacher does not notice any underlying problem with a learner's motor skills the learner should not have any trouble copying or extending simple patterns. However, most children entering Grade R already have had several years of experience with writing implements and should already have developed their dynamic three-point pincers grip and be able to write using only their hand or arm and not their whole body. Such behaviour takes practice and cannot be learnt in one or two weeks. Therefore any learner who has absolutely zero experience writing with a pencil or crayon, might find the work required of them to be very arduous and stressful.

## CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS

### 6.1 Variables influencing the study

Before considering the results, it is worth noting that several variables might have impacted on how the learners answered the questions. These factors may have included one or more of the following:

- **Gender** – it is widely believed that girls outperform boys between the ages of 2 and 7 and as the participants from School B consisted of only girls, this could a possible reason why they might have scored marginally higher in some of the questions. Overall, the breakdown of female versus male learners who partook in the study were as follows:

School A – girls **2**

boys **3**

School B – girls **5**

boys **0**

School C – girls **2**

boys **3**

School D – girls **2**

boys **3**

School E – girls **4**

boys **1**

- **Aptitude** – it was specifically requested that learners be randomly chosen to ensure that the study consisted of learners from a mixed aptitude range.
- **SES (socio-economic status)** – learners who come from disadvantaged backgrounds often do not have access to educational toys, stimulating activities and spend less time with parents. These factors can all impact on their emergent literacy skills at this age. In addition, food might be scarce at home and stressful living conditions might influence how a child functions at school.

- **Home language** – Schools C and E consist of learners whose home language is not English and at the age of 5 it is unrealistic to think that all the learners are already completely proficient in English. There might still be a myriad of concepts that they struggle to grasp in English.
- **Home intervention** – Home intervention in the form of storybook reading and other literate activities give children a distinct advantage in terms of acquiring literate behaviour. Some parents do not have to work and can therefore spend copious time simply reading or doing other activities with their children after school.

## 6.2 Results

The graphs below reflect how schools performed in each individual area:

### **Question 1 - Can the learner listen with attention and enjoyment to a story?**

*Figure 1.1*



Figure 1.1 reflects that the majority of the learners were able to listen to a story with attention and enjoyment. Schools B, C and D show similar results. School E is slightly below the average.

**Question 2 - Can the learner properly interact with printed matter in terms of turning the pages of a book and reading from left to right with return sweeps?**

*Figure 1.2*



Figure 1.2 reflects that the majority of the learners were familiar with print and printed material.

**Question 3 - Can the learner recognise letters of the alphabet?**

As Question 3 was not considered to be a skill required of learners about to enter Grade R, no formal points were given for learners who could in fact recognise letters of the alphabet.

**Question 4 - Can the learner recite simple nursery rhymes?***Figure 1.3*

Figure 1.3 reflects that Schools A and D performed much poorer than the rest.

**Question 5 - Can the learner follow a logical sequence using pictures?***Figure 1.4*

Figure 1.4 reflects that School C and D fared very badly in this area.

**Question 6 - Can the learner use simple reasoning to identify “parts of a whole”?***Figure 1.5*

Figure 1.5 reflects that all the schools except School A generally scored much lower in this area.

**Question 7 - Can the learner use simple reasoning to differentiate between the largest/smallest or the odd one out?***Figure 1.6*

Figure 1.6 reflects that School C fared poorer than the rest in this area.

**Question 8 - Can the learner identify simple shapes and colours?***Figure 1.7*

Figure 1.7 reflects that all the schools were very strong in this particular area.

**Question 9 - Can the learner recognise numbers 1 – 10 and rote count to 30?***Figure 1.8*

Figure 1.8 reflects that all the schools fared well in this area.

**Question 10 - Can the learner copy and extend simple patterns using writing implements?**

*Figure 1.9*



Figure 1.9 reflects that all the schools fared well in this area.

The objective of the study was to prove: **1) whether any discrepancies existed amongst the five schools involved in the study and 2) whether there was in fact a solid foundation of emergency skills already in place.**

*Figure 1.10*



Figure 1.10 reflects how each school performed overall in all nine questions asked

Table 6.2.1

Questions	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E
1	very well	very well	very well	very well	very well
2	well	well	poor	very poor	well
3	X	X	X	X	X
4	very poor	well	average	very poor	very well
5	very well	average	very poor	very poor	well
6	very well	poor	very poor	very poor	very poor
7	very well	very well	very poor	very well	average
8	very well	very well	very well	very well	well
9	very well	average	average	average	poor
10	very well	well	well	average	very well

1 - 4	<i>very poor</i>	5	<i>poor</i>
6	<i>average</i>	7	<i>well</i>
8 - 10	<i>very well</i>		

Table 6.2.1 reflects the mark allocated to schools for each question asked.

**Question 1** - It is clear that discrepancies indeed exist amongst the five schools. Unfortunately, whether this was as a result of external variables already in place or emergent literacy skills attained at the school is most difficult to discern. A definite impacting factor was the fact that there was no uniform syllabus in place. All five schools interviewed use a different syllabus made up according to what they perceived as essential knowledge for learners going to Grade R. While School A remained strong in most areas, School B, C, D and E fared well in some but quite poorly in others.

**Question 2** - Upon reviewing the findings, it seems that there is definitely a solid foundation of emergent literacy skills already in place. Some schools displayed a weakness in certain areas but overall, except for School D, all the schools were above the 50 percentile (45/90). Findings also revealed the following:

- School B, which consists of all girls, was outperformed by School A, which consisted of more boys than girls.
- School C and E outperformed School D (an Afrikaans school) even though English was not the home language for all the learners in School C (Sesotho) and for 3 of the 5 learners in School E (Sesotho and Afrikaans).
- School E reflected the lowest SES of all the schools and fared the worst.
- School A reflected the highest SES of all the schools and fared the best.

### **6.3 Recommendations for future research**

Education or the lack thereof remains a difficult, contentious issue in South Africa today. Millions of children still have no access to education in the years prior to Grade R and this places them at a disadvantage when entering formal schooling. The results of the above study clearly indicate that if children have access to preschool during years 2 to 5, they will enter Grade R with a solid foundation of emergent literacy skills already in place. Certain variables like gender, aptitude, SES, home language and home-intervention might mean that they display weaknesses or strengths in certain areas but it is important to point out that overall, these fortunate children already have taken massive strides in acquiring skills that they will definitely need to possess when they enter formal schooling. Failure to possess most of the above-mentioned emergent literacy skills will simply mean that such children will be behind in Grade R.

