AN EDUCATOR'S INTERVENTION TO INVOLVE PARENTS WITH ENGLISH LITERACY HOMEWORK OF PRIMARY SCHOOL LEARNERS

by

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DECLARATION

I, **CHRISTABEL BELINDA ROOI**, declare that the contents of this thesis represent my own unaided work, and that the thesis has not previously been submitted for academic examination towards any qualification. Furthermore, it represents my own opinions and not necessarily those of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to explore parental involvement within an English Literacy intervention programme focusing on a group of 38 Grade 4 primary school learners enrolled at a primary school in the Cape Peninsula area of the Western Cape, South Africa.

The study postulates that active involvement of parents in their children's education can enhance learning, and argues that learners and parents should actively engage with the learning processes; by doing so they should become more emancipated in the process.

The study is framed by a qualitative approach. The parents of identified learners were invited to participate in an English literacy homework intervention programme, implemented to practically investigate the benefits of parental involvement in homework activities. A small, multilingual focus group was formed afterwards to determine the success of this particular intervention programme.

To give credence to both researcher and authentic responses, the research paradigm used leaned towards a critical theory paradigm, as framed by an action research model. The theoretical frameworks of Habermas and Horkheimer largely underpin the literature review, to which further views of educational researchers were cross-referenced and acknowledged.

Based on findings derived from interviews, it became apparent that (1) authentic texts used to frame intervention programmes can foster a real sense of awareness, even in socio-economically-deprived areas, (2) greater triadic relationships between schools, educators and learners can yield meaningful relationships that can scaffold learning, and (3) parental involvement can increase motivation among learners and parents.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my loving husband, Gerard Rooi, and my magnificent daughters, Jacolene, Lucinda and Meshé, for their unconditional love, endurance, inspiration and support.

It is also dedicated to my late aunt, Christina Steyn, for all her help, encouragement and words of wisdom. She always motivated me to persevere.

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GLOSSARY

Collaboration: A joined intellectual effort between teacher, learners and parents to work together to successfully enhance communication, and to facilitate administrative, cognitive and academic support

Homework: Activities, tasks and assignments given by the teacher to learners, which have to be completed outside of school hours

Intervention: A concentrated attempt in the form of a programme, designed to increase participation, and to serve as an attempt by parents to scaffold the learning of learners, to assist them in reaching the level needed in the academic grade

Involvement: The act of participating in the intervention programme, with the goal of engaging with relevant stakeholders to cognitively scaffold the learning processes

Literacy: Conventionally referred to as the ability to read and write. In this study it refers to reading, writing and critical discourses needed by learners to employ taught conventions in practice.

Partnership: Participation based on joint interest of the teacher, parents and learners

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMNS

CASS   Continuous assessments

CEMIS   Centralised Educational Management Information System

DoE   Department of Education

LoLT   Language of learning and teaching

NGO   Non-Governmental Organisation

SGB   School Governing Body

SMSs   Short Message Services

SMT   School Management Team

WCED   Western Cape Education Department

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1   Background and context of research

Since the early 1970s, the effectiveness of homework and its impact on learners' achievements has been debated, especially from the perspective of parental involvement in homework activities and parents' influence on learners' attributes related to achievement (Fan, 2001; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001). In modern-day South African classrooms, the lack of parental involvement is often seen as a result of socio-economic factors, that is, the absence of key and appropriate literacy development practices prior to school commencement, multilingualism, the parents' or caregivers' level of literacy, their attitudes towards literacy, and the lack of suitable resources and developmentally appropriate literacy materials.

In a study conducted by Wolfendale (1992:6), the critical role of parents in classrooms was viewed as integral to learners' learning. He indicated his concern that "parents are conspicuously absent; [and that] they appear to exist only in relation to their primary legal duty: to send children to school". What has become apparent more recently is that parents find it increasingly difficult to assist their children with homework. This could be attributed to variables such as learner characteristics, lack of knowledge, and integrative orientations (Brown, 2007:170).

To increase parental involvement in learning, educators have started implementing new and innovative ways to involve parents more in the schoolwork of learners, but still with no or little success. As a result, parents often disclose various factors hindering their participation in learners' schoolwork. These factors range from their inability to assist their children, owing to their level of schooling, to their unfamiliarity with the varied materials and methodological approaches used in Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) classrooms. This is in sharp contrast to expectations cited in the Department of Education (DoE) communiqué, which is premised on the belief that a greater degree of parental involvement is needed to enhance the educational development of learners (Mestry & Grobler, 2007:176).

OBE, as an educational reform model, demands of educators to give learners homework that will positively engage parents with their child's educational endeavours, so that the engagement can operate as a space for parents to collaborate with educators regarding the education of their children. Van der Horst and McDonald (1997:6) view the shift to OBE as

positive, as it centralises the learner and his or her needs in the classroom, while acknowledging the human diversity element in learning. In this way learners' differences are accommodated. These factors allow for a radical shift towards participatory classroom practices in terms of decision making in education. The emphasis of OBE is now based on accountability and responsibility, allowing all learners to achieve their full potential (within the bounds of their different levels of performance, and according to individual ability).

In support of this view, Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009:17) contend, "parents (should) also benefit greatly from being involved with the school … [as] teamwork reduces the characteristic isolation of their (teachers and parents') respective roles". Consequently, collaboration in this regard is imperative, as it shows that both parents and teachers are key to the development of the learner.

In 2007, the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) distributed a circular that encouraged parents to support learners with homework activities. This document states that stakeholders such as the school management teams (SMTs) and school governing bodies (SGBs) should use this opportunity to engage with parents in respect of the benefits of assisting their children with their homework (WCED, 2007). Members of the SMT, as well as the SGB, were expected to continuously post urgent appeals to the parents at school-based parent-teacher association (PTA) meetings to fulfil a more supporting role with pupils. Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009:83) share these sentiments, indicating that learners can largely benefit by such collaboration. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2001) support such collaboration, yet caution that such collaboration can only be successful based on three conditions, if:

- parents believe that they should be involved;
- parents believe that their involvement will make a positive difference; and
- such invitations are supported by teachers (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001:201).

Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009:83) refer to such collaborative activities, if successfully steered, as the "curriculum of the home". They further suggest that these activities can comprise tutoring, parental supervision, checking of homework, and conversations between the parent and child regarding everyday events, after school.