A possible solution to address this problem would be to make sure that every preschool child in South Africa receives adequate preschool education and that every parent in South Africa, literate or illiterate, becomes involved in teaching their children 'emergent literacy' skills. In order for this initiative to succeed, the government, parents, schools, communities and the private sector all need to become involved:

- **Government**

Accordingly to Padayachie *et al.* (1994: 2), official statistics in 1991 show that nineteen years ago there were an estimated 5.8 million preschool children in South Africa. However, only 9% of those children were included in an assortment of early childhood education programmes. Furthermore, only 35% of the 9% benefited from programmes provided by the government. The rest all attended private preschool or daycare facilities. Obviously most parents in the townships are unable to pay expensive private daycare rates and thus “those children who could benefit most from [preschools] have very limited access to early childhood education services” (Padayachie *et al.* 1994: 2).

It is clear that the government has two problems to contend with: 1) to find ways to make sure that all children have access to some kind of preschool education, and 2) to find ways to motivate parents to care more whether their child receives a decent education and stays in school for the full 12 years.

In a report detailing certain recommendations made to the government regarding early childhood development in 1994, one recommendation suggested that “[a]lternative ways of reaching those under 5 need to be explored” (Padayachie *et al.* 1994: 31). The report (Padayachie *et al.* 1994: 68/9) proposed the following options for early childhood development:

- Full-day education services
  - Educare centers that cater for 3 – 5 year olds
  - Home-based educare where children aged 0 – 5 are cared for by a home mother/childminder in their own home
- Part-day child-oriented services
- Family education programmes
  - Educational home-visiting
  - Parent and child groups

Fortunately the government is in the process of implementing plans to address the above-mentioned issue. In the next two years it is almost certain that the grade prior to Grade R, Grade 0 or Grade 00, will become compulsory for all learners in South Africa. This also means that there will be a solid, uniform syllabus in place, which in turn will mean that all learners about to enter Grade R will be on an equal footing. This new mandate from the government has been brought on by the realisation that in order to succeed, children really do need to be given the best start in life that they possibly can be given.

Dr Skweyiya, Minister of Social Development, points out that:

[i]n the human life cycle the early childhood phase from birth to nine years is considered the most important phase for every human being. Giving children the best start in life means ensuring them good health, proper nutrition and early learning...[e]arly childhood development services need to be holistic and should attend to the child's health, nutrition, development, psychosocial and other needs. Parents, communities, non-government organisations and government departments have a role to play to ensure an integrated service to children. Collaboration between sectors is therefore of utmost importance. Access to basic social services is the right of all children, parents and other primary caregivers. They should have access to as many resources as possible to provide in [sic] the needs of young children (Department of Social Development/Unicef booklet, 2007:1)

However, government needs to ensure that children who are now fortunate enough to attend preschool stay in school and do not drop-out after primary school education. It would be pointless to ensure that all children receive quality preschool education, only for them to drop-out after Grade 4 or 5. The government therefore needs to initiate an incentives-related scheme to ensure that parents keep their children in school for the full 12 years. For many impoverished parents living in the township, it is quite obviously economically beneficial to allow their children to seek work in order to support the family. Therefore, the government should issue some kind of financial incentive to parents when their child has completed the full 12 years of schooling. If parents know that they will, for argument's sake, receive R2 500 if their child completes school, they will be more likely to make sure that this child completes his/her schooling. However in

light of the growing number of child-headed families in South Africa, it is crucial to devise an incentives-related scheme aimed specifically at these households.

- **PARENTS**

When parents are informed that they need to make a contribution to their child's literacy and are given helpful suggestions to achieve this, there is actually no excuse not to become actively involved in providing children with the necessary literacy skills. The government, the community as well as the preschool should assist parents in helping their children.

The following are examples of affordable ways in which parents can enrich their children's environment and assist in developing the necessary literacy skills:

- joining the library
- reading aloud to their child every night
- making paper books to look through together
- collecting environmental print
- making up stories to 'read' to their children

Preschools in particular should give regular talks to parents to explain and demonstrate how they can assist their children at home. The importance of early intervention should be stressed repeatedly to ensure that parents reinforce literacy skills in the home on a daily basis.

Parents could be of further assistance to their children by actively encouraging them to stay in school to obtain an education. Parents and children should ideally come to the realization that the only way of transcending a life of poverty and suffering is through education. Therefore, parents need to be convinced of the value of education, even if they and the rest of their family are illiterate and have survived by doing menial jobs. Children

copy what their parents do, say and think. If a parent has a negative attitude towards schooling, the child will soon echo this very sentiment.

In his poignant autobiographical account of life in the township during apartheid, author Mark Mathabane (1986) recounts how he managed to escape a life of poverty by diligently going to school and procuring an education. He attributes his success at school in most part to his illiterate, domestic-servant mother who forced, encouraged and implored him to stay in school for the full 12 years, even though *he* viewed school as a complete waste of time. His mother even incurred the violent wrath of her husband by insisting that her children attend school because she had the foresight to realise that an education is the equivalent of a passport to knowledge and can change a child's life forever.

Mark Mathabane (1986: 179) relates the following sentiments about his mother:

I knew that deep in her heart, she was the proudest of all mothers because of my work at school. Of all the reasons that kept me plodding along the long and hard road of Bantu education, the most important was that my mother and Granny were so proud of me.

Dr Peter Thulo, lecturer in African Studies at the University of the Free State (personal interview: 3 October 2010), is also emphatic about his parents' contribution towards his education and attributes much of his success to the fact that although they did not possess much materially, his parents valued education above all else and continually pushed their children to succeed academically.

- **PRESCHOOL**

The same principle of teachers and parents actively participating in ensuring that children acquire literacy skills should apply at preschool. Many teachers are ignorant to the fact that they should be creating opportunities to aid children with their emergent literacy skills. However, the government is currently investing substantial sums of money in training teachers to ensure that they are adequately prepared to teach preschool children.

The newly trained teachers will be aware of all the developmental, social and emotional needs of preschool children and will not be able to register their Edu-care facility until they can attain proof that they have the relevant qualifications or experience.

These newly trained teachers should also make sure to incorporate various daily reading-aloud sessions in their school routine and be encouraged to create comfortable library corners in their classrooms. This can be achieved through donations from more privileged schools in the suburbs. Instead of throwing away broken crayons or torn books, these can be given to needy preschools.

As alluded to previously, too many preschools take on a largely custodial role in looking after children while parents are at work, but hopefully in the near future this will be remedied as parents and teachers are made aware of the fact that preschool is a vital component in any child's education and the time that children spend at daycare and preschool should therefore be put to the best possible use.

- **COMMUNITIES**

Several communities have already taken the initiative to improve literacy in their area. One such community is the community in Evaton, in the Vaal Triangle near Johannesburg (*You Magazine*, 8 July 2010: 96-97), who have established the Cling community library. The Cling library – short for Community Literacy and Numeracy Group – was established after the founding members Tholakele Mbewe, Sthembiso Nhlapo, Meshack Tladi, Xoli Mthethwa, Thembi Sefatsa, Gladys Posa, Edith Mthimkhulu, Emily Dlamini and Sello Mabona (who recently passed away) saw a huge need for improving literacy in their area. The library houses books of all kinds - from textbooks, to magazines, to poetry and is open on weekdays. In the mornings crèches are welcome to bring children in order for Cling workers to read stories to them.

Another initiative is to engage senior citizens (gogos) to read to children in the township. The EKUFUNDENI Project was started eleven years ago as a mobile library but the

Reading Gogos Component was only formed two years ago (*Women and Home Magazine*, October 2010: 50). At present there are 40 gogos who read to over one thousand children at the Daveyton Intermediate School and Chief Luthuli School. Reading takes place for an hour every Friday morning and recently more educational activities and arts and crafts were also introduced.

- **PRIVATE SECTOR**

Awareness should be raised in the private sector about the plight of impoverished children in the township whose parents and/or preschools cannot afford to buy any books and magazines. This awareness should ideally be of such a nature that ‘early literacy’ becomes the new buzz-word. Massive book drives can be organised annually where people are asked to donate any old books or magazines. Often old children’s books and magazines are just packed away, or, even worse, thrown away to make space. These discarded books and magazines could be of enormous benefit to many children in the townships. All too often, despite being aware the dire suffering of others, the public at large is hesitant to donate money. Therefore, donating old books and magazines is a wonderful way to make a difference without spending a cent. Most people are often simply unaware that dozens of children in the township never even see a book before they start school. Making the public aware of the tremendous benefit of exposing young children to some form of print in the home or at preschool should surely have the desired effect.

Churches could also be asked to plead with their congregations to donate any unwanted books by emphasizing the dilemma of children who cannot afford to buy any reading materials.



## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

### 7.1 Concluding remarks

South Africa has faced many difficult challenges in the last fifteen years and has seemingly emerged relatively unscathed. People are working together and black South Africans are at last being presented with opportunities which their grandparents only dreamed of. Nonetheless, for many people living in the townships, far too few improvements have materialised. These people still live in sub-standard housing, have minimal access to proper healthcare and education and earn a pittance, barely enough to feed one person a month, let alone a family of five or six. It is easy to understand why such people feel disillusioned with the new government as well as the general state of affairs in South Africa. The only way to escape a life of abject poverty is through education and even this basic right is denied most people.

The drop-out rate in secondary and even in primary schools is still alarmingly high. This is largely due to the fact that most children enter school in the township without the requisite literary knowledge. The result is that they quickly fall behind the other children, eventually lose interest in school and drop out to become *tsotsis* or to find some menial labour employment (Mathabane 1986, Barbarin and Richter 2001). Clearly, this perpetual cycle of poverty should be addressed urgently as the sad truth is that the young child stands poised on a precipice of possibility: either he/she will progress forward to reach unimaginable goals and overcome all obstacles and succeed in life or he/she will plunge to the depths of illiteracy, forever condemned to a life of hopelessness and poverty. This may sound dire and these two options presented may seem extreme, but to the illiterate person, the world is not kind. Too often, an illiterate person will be considered for menial jobs only, either as a labourer or a domestic servant, perpetuating the endless cycle of poverty.

The solution to this predicament is simple: education is the key to success and the only way for a person to broaden his/her horizon and move forward. Unfortunately, the fact

remains that too many children are denied this right, mostly due to circumstances ranging from a lack of funds to afford preschool or an utter lack of any emergent literacy skills which so handicap children that soon after they enter school, they fall behind, lose interest and eventually drop-out.

The study conducted has proven that most children about to embark on formal education already have a solid foundation of emergent literacy skills already in place. Some of these skills may be easy enough to acquire over a short period of time, but some may require extra time and patience from the learner and teacher alike. The sad reality is that many teachers face over-crowded classrooms, a serious lack of resources and a demanding syllabus, and are often not able to provide this extra tutelage to the many students who so desperately need it.

It is thus vital that parents, the government and especially preschools nurture emergent literacy skills necessary for formal education to produce children who are confident and competent in their knowledge of print. These skills can be nurtured in a variety of ways, including:

- stimulating the child from a very young age to stimulate brain growth
- reading aloud to the child as often as possible
- looking at pictures and discussing stories and books
- playing games and singing songs, rhymes and chants
- bringing environmental print into the home to stimulate the child
- speaking to the child as often as possible

Putting the above skills into practice requires minimal monetary input from the parents and simply rather requires parents to put aside quality time to spend engaging with their children. The modern trend is to merely put your child in front of the television in the hope that this alone is sufficient to entertain and educate him/her. However, exposure to television has not shown to have any immediate educational value. Van Huyssteen (*Mom and I*, August-September Issue 2010: 6) points out that:

[u]sing Positron Imaging Technology scans, researchers have found that television stimulates only the visual and listening areas of a baby's brain. Areas that are used for understanding language and communicating, learning, thinking, memorising, expressing personality and fine-tuning social behaviour remain inactive and unstimulated. In contrast to this, a child's brain lights up like a Christmas tree when a parent reads to him while pointing to pictures and interacting with the child.

Gardner (1997), Krashen (2004) and White (2005) all contend that reading aloud to children as well as 'shared' reading experiences between an adult and a child not only enhances their intelligence and familiarity with print, but also helps them to exhibit advanced language skills and substantial gains in vocabulary. Lonigan, Burgess and Anthony (2000: 596) concur that reading and general knowledge are substantially improved in children who are exposed to print from an early age, with the result that these children are at a definite advantage in all other educational domains.

Hechinger (1966: 4) holds the belief that the overall difference in IQ scores between a child who is brought up in a culturally abundant literate environment and a child who is environmentally deprived is likely to be as many as 20 IQ points. The real tragedy lies with children who are looked after by neighbours, grandparents or other family members where no interaction with the print environment occurs before these children enter Grade R. Education, and in particular early education, is not regarded as vital because these children need to grow up quickly to assume their share of household duties to ease the burden of the parents, single mother or grandmother. The key is therefore to find affordable and realistic ways in which to assist such disadvantaged children in developing the necessary literacy skills before they start school.

It should be stressed that it is the responsibility of the government, parents and the preschool to make sure that all children are familiar with print and are school-ready by the time they enter Grade R. School readiness (de Witt 2009: 183) requires skills such as: being aware of left and right, being familiar with print and acceptable behaviour surrounding print, telling a story and answering questions about a picture, being able to recognise their names, being able to recognise various sounds and words, being aware of

sequences and cause-and-effect, being able to explain what will happen next in a sequence, and being able to concentrate on detail and various other social, emotional and physical traits.