Parents can also encourage their children to read for enjoyment. The reason why reading is seen as vital, is that it can stimulate strategic action beyond the classroom, as documented in the Department of Education's (DoE) National Reading Strategy:

To read is to empower

To empower is to write

To write is to influence

To influence is to change

To change is to live (DoE, 2008:04)

The National Reading Strategy suggests that parents should show a greater level of interest in how their children perform academically, and should pay closer attention to their children's personal growth.

In a study conducted by Squelch (1994:3), the researcher argues that education is first and foremost the parents' responsibility. She mentions that the parents "are the child's first educators" and that parents are to be considered the predominant persons in the child's life. According to Squelch (1994:3), it is evident that as the child reaches school-going age, the parents should share dual responsibility with the educator, thus forming a triadic partnership between home and school. These triadic partners, namely the school, parents and learners, should share equal responsibility in terms of skills, commitment and effort. Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009: 83) support the idea that parents should also reward their children when they perform well in activities both in and outside the classroom. These forms of reward that parents can provide may consist of appraisals, incentives, encouragement, praise and compliments. These may serve as further motivation to children to perform better at school and stimulate both their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to achieve more academically and socially.

In line with these pleas for greater parental involvement, the concept of developing an intervention programme for parents has evolved.

1.2 The purpose of the study

The purpose of this research study was three-fold, namely: (1) to implement an existing homework intervention programme, as created by Van Niekerk (2007) among learners not reaching or maintaining levels appropriate to their grades; (2) to train parents to assist learners with learning tasks, and (3) to evaluate responses gained from learners and parents.

The primary aim, as linked to the purpose outlined above, was to involve parents of a selected group of Grade 4 learners with a series of English literacy homework sessions and activities; and to ascertain whether such a form of intervention would enable parents to assist

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learners with such homework activities. The homework programme, which was implemented, consisted of listening and language homework activities. An action research approach was used to structure the observations made during the various stages and sessions of this programme.

For this study, the level of parental involvement was crucial as parents needed to become much more supportive of and involved with the learning processes of the child. A strong bond or partnership between the school and the home was essential for the learner's holistic development. It was evident that parents (or caregivers) needed to display a more hands-on approach and work collaboratively with the teacher to meet the outcomes of the set activities.

The key purpose of the language homework programme was to provide an academic and strategic link between the school and the home, as well as to create a collaborative space for further engagement between parents and learners. Aside from the fact that English is seen as a language of wider communication by both the school and parents, English is also the subject area of the researcher.

The researcher viewed these aims as crucial, especially in her quest to establish a more transparent level of communication between home and school, and as a way to support parents with the necessary knowledge and skills to assist learners with homework, especially as parents are seen as the child's foremost educators (Squelch, 1994:3).

In this study, the language programme was used as an instrument to enable parents to be more supportive towards their children's schooling. It also encouraged parents to reflect on their involvement in and contribution to the learner's learning processes. The intention behind the language programme was to illustrate to parents the primary importance of communication, and how effective parental involvement could be beneficial to all stakeholders. The stakeholders identified comprised learners, parents, educators and the principal.

1.3   Background to the homework programme

The language programme was designed by Van Niekerk (2007), and served as research instrument for this study. This programme exercises are themed and consist of relatable topics that are authentic and relevant, and which can steer homework exercises towards better learner engagement. The homework programme comprises various themes, ranging from "The School" to "Road Safety", and was strategically chosen as it is appropriate to the learners' age group and developmental needs, and is aligned with the cognitive level of

language proficiency required. In this study, some of the topics were combined, according to the general theme covered (see Table 1.1).

In her programme, Van Niekerk (2007:3) integrates various themes to complement activities and skills within the classroom, and at home. The outline below charts these topics as covered during the six sessions with the participants. It should be noted that in further chapters the researcher refers to participants who attended these listening-and-language-homework intervention sessions interchangeably as parents, representatives, respondents or participants (see Appendix M), given the context in which the interaction (with research participants) occurred.

Table 1.1: An abbreviated version of the Van Niekerk (2007) model used in this research study. The themes selected covered an 18-week period.

Session One	Theme 1	The School	Topics	The Classroom
				Late for School
Session Two	Theme 2	The City	Topics	The Shopping Mall
				Occupations
Session Three	Theme 3	Transport	Topics	The Service Station
				The Railway Station
Session Four	Theme 4	Road Safety	Topics	The Bicycle
				The Motorcar
Session Five	Theme 5	The Supermarket	Topics	Odd one out
				Let's bake
Session Six	Theme 6	The Animals	Topics	The Zoo
				The Farm
				Animal Games

The table above is an abbreviated outline of Van Niekerk's model, covering a 28-week timeframe. For the purpose of this study, only 18 weeks were covered, consisting of the six contact sessions of one hour each with the parents (see full Listening and Language Home programme Level 2 in Appendix I).

Each topic indicated above consisted of a comprehension activity, a family game, vocabulary activities, auditory reception activities, and activities to enhance memory skills. The topics covered also comprised a large range of phonic activities. As the purpose of the programme was to improve the language skills of the learners, further emphasis was placed on reading and writing activities, which formed part of the homework programme.

1.4 Research questions

In order to strengthen the relationship between home and school, and to simultaneously improve the English literacy skill levels of the 38 Grade 4 learners at the research site, the study focused on addressing the following research questions:

1.4.1 How can parents (or caregivers) be supported in assisting their Grade 4 children with English literacy homework?

1.4.2 What strategies can be implemented to involve parents of Grade 4 learners with English literacy homework?

1.5 Research objectives

The objectives of the study are:

- To find ways to support parents in assisting their Grade 4 children with English literacy homework.
- To implement strategies for the involvement of parents of Grade 4 learners in an English literacy homework programme.

1.6 Methodology

To address the research questions and attain the objectives, support was provided in the form of an intervention programme consisting of a series of six homework sessions. Action research methodology was deemed fit to investigate possible means of providing support and simultaneously implement strategies to involve parents.

1.7 Research design

The researcher used an interpretivist design where "description of human actions are based on social meanings" (Bassey, 1999:43). Social science researchers are keen to address social issues in and through their research as situated in a specific context. Thus to position this study within its context, case study research methodology was utilised.