Although the government has made Grade R compulsory for every learner in South Africa and is planning to make the preceding grade/grades mandatory too, much more thought and effort have to be put into establishing effective earlier education for all children in South Africa. The discrepancy between children who attend well-equipped, expensive preschools in the suburbs and children in the townships, whose parents are often illiterate and cannot afford daycare, is too vast. Waiting until children go to school before reinforcing literate behaviour is almost always detrimental. Literate behaviour has to be established and nurtured from a very young age in order for it to translate into future academic accomplishment and success. Although tremendous efforts are currently being made in South Africa by creating required bridging courses and extended programmes to enroll more black learners at universities and other tertiary institutions, the through-put rates are hardly encouraging. It therefore seems that a more practical and economical way of leveling the playing fields is simply to ensure that all disadvantaged learners are equipped with the required emergent literacy skills upon entering Grade R. It is imperative that all learners in South Africa commence their schooling on an equal footing to ensure equal access to opportunities. It is easy to grasp why many disadvantaged children struggle to keep up with their privileged counterparts who start school with the advantage of being familiar with the alphabet, book conventions, basic story narratives, words, songs, rhymes, and so forth.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

ADAMS M.J.

1992. *Beginning to read*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.

ALEXANDER N.

2000. *English Unassailable but Unattainable*. PRAESA Occasional Paper No.3. Cape Town: PRAESA.

ARNOLD D.H. & DOCTOROFF G.L.

2003. The Early Education of Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Children. *Annual review of Psychology* 54:517-45

AUERBACH A.B. & ROCHE S.

1971. *Creating a Preschool Center: Parent Development in an Integrated Neighborhood Project*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

BAKER C

2001. *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. UK: Biddles Ltd.

BARBARIN O. A. & RICHTER L.M.

2001. *Mandela's Children*. New York: Routledge.

BENNETT K., BROWN S., BOYLE M., RACINE Y. & OFFORD D.

2003: Does low reading achievement at school entry cause conduct problems? *Social Science & Medicine* 56: 2443-2448.

BLOCH C.

2001. Literacy in the Early Years: Teaching and Learning in Multilingual Early Childhood Classrooms. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy* 1(1).

BLOCH C.

2002. A case study of Xhosa and English biliteracy in the foundation phase *versus* English as a 'medium of destruction'. *Perspectives in Education* 20(1).

BRIERLEY J.

1987. *Give Me a Child until He is Seven: Brain Studies & Early Childhood Education*. England, East Sussex: The Falmer Press.

BURKETT B., CLEGG J., LANDON J., REILLY T. & VERSTER C.

2001. The Language for Teaching project: Developing language sensitive-teaching in South African secondary school. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* 19: 149-161.

CHRISTIE J., ENZ, B. & VUKELICH C.

2003. *Teaching Language and Literacy*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

CONRAD N.K.

2008. *Enduring Bonds*. Jalongo M.R. (ed). Johnston: University of Pittsburgh Press.

DALVIT L. & DE KLERK V.

2005. Attitudes of Xhosa-speaking students at the University of Fort Hare towards the use of Xhosa as a language of learning and teaching (LOLT). *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* 23 (1): 1-18.

DE KLERK V.

2002a. Language issues in our schools: Whose voice counts? Part 1: The parents speak. *Perspectives in Education* 20 (1).

DE KLERK V.

2002b Part 2: The teachers speak. *Perspectives in Education* 20 (1).

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT/UNICEF BOOKLET.

2007. Pretoria: South Africa.

DE WET C.

2002. Factors influencing the choice of English as language of learning and teaching (LoLT) – a South African perspective. *South African Journal of Education* 22 (2): 119-124.

DE WITT M.W.

2009. *The Young Child in Context: A Thematic Approach*. Hatfield, Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

DRENNAN L.

2010. Personal interviews with Mrs van Jaarsveld, Miss Phake, Mrs Bann and Dr Thulo.

ESSA E.L.

2007. *Introduction to Early Childhood Development*. USA: Delmar.

GAMBLE N. & YATES S.

2002. *Exploring Children's Literature: Teaching the Language and Reading of Fiction*. London: Sage Publications Company.

GARDNER H.

1991. *The Unschooled Mind: How Children Think and How Schools Should Teach*. USA: BasicBooks.

GESTWICKI C.

1997. *The Essentials of Early Education*. Albany, NY: Delmar.

GOODWIN P.

1999. *The Literate Classroom*. London: David Fulton Publishers.

GROSJEAN F.

1985. The bilingual as a competent but specific speaker-hearer. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 6(6): 467-477.

GROSJEAN F.

1992. Another view of bilingualism. *Cognitive Processing in Bilinguals* 83.

HART M.

2008. The *Reading to Learn* Programme – A Preliminary Motivation for its Implementation In South African Schools.

HARTGILL M.

2010. *School Readiness*. Internet: <http://www.kidzworld.co.za/parentingarticles/school-readiness.htm>. Access: 7 July 2010.

HECHINGER F.M.

1966. *Pre-school Education Today*. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc.

HOLT N.

2007. *Bringing the High/Scope Approach to Your Early Years Practice*. London: Routledge.

HEUGH K.

2002. The case against bilingual and multilingual education in South Africa: Laying bare the myths. *Perspectives in Education* 20(1).

IISKOGLU N. & IVRENDI A.

2007. Mobile Crèches: A Way of Reaching Children of Poverty. *Educational Research* 49(3):225-242.

JENSEN E.

1995. *Brain-Based Learning*. San Diego, USA: The Brain Store Publishing.

JOUBERT I., BESTER M. & MEYER E.

2008. *Literacy in the Foundation Phase*. Pretoria: van Schaik Publishers.

KAMWANGAMULA N.M.

2004. The language policy/language economics interface and mother-tongue education in post-apartheid South Africa. *Language Problems & Language Planning* 28 (2): 131-146.

KRASHEN S.D.

2004. *The Power of Reading*. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited.

LONIGAN C.J., BURGESS S.R. & ANTHONY J.L.

2000. Development of Emergent Literacy and Early Reading Skills in Preschool Children: Evidence From a Latent-Variable Longitudinal Study. *Developmental Psychology* 36(5): 596-613.

MCLANE J.B. & MCNAMEE G.D.

1990. *Early Literacy*. Bruner J. & Cole M. (eds). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

MATHABANE M.

1986. *Kaffir Boy*. New York: Plume.

MINNS H.

1997. *Read it to me now!* Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.

MOHLAHLE S.J.

1993. *The Performance of a group of Mangaung children in the Gesell preschool test.*  
Unpublished MA thesis.

MOFFETT J.

1994. Forward. In D.F. Lancy, *Children's emergent literacy.* Westport, CT: Praeger.

MOM & I MAGAZINE.

2010 (August/September).

MORROW L.M.

1982. *Relationships between Literature Programs, Library Corner Designs, and Children's Use of Literature.* *Journal of Educational Research* 75(6).

2007. *Developing Literacy in Preschool.* New York, NY: Guilford Publications, Inc.

NELSON M. R. & NELSON-PARISH J.

2002. *Peak with Books: An Early Childhood Resource for Balanced Literacy.* Albany, NY: Delmar.

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF CHILD HEALTH AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT  
EARLY CHIDCARE RESEARCH NETWORK.

2005. Duration and Developmental Timing of Poverty and Children's Cognitive and Social Development from Birth through Third Grade. *Child Development* 76(4): 795-810.

NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL.

1998. *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children.* Washington, D.C.: National Academic Press.

NTULI D. & PRETORIUS J.

2005. Laying Foundations for Academic Language Competence: The Effects of Storybook Reading on Zulu Language, Literacy and Discourse Development. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* 23(1): 91-109.

OBANYA P.

2004. *Learning In, With and From the First Language*. PRAESA Occasional Papers No.19.

PADAYACHIE R., ATMORE E., BIERSTEKER L., KING R., MATUBE J.,

MUTHAYAN S., NAIDOO K., PLAATJIES D. & EVANS J.L.

1994. *Report of the South African Study on Early Childhood Development*. Braamfontein, RSA: Center for Education Policy Development.

PAPALIA D.E. & OLDS S.W.

1975. *A Child's World*. USA: McGraw-Hill, Inc.

PLÜDDEMANN P.

2002. Action and reflection: Dual-medium primary schooling as language policy realisation. *Perspectives in Education* 20 (1).

PROBYN M.

2005. Learning science through the medium of English: what do Grade 8 learners say? *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Studies* 23 (4): 369-392.

PRINSLOO D.

2007. The right to mother tongue education: a multidisciplinary, normative perspective. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* 25 (1): 27-43.

RIDGE S.G.M.

2004. Language planning in a rapidly changing multilingual society. *Language Problems & Language Planning* 28 (2): 199-215.

RODSETH V.

2002. Developing main language instruction: Developments in *The Molteno Project – Literacy, language and education development*. *Perspectives in Education* 20.

SINGH S.K.

2001. *Multilingualism*. New Delhi: Bahri Publications.

SNOW C.E., BARNES W.S., CHANDLER J., GOODMAN I.F. & HEMPHILL L.

1991. *Unfulfilled Expectations: Home and School Influences on Literacy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT/UNICEF INFORMATION BOOKLET.

2007. *Guidelines for early childhood development services*. Pretoria.

STANOVICH K.

1986. Matthews effects in reading: Some consequences of individual differences in the acquisition of literacy. *Reading Research Quarterly* XXI/4.

SYLVA K., SCOTT S., TOTSIKA V., EREKY-STEVENSON K. & CROOK C.

2008. Training parents to help their children read: A randomized control trial. *British Journal of Educational Psychology* 78: 435-455.

THE CHILDREN'S ACT, 2005 (ACT NO. 38 OF 2005)

TRELEASE J.

1982. *The Read-aloud Handbook*. New York: Penguin Books.

VAN ZYL E., LE ROUX S. & VAN RENSBURG O.

2010. *The Impact of School Readiness on School Performance*. Internet:

[http://www.pmg.org.za/files/docs/100518ufstate\\_0.rtf](http://www.pmg.org.za/files/docs/100518ufstate_0.rtf). Access: 1 October 2010.

WEBB V.

2004. African languages as media of instruction in South Africa. *Language Planning & Language Problems* 28 (2): 147-173.

WEINBERGER J.

1996. *Literacy goes to School*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd.

WELLS G.

1987. *The Meaning Makers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

WILSON R.A.

2010. *Emergent Literacy*. Internet:

[http://www.earlychildhoodnews.com/earlychildhood/article\\_view.asp](http://www.earlychildhoodnews.com/earlychildhood/article_view.asp). Access: 7 July 2010.

WHITE H.

2005. *Developing Literacy Skills in the Early Years: A Practical Guide*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

WOMAN & HOME.

2010 (October).

WORKING GROUP ON VALUES IN EDUCATION.

2000. *Values, Education and Democracy*. Internet:

<http://www.info.gov.za/otherdoc/2000/education.htm>. Access: 11 November 2010.

YOU MAGAZINE.

2010. (8 July).

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A – Questions to determine school-readiness

SCHOOL: \_\_\_\_\_

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

AGE: \_\_\_\_\_ HOME LANGUAGE \_\_\_\_\_

#### **QUESTION 1**

CAN THE LEARNER LISTEN WITH ATTENTION AND ENJOYMENT TO A STORY?

**OBSERVATION:**

---



---



---

**COMMENT:**

---



---

#### **QUESTION 2**

CAN THE LEARNER INTERACT WITH PRINTED MATTER IN TERMS OF HANDLING THE BOOK CORRECTLY, TURNING THE PAGES AND UNDERSTANDING THAT READING TAKES PLACE FROM LEFT TO RIGHT WITH RETURN SWEEPS?

**OBSERVATION:**

---



---



---

**COMMENT:**

---



---

#### **QUESTION 3**

CAN THE LEARNER RECOGNISE LETTERS OF THE ALPHABET?

**OBSERVATION:**

---



---



---

**COMMENT:**

---

---

**QUESTION 4**

CAN THE LEARNER RECITE SIMPLE NURSERY RHYMES?

**OBSERVATION:**

---

---

---

**COMMENT:**

---

---

**QUESTION 5**

CAN THE LEARNER FOLLOW A LOGICAL SEQUENCE USING PICTURES?

**OBSERVATION:**

---

---

---

**COMMENT:**

---

---

**QUESTION 6**

CAN THE LEARNER USE SIMPLE REASONING TO IDENTIFY "PARTS OF A WHOLE"?

**OBSERVATION:**

---

---

---

**COMMENT:**

---

---

**QUESTION 7**

CAN THE LEARNER USE SIMPLE REASONING TO DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN LARGEST/SMALLEST OR ODD ONE OUT?

**OBSERVATION:**

---

---

**COMMENT:**

---

---

**QUESTION 8**

CAN THE LEARNER USE IDENTIFY SIMPLE SHAPES AND COLOURS?

**OBSERVATION:**

---

---

**COMMENT:**

---

---

**QUESTION 9**

CAN THE LEARNER RECOGNISE NUMBERS FROM 1 – 10 AND ROTE COUNT TO 30?

**OBSERVATION:**

---

---

**COMMENT:**

---

---

**QUESTION 10**

CAN THE LEARNER COPY AND EXTEND SIMPLE PATTERNS USING WRITING IMPLEMENTS?