1.8   Sample

The case study consisted of the parents, or caregivers, or representatives of one Grade 4 class. There were 38 learners in this particular class. Learners were not necessarily all represented for each homework session of the intervention programme. On average only six learners were represented by parents (participants) during the six homework sessions.

1.9   Research methods

Research instruments consisted of a variety of data collection tools each serving a particular purpose.

- A self-administered questionnaire was used to gauge parents' perceptions of their capabilities in assisting their children with homework.
- An intervention programme was implemented to equip parents to assist their children with their homework.
- A focus group interview was conducted to determine the success of the intervention programme.
- Field notes were compiled from informal discussions with different stakeholders, during class time and based on participant observations for the purpose of verification during data analysis.
- Observations during the intervention homework sessions as well as during class time were conducted to determine the level and effectiveness of strategies employed during the intervention programme.

Throughout this study, the researcher supported parents (or caregivers) through regular contact sessions, parent-teacher communication, and involvement in developing strategies to support learners with their schoolwork. The researcher had regular contact with parents or representatives of the learners through telephonic communication to remind parents of meeting dates and/or by written communication via letters and circulars. Home- and school-liaison diaries to discuss the progress of learners were provided to parents with regular feedback on each learner's performance. Report cards were also used to apprise parents of how their children had performed throughout the term. The researcher regularly used Short Messaging Services (SMSs) to the parents if learners either failed to complete homework tasks, or if parents failed to sign the homework sheet.

The intention of all the above was to successfully immerse parents in the intervention programme. This successfully eliminated barriers between the school and home, and

secured wider research participation. English was used as a medium of communication because of the language diversity of the respondents of the Grade 4 class (see Table 3.7).

Another approach was to strengthen relationships between the teacher and parents, especially among foreign nationals, who were regarded as alien within the immediate social setting of the school. These existing power relationships were transformed by initiating working relationships between parents and teachers, and parents and parents, especially parents hailing from regions and countries outside of the Western Cape.

Time management skills were integrated, as parents were to allocate dedicated time-slots, and were supported in reconstructing their parental roles to assist their children with homework. Homework slots were instrumental in building family relationships, as these provided a space within which to structure tasks and to afford concentrated attention on activities appropriate to the child's age and level of development. In this regard, time management facilitated a specific form of discipline and routine in the family milieu, which further added value to the importance of reconstructing the home as an informal learning environment.

Transport to sessions was provided to parents who indicated that they had transport difficulties. The approach was particularly beneficial as it eliminated infrastructural barriers, and provided the teacher with a much clearer insight into the infrastructural and socio-economic difficulties that parents and caregivers encountered.

1.10 Context of the research site

The research was conducted at a primary school consisting of290 formally registered learners in the Western Cape, South Africa. This school is situated in an affluent area in the southern suburbs of Cape Town, and although the school has a rich and interesting history dating back to the early 1900s, learners come from very poor socio-economic backgrounds and many live in informal settlements and on farms.

The school celebrated its centenary in 2010. It was built on historic land that was once part of the surrounding farms (Red24, 2011). The school was established as an all-white school with 12 boys and 16 girls in 1910, and in the early 1970s the school was forced to relocate to its current position due to forced removals.

The school currently hosts learners from Afrikaans-, English-, chiShona- and isiXhosa-speaking backgrounds, whose parents live and work in the neighbouring and surroundings areas. The school continues to operate as a symbol of hope for those less privileged. In

1910, it was officially classified as a "coloured school", due to the small number of learners who attended school at that time (Union of South Africa, 1911:105). In 1910, the school was accorded'A3 category'-status in the then-classification system, categorising it as a public school, offering tuition to learners from Grade 1 up to Grade 6. In later years, the classification was extended to that of an 'A2 category', which provided tuition up to Grade 9(Union of South Africa, 1911:105**).** The A3 classification of the school also meant that it was allocated only one qualified educator.

Many of the coloured families residing in the immediate surroundings of the school were affected by the forced removal laws in the 1960s and were consequently moved and relocated to different areas in and around the Cape Flats. The school thus became a commuter school, and learners had to make use of different modes of transport such as farm transport, taxis, cars, trains, buses and 'bakkies' (pickup trucks) to get to and from school.

Because of these transport difficulties, learners hardly participated in any extramural activities or classes after school, which further militated against support groups after school. If learners wanted to participate in extra-mural activities, the onus was on the school to ensure that learners returned home safely. This created great infrastructural difficulties, as travelling distances further exacerbated problems, impeding parental involvement. Many learners were then compelled to use alternative transport to school. The same applied to parents wanting to attend parent-teacher meetings. Even today, parents of learners at the research site are always encouraged to participate in meetings and to be involved in different activities at school. Yet, financial constraints still largely impact on transport to and from school, and often result in high learner absenteeism and irregular school attendance.

From information retrieved from the Centralised Education Management Information System (CEMIS) database, it is apparent that learners from low socio-economic backgrounds contend with various levels of poverty. These levels are characterised by high unemployment rates, and where social grants are received, a single income, or even no income at all, is the daily reality for parents who comprise this low socio-economic group. Jensen (2009:1) views poverty in this regard as "a chronic and debilitating condition that results from multiple adverse synergistic risk factors and affects the mind, body, and soul". Jensen (2009:1) further contends that poverty is complex, and indicates that regardless of how poverty is defined or described, people will always perceive it differently.

At this research site, learners are multicultural and multilingual. It was for this reason that the researcher wanted to use diversity as resource. Ferrante (2011:201) refers to diversity as the

recognition of collective identities, and it is through such identities that the culture and ethos of the school are so unique.

The medium of instruction at this research site is Afrikaans, even though learners speak different languages, that is, isiXhosa, isiZulu, xiTsonga, Tswana, and English as mother tongue. The pull-factor of possible employment and better job opportunities in the cities, has led to migration of most of these learners' families to the Western Cape from other provinces and some neighbouring countries. Despite this, parent groups at the research site are mindful of making people from other cultures feel welcome. Continued awareness campaigns resulted in issues of racism and xenophobia being addressed at school. Cultural issues are discussed on a regular basis in meetings, during assemblies and in lessons in the subject areas of Life Orientation (LO), Arts and Culture (A & C) and Social Sciences (SS). In this way, learners are encouraged to be tolerant and accepting of one another, and of other cultures.