**OBSERVATION:**

---

**COMMENT:**

---

---

## **APPENDIX B – Quality Assurance Assessment Report**

<b>QUALITY ASSURANCE REPORT</b>	
Name of Department of Social Development official:	_____
Date of visit:	_____
<b>CENTRE DETAILS</b>	
Name of ECD Centre:	_____
Date opened:	_____
Postal Address:	_____
	_____
Physical Address:	_____
	_____
Telephone number (if available):	_____
Hours of opening:	_____
<b>STAFF</b>	
Supervisor:	_____
ECD Qualifications:	_____
Other relevant qualifications:	_____
Number of other practitioners:	_____
ECD Qualifications of practitioners:	_____
Other relevant qualifications:	_____
	_____
Number of other staff:	_____
Kitchen workers:	_____
Gardeners:	_____
Caretakers/security:	_____
Cleaners:	_____
Other (specify):	_____
	_____
	_____

**CHILDREN**

Number of children registered: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of children present on day of review: \_\_\_\_\_

Age	Girls	Boys	Total
0 - 2 years			
2 - 3 years			
3 - 5 years			
TOTAL			

**MANAGEMENT**

Admission / Registration forms available: Yes/No

Are the Admission / Registration forms up to date? Yes/No

Are there job descriptions for all staff? Yes / No

Is there a Staff Development Plan? Yes/No

Menus Yes/No

Admission policy Yes/No

Admission policy of HIV/AIDS infected and affected children Yes/No

Admission policy of children with disabilities Yes/No

Other policies: Specify \_\_\_\_\_

Outings procedure: \_\_\_\_\_

Complaints procedure: \_\_\_\_\_

Emergency plan: \_\_\_\_\_

First Aid kit: \_\_\_\_\_

Attendance Register: \_\_\_\_\_

Accident register: \_\_\_\_\_

Abuse register: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### PREMISES AND EQUIPMENT

**Toilet facilities:**

Not acceptable \_\_\_\_\_

Acceptable with a few adaptations acceptable: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of toilets/potties: \_\_\_\_\_

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**Hand washing facilities:**

Not acceptable: \_\_\_\_\_

Acceptable with a few adaptations acceptable: \_\_\_\_\_

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**Kitchen facilities**

Not acceptable: \_\_\_\_\_

Acceptable with a few adaptations acceptable: \_\_\_\_\_

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**Outside area:**

Not acceptable: \_\_\_\_\_

Acceptable with a few adaptations acceptable: \_\_\_\_\_

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**Outside play equipment**

Not acceptable: \_\_\_\_\_

Acceptable with a few adaptations acceptable: \_\_\_\_\_

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**Fencing**

Not acceptable: \_\_\_\_\_

Acceptable with a few adaptations acceptable: \_\_\_\_\_

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**Other e.g. swimming pool**

Not acceptable: \_\_\_\_\_

Acceptable with a few adaptations acceptable: \_\_\_\_\_

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**Management of pets**

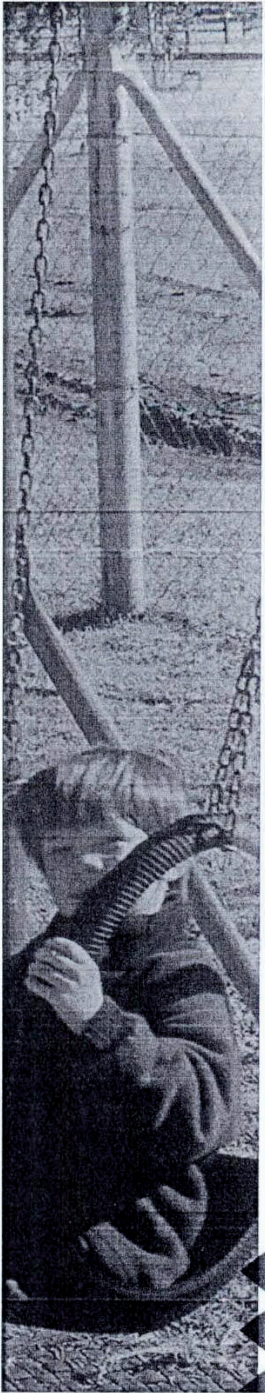
Not acceptable: \_\_\_\_\_

Acceptable with a few adaptations acceptable: \_\_\_\_\_

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

100

## APPENDIX C – Progress Report

	<p><b><u>1. GROSS MOTOR DEVELOPMENT</u></b></p> <p><b><u>OUTDOOR PLAY</u></b></p> <p>Enjoys / lively and active / passive / lethargic          Enjoys sandpit / swinging / climbing          Avoids climbing and heights / getting dirty          Dislikes movement / likes to play alone</p> <p><b><u>BASIC MOTOR MOVEMENTS</u></b></p> <p>Can do 2 somersaults          Can climb jungle gym          Can climb ladders          Can use swings / ropes effectively</p> <p><b><u>BALANCE</u></b></p> <p>Good / average / improving</p> <p><b><u>SPATIAL PERCEPTIONS</u></b></p> <p>Knows: on / under / behind / in between / far / close</p>	<p><b><u>BALL SKILLS</u></b></p> <p>Can catch / Can throw / Can kick</p>
	<p><b><u>2. FINE MOTOR DEVELOPMENT</u></b></p> <p><b><u>Handling of crayons / pencils</u></b></p> <p>Correct pencil grip          Colours in fairly well</p> <p><b><u>CUTTING</u></b></p> <p>Handling of scissors good / clumsy / improving</p> <p><b><u>DRESSING / UNDESSING</u></b></p> <p>Can cope with zips, buttons          Can put shoes on right way round</p>	<p><b><u>DOMINANCE</u></b></p> <p>Preferred hand definitely established          / switches hands / still unsure</p>
	<p><b><u>3. SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT</u></b></p> <p><b><u>Relationship to Adults</u></b></p> <p>Good / respectful / friendly / co-operative / disrespectful / shy          / demanding at times</p> <p><b><u>Relationship to Peers</u></b></p> <p>Good / friendly / sharing / quarrelsome / domineering</p>	
	<p><b><u>TIDYING UP</u></b></p> <p>Eager / quick / slow / needs reminding</p>	



#### **4. EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Happy / independent / friendly / cries easily / gets angry quickly / immature range of emotions / gives up quickly / aloof

#### **5. COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT**

##### **MAN-DRAWING**

Good / lots of detail / lacks detail / small / colourful / immature

##### **CREATIVE ABILITY**

Enjoys creative tasks  
Uses all mediums / follows instructions

#### **6. VISUAL PERCEPTION**

##### **VISUAL DISCRIMINATION**

Can recognise name  
Can play basic picture lotto

##### **VISUAL MOTOR INTEGRATION**

Can copy                   ○ □ ▭  
Beginning to reproduce △  
Can build a ..... piece puzzle

##### **VISUAL MEMORY**

Can retell a simple story  
Remembers 5 objects (June) telephone number (December)

#### **7. AUDITORY PERCEPTION**

##### **AUDITORY DISCRIMINATION**

Ability to listen in a group: good / average / poor / can distinguish different sounds