At the research site there is only one class per grade. The Grade 4 class comprises 38 learners, consisting of 18 girls and 20 boys. Seven out of the 38 learners reside on neighbouring wine farms which are situated around the school area, and where their parents work as farm labourers.

Table 1.2: A statistical analysis of the family types in ratio to the number of learners

Family Types	Number of Learners
Single parent within extended family	8
Single parent	8
Learners in foster care	1
Nuclear family	18
Guardian	3
Total	**38**

In a statistical analysis of the Grade 4 cohort, the researcher used an outline by Flynn et al. (2000:76) to indicate how the compositions of families vary. According to Flynn et al. (2000) children have different perceptions of their families as illustrated inFigure1.1below. It is also evident that the perception of family types in such socio-economic circumstances could influence the perception of roles and responsibilities of family members, that could, in turn, limit the expectations of certain family members in terms of the academic potential of the learner.
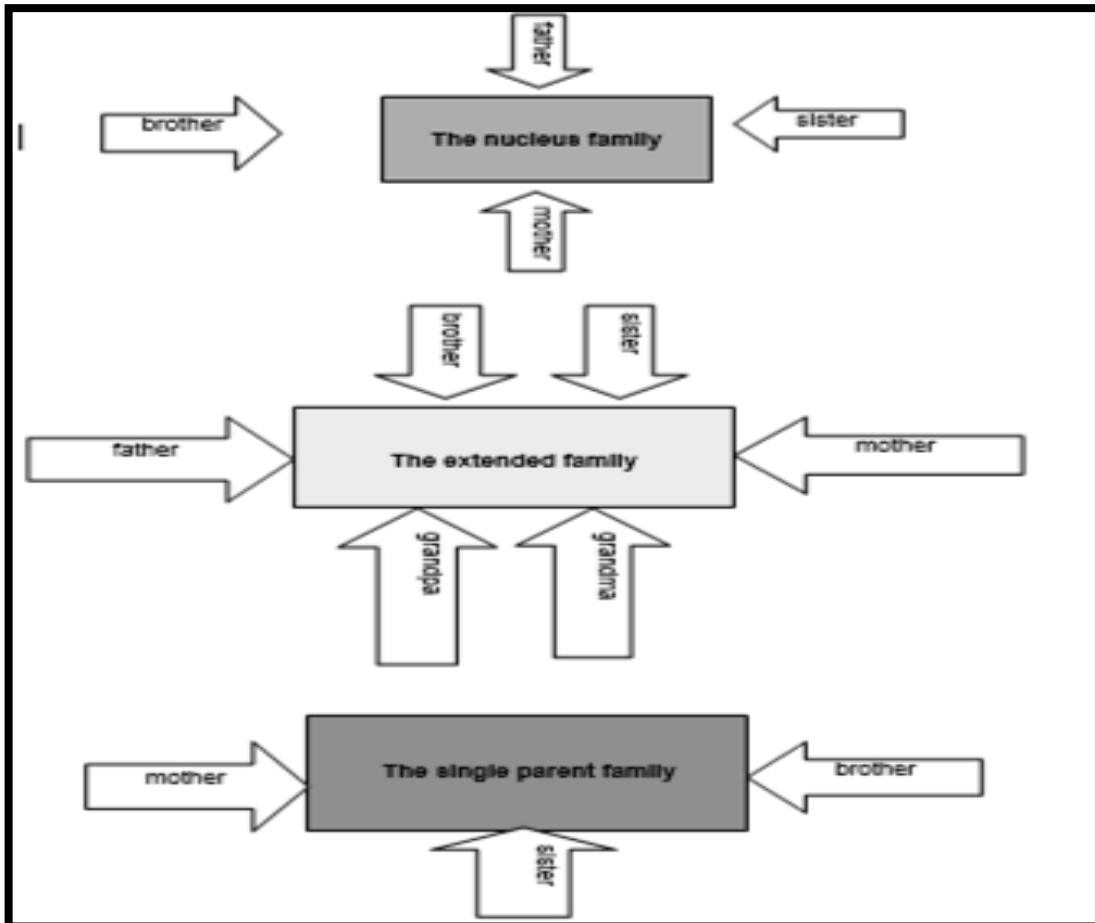
Figure 1.1: Children's conceptions of their families (adapted from Flynn et al. (2000:76)

Lilly and Green (2004:154) define a nuclear family, as a family which constitutes a mother, a father and their child or children; a single-parent family as a family consisting of either a single father or mother, who resides with his/her biological children; and an extended family as a family comprising both parents living with their biological or adopted children; as well as other family members such as grandparents, cousins, uncles and aunts.

1.11   The intervention programme

English literacy was used as a subject area, with the primary intent of facilitating communicative language proficiency, and to equip parents to assist their children with homework activities. As mentioned previously, many of the parents do not speak English as their mother tongue. Language diversity creates additional problems when parents have to assist their children with homework; the intervention programme was therefore aimed at involving parents in becoming active participants in their children's learning processes. The participants were exposed to the various levels of thinking skills as outlined in Bloom's Taxonomy (Van der Horst & McDonald, 1997:9).

Table 1.3: A Breakdown of Bloom's Taxonomy (Van der Horst & McDonald, 1997:37-38)

Level Six	Evaluation	Creating
Level Five	Synthesis	Evaluating
Level Four	Analysis	Analysis
Level Three	Application	Applying
Level Two	Comprehension	Understanding
Level One	Knowledge	Remembering

In view of the learning processes identified through the intervention programme, and based on the levels of thinking skills identified by Bloom in 1956, Sharman et al. (2004:10) support the idea that "children need to develop a variety of skills to enable them to fulfil their individual potential". According to Sharman et al. (2004:10), the skills most intrinsic to the process of learning are "language, reasoning and memory". These skills are depicted in Figure 1.2.The intervention programme was intended to equip parents with skills, which would in turn enable them to impart these skills to their children, while engaging with the homework programme. Additionally, the programme also furnished them with knowledge, as indicated in the first level of Bloom's Taxonomy, to communicate the content of the homework programme to their children.