##### **AUDITORY MEMORY**

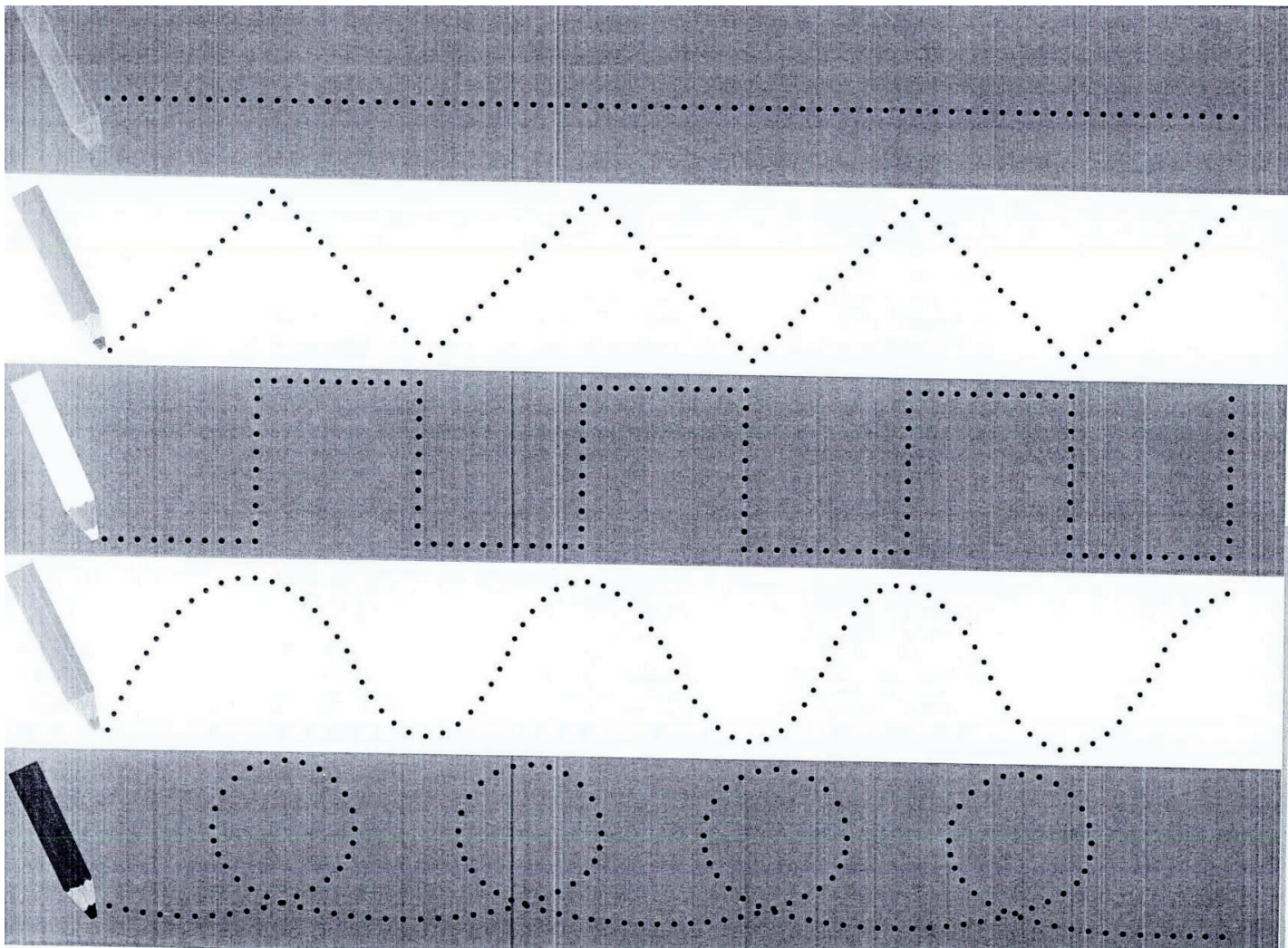
Can repeat 4 digits (June) 5 digits (December)  
Can perform 1 or 2 instructions  
Can clap a rhythmic pattern

#### **8. LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT**

##### **PRONUNCIATION**

Clear / correct / mumbles / uses language creatively / unable to pronounce certain words or sounds

**APPENDIX D – Example of patterns used in school-readiness study**



**APPENDIX E – English letter to schools to request permission to undertake study**

To whom it may concern,

I am currently doing my Master's degree at the University of the Free State on emergent literacy skills, focusing specifically on children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

In order to establish whether children who are not able to attend preschool or who do not have literate parents that can help them or provide any interaction with print before Grade R are in fact at a disadvantage when they enter Grade R, I need to test how much knowledge children who do attend preschools have.

I would therefore like to conduct a short study at your school. This study is not a test and children who are unsure of answers will not be made to feel inadequate in any way. I will merely observe if all children of this age group who attend preschool possess more or less the same amount of knowledge. I will only need about two hours of your time in which I will read a short story and ask ten very basic questions to individual learners.

Your cooperation is very much appreciated!

Kind regards,  
Lisa Drennan

## **APPENDIX F – Afrikaans letter to schools to request permission to undertake study**

Vir wie dit mag aangaan,

Ek doen tans my Meestersgraad aan die Universiteit van die Vrystaat oor ontluikende geletterdheidsvaardighede en fokus spesifiek op kinders uit agtergeblewe agtergronde.

Ten einde vas te stel of kinders wat nie pre-primêre skole kan bywoon nie of nie geletterde ouers het wat hulle kan help of enige interaksie met die gedrukte woord voor Graad R verskaf nie wel 'n agterstand het wanneer hulle vir Graad R inskryf, moet ek vasstel oor hoeveel kennis kinders wat wel pre-primêre skole bywoon beskik.

Gevolgtik wil ek graag 'n kort studie by u skool doen. Hierdie studie is nie 'n toets nie, en daarom sal kinders wat onseker oor die antwoorde is geensins laat voel word dat hulle nie goed genoeg is nie. Ek gaan slegs waarneem of al die kinders in hierdie ouderdomsgroep wat pre-primêre skole bywoon oor min of meer dieselfde hoeveelheid kennis beskik. Ek benodig slegs ongeveer twee ure van u tyd, waartydens ek 'n kortverhaal gaan voorlees en dan tien baie basiese vrae aan individuele leerders gaan stel.

U samewerking word hoog op prys gestel!

Beste Wense,  
Lisa Drennan

## **APPENDIX G – Sesotho letter to schools to request permission to undertake study**

Ho ya ka anngwang ke sena

Ke moithuti ya etsang lengolo la M.A. Yunivesithing ya Freistata ya ithutelang bokgoni ba ho qala ho tseba ho bala le ho ngola, ke tsepamisitse boithuto ba ka baneng ba tswang dibakeng tse neng di tinnngwe menyetla nakong ya pele.

Ke batla ho fumana hore na bana ba sa kang ba kgona ho ya sekolong sa dikonyana pele ba qala ka sekolo kapa ba se nang batswadi ba tsebang ho bala le ho ngola bao ba ka ba thusang kapa ba fana ka ho ba thusa ka setshwantsho sefe kapa sefe pele ho Kereite ya R ke bao ba leng bothateng ha ba qala Kereiti ya R. Ke batla ho fumana hore bana bana ba keneng sekolo pele ba qala sekolo ba na le tsebo e kae.

Ke kopa ho etsa boithuto bo bokgutshwanyane sekolong sa hao. Boithuto bona ha se teko, bana ba se nang bonnete ba dikarabo ha ba no etswa e ka ha ba tsebe ka tsela efe kapa efe. Ke tla hlahloba hore ha eba bana kaofela ba dilemo tsa sehlopha sena ba keneng sekolo pele ho sekolo sa mathomo ba na le tsebo e batlang e lekana. Ke tla hloka dihora tse pedi tsa nako ya hao moo ke tla bala pale e be ke botsa dipotso tse leshome tsa sethatho ho moithuti ka mong.

Ke lebohela tshebedisano le wena

Ke a leboha  
Lisa Drennan

**APPENDIX H – English consent letters to parents**

Dear Parents

I am currently doing a Master's degree at the University of the Free State and in order to complete my study, I am conducting research to determine the gap in terms of knowledge that exists between children who attend preschools and have literate parents that can help them and those who do not. It would be a great help to my study if you could please spare five minutes of your time and complete the attached questionnaire. Please answer the questionnaire truthfully as it is not a reflection on your parenting, school or child but merely a determination of how much time most working parents are able to spend with their children on literacy activities.

I really appreciate your help!

Kind regards

Lisa Drennan

## **APPENDIX I – Afrikaans consent letter to parents**

Geagte Ouers

Ek is tans doenig met 'n Meestersgraad aan die Universiteit van die Vrystaat en ten einde my studie te voltooi, doen ek navorsing om die kennisgaping te bepaal wat bestaan tussen kinders wat pre-primêre skole bywoon en geletterde ouers het wat hulle kan help aan die een kant, en dié wat nie die geleentheid het nie aan die ander kant. Dit sal van groot waarde vir my studie wees indien u asseblief vyf minute van u tyd kan afstaan om die aangehegte vraelys te voltooi. Beantwoord die vrae asseblief eerlik, aangesien dit geensins 'n refleksie is op u ouerskap, skool of kind nie, maar slegs 'n vasstelling van hoeveel tyd die meeste werkende ouers aan geletterdheidsaktiwiteite met hul kinders kan bestee.

Ek waardeer u hulp opreg!

Beste wense

Lisa Drennan

**APPENDIX J – Sesotho consent letter to parents**

Batswadi ba ratehang

Ke moithuti wa M.A. dikri Yunivesithing ya Freistata hore ke tle ke phethele boithuto ba ka, ke etsa diphuputso pakeng tsa batswadi ba nang le tsebo le ba se nang yona ho lekola sekgeo se teng pakeng tsa bana ba kenang sekolo sa mathomo le ba sa keneng sekolo pele ba eya sekolong. O tla be o nthusitse bakeng sa boithuto ba ka ha o ka ba le metsotso e mehlano ya nako ya hao ho tlatsa dipotso tsa dipatlisiso tse hokelletsweng. Ke kopa o arabe dipotso tsa dipatlisiso ka botshepehi hobane ha se seipone sa hao botswading ba hao, sekolo kapa ngwana empa e le ho lekola hore batswadi ba sebetsang ba qeta nako e kae le bana ba bona ho ba thusa mesebetsing ya ho bala le ho ngola.

Ke tla ba motlotlo ka thuso ya hao.

Ke a leboha.

Lisa Drennan

## **APPENDIX K – Questionnaire for parents**

### **QUESTIONNAIRE**

**Please complete the following questionnaire and return it to the school as soon as possible.**

**Please mark the appropriate box or boxes.**

1. On a daily/weekly basis, I read the following:

- Books/novels
- Newspapers
- Magazines
- None of the above
- I don't enjoy reading, I prefer to watch television or DVD's

2. Does your child seem to enjoy interacting with printed matter?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

3. On average, how much time do you spend per week reading to your child?

- More than 10 hours
- 5 – 9 hours
- 1 – 4 hours
- Less than an hour
- I don't read to my child

4. What type of reading materials do you read to your child?

- Storybooks
- Picture books
- Graded readers
- Magazines
- Newspapers
- Other \_\_\_\_\_
- I don't read to my child

5. The following best sums up my view of literacy:

- Literacy is something that my child will acquire at school.
- Literacy is something that I have to constantly reinforce at home.
- In order for my child to become truly literate, it will take a combination of school and home intervention.
- I will encourage my child to read to help them become more literate.
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation explores the benefits of nurturing early literacy which are increasingly being recognized. Many language practitioners (Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman and Hemphill, 1991; Gestwicki, 1997; Krashen, 2004; White, 2005; Morrow, 2007) emphasise that withholding instruction in reading and literate behaviour until school-going age results in children being unprepared for the rigours of school. Intervention should therefore commence as early as possible (Auerbach and Roche, 1971; Brierley, 1987; Essa, 2007; de Witt, 2009) to ensure school readiness and to pave the way for a successful transition into Grade R. At present, it is compulsory for South African learners to begin school in Grade R. This is a government endeavour to ensure that all learners have at least one compulsory year of kindergarten tuition. However, the years preceding Grade R are the most important in terms of acquiring emergent literacy skills (Hechinger, 1966; National Research Council, 1998; Barbarin and Richter 2001; Arnold and Doctoroff, 2003), and urgent attention should therefore also be paid to nurturing literacy during these crucial years. Clearly, children from less advantaged backgrounds who receive little or no stimulation involving printed matter start Grade R at a severe disadvantage as opposed to children who regularly attend pre-school and have literate parents who spend ample time reading to their children. This study highlights ways in which parents and caregivers can significantly alleviate this disadvantage simply by reading to children and by exposing them to a literate environment. Reading to children provides an immensely powerful tool for teaching crucial skills such as page-turning, reading from left to right with return sweeps, following words and understanding basic narrative structures (Bloch, 1996; Ntuli and Pretorius, 2005; Joubert et al, 2008).

## **KEY TERMS**

- **Emergent literacy**
- **School readiness**
- **Early stimulation**
- **Home intervention**
- **Preschool intervention**
- **Government intervention**
- **Nurturing reading**
- **Reading aloud**
- **Storybook reading**
- **Disadvantaged learners**