Parents were taught how to conduct and evaluate basic reading and comprehension skills (*Level Two*) of the programme, as they were to read short paragraphs to their children. Through such an approach, parents would then be able to assist their children with comprehension skills, as they were now acquainted with the content of the homework programme as presented by the educator during their one-hour contact sessions on predetermined dates. 'Reasoning 'and **'**dictionary skills' were taught to parents as a way to expand their vocabulary, to check spelling, and to derive the intended meaning from the content. For the purpose of these sessions all the parents were provided with an *Oxford School Dictionary.*

Parents were encouraged to use these dictionaries at home, and to use dictionaries as a referencing tool, should they struggle with the intended meaning and spelling in the learners' reading, dictionary, vocabulary and spelling skills. Parents were also taught how to apply (*Level Three*) the information, as well as to analyse (*Level Four*) the work produced by learners. Participants were then encouraged "to put elements together to form a new whole" (*Level Five, synthesis*). Learners were challenged to write a poem about their educator. Parents had to evaluate sets of work their children had produced by making a judgement-call based on the work that their children had completed (*Level Six*). These judgements were

categorised in the form of comparisons and recommendations (Van der Horst & McDonald, 1997:37-38).
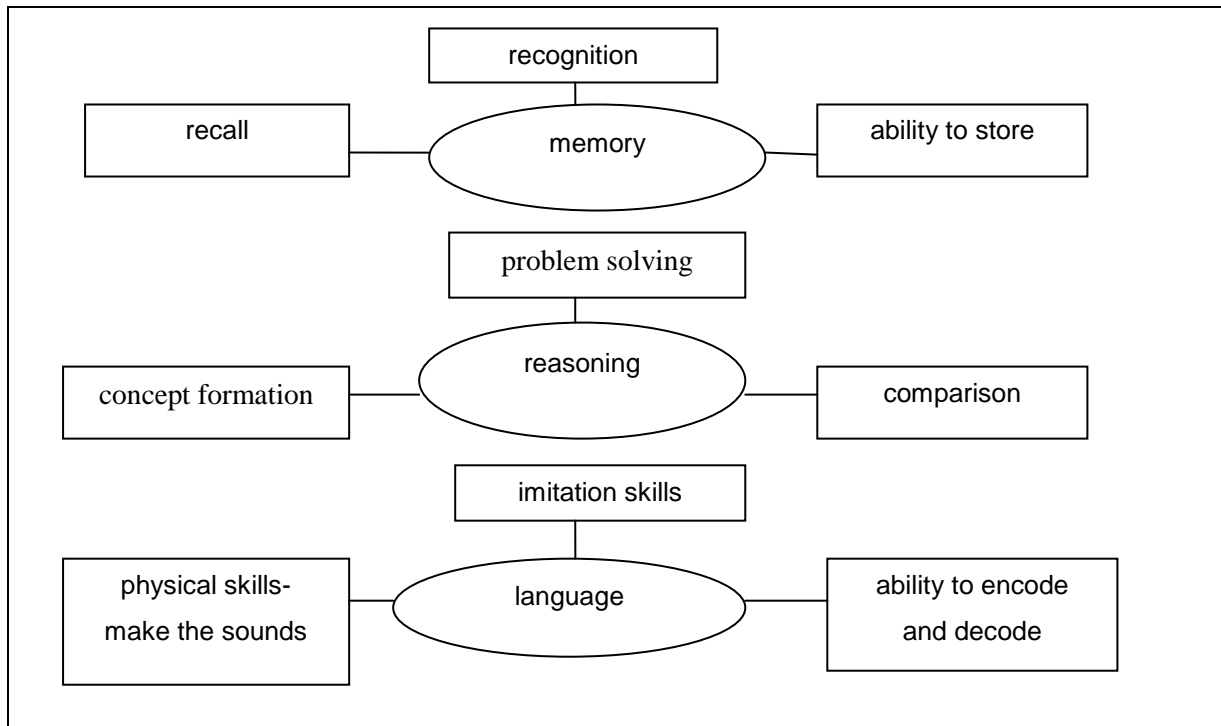
Figure 1.2: Some of the skills involved in the process of learning (adapted from Sharman et al., 2004:12)

The intervention strategies with parents took place *prior* to the lessons being introduced or taught and facilitated in the classroom. These sessions ensured that all the parents were on par, and had at least a frame of reference for the homework to be prepared, the structure in which it had to be presented, and the timeframe in which it should be completed.

1.12   Collaboration between home and school

The *Longman South African School Dictionary* defines *collaboration* as the working together towards one common goal (*Longman South African School Dictionary*, 2008:135). This refers to the alliance between the home and the school, through which parents become actively involved in their children's education. It was expected that the skills that these learners acquired throughout the English literacy programme, would be transferred positively across all the other learning areas. In line with the DoE's National Reading Strategy (DoE, 2008:16), family literacy programmes should help parents to support their children in reading. Families are therefore encouraged to take responsibility to ensure that reading continues even after the bell had rung for the end of the school day.

1.13   Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the relevance of parental involvement and collaboration between home and school. A brief summary of the process of the intervention programme was introduced, especially with regard to the collaborative action needed to scaffold parental support in the learning processes of these Grade 4 learners. In addition, a brief background of the school context was sketched, and the importance of such a literacy intervention programme was highlighted. Key areas of this chapter presented the research problem, the purpose of the research, the importance of the study and the contextual background.

Chapter 2 presents an overview of relevant literature on the importance of parental involvement, and different parenting styles that will be discussed. Thereafter a brief outline of the action research approach is provided as introduction to the intervention strategy to parental involvement in learners' homework activities.

In Chapter 3 the research methodology and the action research model are addressed. This chapter also contains requisite information on the collection and analysis of the data.

The results from the focus groups are presented in Chapter 4, and the findings (derived from questionnaires and interviews) are presented.

The findings of and limitations to the study, as well as recommendations for further research, are presented in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Introduction

In the preceding chapter, the foci of this study highlighted the interplay between homework and parental involvement. Chapter2 begins with an overview of the Critical Theory framework used in this study to reflectively frame the research methodology, instructional tools and classroom activities, with a brief outline of the action research framework as cooperative enquiry.

The focal point of this study is to investigate the involvement of parents of Grade 4 primary school learners, based on their teacher-learner engagement in an English literacy homework programme. This chapter aims to further highlight relevant paradigms, linking to ideas on how parental involvement with homework can successfully generate new ways of learning to make learning environments more structured, goal-directed and purposeful.

Following a presentation on the aforementioned, a comprehensive review of relevant literature is undertaken to (1) gauge the connection between home and school collaboration, and (2) identify relevant recommended practices which can foster workable triadic relationships between teachers, parents and learners.

2.1.1   Theoretical framework: Critical Theory

In view of the problem statement presented, the research approach used in this study leans towards the Critical Theory paradigm, and is framed by the Action Research model.

Critical Theory was first defined by Horkheimer in his 1937 publication *Traditional and Critical Theory,* and has since dominated the work presented by Habermas (Duffy & Scott, 1998:184). In response to Habermas's Critical Theory model and interpretation, Duffy and Scott (1998) argue that critical theory allows for a space to enable researchers to view life more critically and objectively, and to create opportunities that will allow them to think in an environment free from domination and oppression. In this way, they are able to critique and change society, based on the limits of a phenomenon (or phenomena) they have observed, within a particular or specific knowledge system. In this research study, the researcher critically evaluated and observed how external influences such as the socio-economic status of parents or caregivers, combined with linguistic challenges, and the literacy levels of

parents and learners, impact negatively on parental involvement in the academic achievements of Grade 4 learners. In establishing the limits of the validity of the phenomena, the researcher used her classroom as a space to review and re-evaluate the roles of teachers, learners and parents more critically, to equip both learners and parents with the necessary support structure to assist these learners with their schoolwork.

Horkheimer (1972:242) claims that critical theory has always been "based on the recurrence of events and thus on a self-reproducing totality". For this reason, an intervention programme was implemented as a vehicle for parents and learners to become more autonomous and emancipated from the difficulties experienced with homework, as assigned to them by teachers at this particular school.

Habermas's framework (as contextualised by Duffy & Scott, 1998:184) has specific views on how to interpret and understand what social reality and emancipation entail. Habermas (1996:15) refers to social reality as being "more complex than the aspects of nature, as objectified in scientific research or those studies that require instrumental action". Horkheimer (1972:199) views "classificatory thinking" of a person as "one of those social reactions" by which a human being attempts to adjust to reality in a way that meet his or her needs. The needs of the parents at the research site were to be better equipped, so that they could facilitate the academic progress of the learner outside of school and scaffold classroom activities.

In respect of the Critical Theory interpretation of Horkheimer (1972:188), he states, "the general goal of all theory is a universal systematic science, not limited to any particular subject matter but embracing all possible objects". Linked to this point, Horkheimer (1972: 188) provides key principles of the critical theory paradigm, indicating that Critical Theory must be (1) descriptive, and (2) realistic; it should also (3) provide direction to explain what is wrong with current social reality, (4) provide realistic means to assess the current situation, and (5) afford direction on how to set practical goals that can enhance social transformation.

In addition to the aforementioned theoretical framework, the researcher in this study observed that there was a lack of parental involvement at the school, and that there was either no or little collaboration between the home and the school. To address this problem, and to facilitate greater interaction between the school and home, the researcher embarked on an intervention programme as a way to enhance collaboration, and to accommodate parents and learners in a situated space of learning. The parents of the Grade 4 class were then introduced to the intervention programme offered at the research site, to show them techniques, methods and strategies to assist learners with homework after school. This

initiative was aligned to the framework of social transformation as referred to in Horkheimer (1972:188). This study by Horkheimer (1972) also centred on the parents' inability to assist their children with homework and demonstrated the effectiveness of homework as an instructional tool. In his study, Horkheimer cautioned that critical theory should be realistic in its approach, as it is imperative that it identifies the actors of change. These actors of change refer to the intervention programme that was implemented to empower parents and learners to adopt a new structure to bridge the gap in parental support. Herein, more specific elements and descriptors of Critical Theory were introduced, namely "to move from fundamental structure to concrete reality" (Horkheimer, 1972:188), and to furthermore afford direction in terms of clearer norms for criticism and achievable practical goals for social transformation (Horkheimer, 1972:225). In essence, as derived from Horkheimer's view, Critical Theory can therefore be seen as a theory that can be radical and emancipatory (Kemmis, 2001:92), as it effects change through research.

This aspect of transformation, as referred to by Kemmis (2001), came to fruition in this study as parents became self-sufficient and empowered in assisting their children with homework tasks. In addition, in a study conducted by Cooper (2001), the relationship between homework and learners' achievements, aside from rare exceptions, indicated that homework positively improved academic achievement.

Horkheimer (1972:194) furthermore views critical theory as follows:

> As a matter of fact, the fruitfulness of newly discovered factual connections for the renewal of existent knowledge, and the application of such knowledge to the facts, do not derive from purely logical or methodological sources but can rather be understood only in the context of real social processes.

In a research study conducted by Lilly and Green (2004:4), they view critical theory through a different focal point. They propose that critical theory is defined through the societal and ethnic milieu that accompanies children when they start attending school. In their study, Lilly and Green *(*2004:4) draw parallels with educators who adhere to critical theory, indicating that using such a methodology within their classroom practice supports a multicultural approach. Lilly and Green (2004) further concentrate on matters of "communal integrity" (Lilly & Green, 2004:4), advocating the need to equip learners with the necessary skills to become critical thinkers and readers. In this study it became evident that educators who implement an action research paradigm in their teaching methodologies do so to improve their practice or the context in which they work, as a way to produce knowledge which other educators can then draw upon and utilise.

Somekh and Zeichner (2009:8) refer to an important contribution made to action research theory and methodology, by highlighting and aligning theoretical parallels to the work of Habermas. This view, supported in the work of Hanson (2010:76), underscores the idea of social realities. In contextualising their view to the research site, it became evident that the social realities at the research site were much broader than merely a lack of parental involvement and support. The social realities identified were often the result of apartheid and socio-economic circumstances, fuelled by a lack of education and opportunities in upbringing, the critical sense among individuals to cope with their circumstances, the often disembedded use of language in literacy practices, the challenges of multilingualism and disparate cultures, poverty, and the lack of suitable resources. These realities were evident, given the socio-realities of the research site. The intent of the research was to address parental involvement and to afford assistance to parents in terms of language and literacy, while allocating resources to support authentic learning, as part of the research study. The purpose of this study was to introduce new ways of learning, and to emancipate the parents from the position of 'non-involvement' to 'involvement', so that a greater level of collaboration between the home and the school could be established. This notion, on which the cognitive emancipation of parents is premised, was introduced by Horkheimer, in which he presents the concept and views of emancipation for the individual (Horkheimer, 1972:227).

2.2   Conceptual framework

Cervone and O'Leary (1982:48) refer to a conceptual framework for parental involvement as the level of involvement along a "continuum that stretches from activities in which the parent is the passive recipient of information, to activities in which the parent is an active partner in the educational process". Consequently, the purpose of this study was specifically aimed at getting the parents actively involved in their children's academic endeavours; hence the implementation of the homework intervention programme which was intended to equip parents with the necessary skills and knowledge to assist children with their homework tasks and activities outside of classroom hours. A further aim was to use this homework intervention programme as a space for parents to become active participants in their children's learning, without requiring them to act as teachers, nor to police their children's attempts from start to completion. Their role was to support the process, and to legitimise the attempt of maximising learning, and no longer occupy the role of passive recipients, as mentioned in the critique of Cervone and O'Leary (1982:48).

2.2.1   Factors influencing parental support of learners

Various factors, including inchoate perspectives on instructional qualities, have an influence on the efficacy of parental involvement of learners. In a study conducted by Davis-Kean (2005:294), some of the factors that may hinder the support of parents include the "education level of parents", "structure of the home environment", "low income levels of parents", and "parenting styles". In view of these limitations, Cervone and O'Leary (1982) concur (as noted by Davis-Kean, 2005), and include cultural differences, language barriers and economic conditions of families as factors that hinder the impact of support programmes of such a nature on parental involvement in the academic success of learners.

In a contextualised view, especially through the perspective of literacy practices in a multilingual, developing country (considering the migration statuses of research participants), additional factors, aside from socio-economic ones, are the parents or caregivers' levels of literacy, their attitudes towards literacy, the accessibility of appropriate reading materials, and the lack of suitable resources. These all are major external influences on the sustainability of such programmes.

In this research study, the researcher took cognisance of all these factors in the planning stages of the intervention programme.

2.2.2   The relationships between home and school

Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009:84) contend that the involvement of parents in their children's schooling career not only improves, but also promotes the relationships between home and school. Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009:84) elaborate that such programmes run by schools to assist parents in strengthening the school – home relationship, can raise academic achievement levels among children.

It is in support of this view that a home – school programme was chosen to assist early childhood learners to widen their knowledge of the world, and to assist them to relate such knowledge to their schoolwork with greater ease (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009:84). With the educator's role as an expert in the teaching and learning process on the one hand, the parent's role on the other hand, serves as a very important "resource in the learning process of their children" (Mofoka, 2004:30). The latter point highlights a crucial factor in improving home and school relationships. Children whose parents are actively involved in most cases are more successful, especially in instances where parents and educators work in collaborative fashion. Mofoka (2004:30) elaborates on this point, stating that these

relationships can be enhanced through the implementation of home contacts which can include home visits by the educator, message books, circulars, letters, notices, telephone calls and text messages to discuss issues regarding the learner's progress. In addition, school contacts such as PTAs, homework sessions, and school functions, can also be used by the educator as spaces to interact with parents.

Studies conducted by Bailey et al. (2004:173) indicate that parental interaction, which occurs while the homework is being completed, plays an important role in developing involvement of parents, including improvement of the partnership between home and school. Bailey et al. (2004:173) further emphasise that the active involvement of parents should enable learners to master their work with greater ease, as parental interest can act as motivation for learners. Further involvement can include instances where parents provide guidance and prompt their children to do and complete their homework. If children struggle or are uncertain about certain aspects of the work, whether in understanding new content, practising a skill, or following a process with difficulty, parents can offer support and/or liaise with the educator to clarify certain aspects. This will assist learners to work through problem areas while consolidating the necessary skills and information with the information presented. This, therefore, will contribute to the mastery of work. Educators should closely monitor homework assignments (Cooper, 2001:21) to ensure consistency in homework patterns. Therefore, the role that educators and parents play in forming a parent – school partnership is important (Coletta, 1977:11). This partnership, as coined by Coletta (1977:11), has a common goal in providing mutual support, which can be beneficial for all parties concerned.

Mestry and Grobler (2007:177) maintain that the idea of a joint venture in the educational situation is of cardinal significance, especially considering the interrelationship between family and school. Ripley (2004:52) argues that this should ideally be a two-way partnership, with both the parents and the educator playing an equally important role in assisting the child. In support of this, Hartas (2008:139) indicates that the kind of parental participation and home – school collaboration between parents and child professionals varies. This can be as a result of a lack of parental involvement, or subject to instances where the parents are uncertain of how the homework should be presented. Further reasons could be that parents are otherwise occupied by work-related or health issues; parents could also be absent, or have low literacy levels.

Hartas (2008:139) argues that shifts in family structures and the value system increase the accountability of both school and home. According to Hartas (2008:140), such interferences require educators and other officials to seriously reflect on the level of parental involvement, and the roles and responsibilities of the parents. Snell et al. (2009:240) support the viewpoint

of Hartas (2008), stating that customary modes of parents' involvement may inhibit some persons or groups of parents, by not acknowledging the significance of the roles they already perform in assisting in the education of their children. Hartas (2008:150) advises that parent learning and mentoring schemes "should consider the diversity in the ways parents become involved with their children's education".

2.2.3   The parent – child relationships

According to Brown (2007:116), parental contribution has plenty of constructive benefits for learners. The most essential is that it contributes to the enhancement of learners' scholastic and societal accomplishments. However, in the schooling system, educators should equally be aware of the factors that influence the involvement of parents, such as their limited knowledge of Outcomes Based Education (OBE), and parenting styles. De Wit (2007:16) cautions that different styles of parenting have a major influence on children especially in terms of school and edification. It is important for parents to realise that the emphasis should be largely on supporting teaching and learning tasks, rather than on assisting children to such a degree that parents complete the homework on their behalf (De Wit, 2007:17).

Learners, whose parents are actively involved in their homework activities, motivate them indirectly to achieve better results in assignments, tests and projects (Chang et al., 2009:311).This is also a way for parents to become aware of their children's academic strengths and weaknesses, so that they are in a better position to assess whether their children are in need of additional support or not (Ripley, 2004:52). Through their interaction, the parent and child may develop a stronger relationship and the child should gain confidence if the parents show an interest in his or her schoolwork. On the other hand, parents may also reach the level of becoming responsible for the child's progress (Chang et al., 2009:311).

2.2.4   The educator and learner relationship

With reference to the educator and learner relationship, Fer (2004:567) views the home as the most suitable place to expand social and emotional abilities, not omitting the important role schools have to play to improve these competencies. It is for this reason that Fer (2004) suggests that a healthy relationship between the educator and the learner should exist for effective learning to take place. It is from this perspective that a homework programme should be implemented to strengthen the bond between the home (learner) and the school (educator) by involving the parents. De Wit (2007:23) concurs with this view, stating that

parents should motivate children, and should become involved by assisting their children with homework tasks.

Through motivation, parents should encourage learners to understand the significance of education and the importance it holds for them, the learners, to develop academically. Educators do have an impact on learners through classroom interaction, and should be regarded as role models to learners, on how to control their feelings and acquire deportment appropriate to a classroom setting. Educators should not merely focus on just lesson planning, lesson design and learning, but also consider the needs of learners, and their (learner) characteristics in the classroom (Fer, 2004:567). These needs should be supportive of the child's emotional, as well as physical and social needs.

2.3   Extrinsic factors

Extrinsic factors refer to all the exterior factors that influence the learner from outside, that is, the home, school and community (Weeks, 2005).

Weeks (2005:38) identifies various extrinsic factors that positively contribute to an effective learning environment. These factors affirm that a sense of loving, approval, attention and appropriate educational practices, aligned to cognitive and affective support, are key to a positive learning environment. Other factors include the learners' need to be nurtured, fed and taken care of. Numerous dynamics within the home also may contribute to a situation where learners are deprived of the loving attention they need. These dynamics include where learners experience feelings of insecurity, as well as a lack of parental involvement. Coleman (2013:73) views the family as an entity that is accountable for the "physical protection", supervision and safekeeping of children by keeping the home environment safe and secure. In many instances, family feuds (especially in situations which involve extended family in one household) give rise to a high level of discomfort in family circumstances, to the extent where personal situations and feelings of parents are often clouded by family problems. This can give rise to instances where parents are often unable to pay focused attention to the needs of their children. In family structures where there is only one parent, grandparent, or one caregiver, the responsibility often rests on that one person to fulfil multiple roles, and to support the learner academically, socially, cognitively and administratively (checking of homework tasks, signing thereof, responding to homework notes, etc.).

Sands et al. (2000:82) support this view and indicate that it is an important challenge for single parents to provide their children with cognitive support, especially in terms of care and love. This challenge is problematic, especially in instances where caregivers face financial

constraints. Often in such situations, there is no role model with whom such learners can identify. Coleman (2013:93) argues that challenges associated with single parent families often are exacerbated by low incomes and insufficient housing, and such families are compelled to determine their own norms. Coleman (2013:195) further observes that such situations are especially evident in families where grandparents are the primary caregivers. Challenges faced by grandparents can also include behaviour, where the opinions of grandparents may differ from those of their grandchildren. A strain on finances in such an extended family structure can also pose a challenge, especially in instances where the responsibility falls on grandparents to provide food, clothes, school supplies, transport and homework supervision for their grandchildren.

Learners, who are often exposed to family situations where parents experience health problems such as alcoholism, illness or depression, may underperform at school. In families where parents are occupied with their own endeavours, children are often left to their own devices. In some instances, parents take their rages, coupled with added frustrations and disappointments, out on children, especially in instances where they are unable to cope with their own stressful state of affairs, as a result of their own poor coping skills. Some parents are compelled to work extended hours, or to work outside of their normal hours, to earn an additional income to make ends meet. Coleman (2013:118) reiterates that parents who work longer hours have a tendency "to spend less time with their children", which might have a negative impact on the child.

Children may also be victims of sexual or physical abuse by a parent(s), and if such abuse is further fuelled by aggression, stress, restlessness, tension, and quarrelling, these may contribute to a negative atmosphere at home. In some homes, children receive insufficient ethical care and supervision, largely because adults engage in improper and immodest activities such as drug abuse and immorality, possibly even in the presence of the children.

The parenting styles of some parents may also have an undesirable effect on the learning organisation, as the parent can be too strict, in their way of disciplining their children. A child may also observe abuse, or be exposed to extremely traumatic experiences, which can leave emotional scars. Learners who, because of ineffective foster care or orphanage placements, might also have been in and out of various positions of care would obviously have been deprived of consistent love and attention.

Children who constantly live with criticism, where one (or more) parents continuously belittle and humiliate them, will have a lack of acceptance, confidence, love and understanding. This can result in the learner feeling unwanted. It is evident that a lack of significant interaction

between family members will give rise to insufficient emotional participation. A lack of space and privacy in a household, where there is overcrowding due to many family members residing in one home, may act as a catalyst for lack of schoolwork preparation and/or ill-preparedness for assessments.

2.4   Factors that result in non-involvement of parents

According to Plevyak (2003:32), the most common reasons why parents are not always actively involved with their children's schoolwork are based on factors such as cultural differences, socio-economic backgrounds, diversity, fear of authority and biased institutions. Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) highlight some complaints from a teacher's perspective. They observed that teachers often complain about parents that are uninterested in their children's school work. The latter might be due to working conditions or working hours of parents. Additional factors can result in making them (as parents) reluctant to become involved in their children's homework rituals. With the change to OBE, parents (who were used to the old curriculum) often find themselves in an isolated space where they *want* to offer assistance, but they do not have the expertise to guide learners to facilitate the learning process. In other cases, the poor socio-economic situations of parents also prevent them from according undivided attention to the needs of their children.

Consequently, Plevyak (2003:32) notes that many cultural groups and low-income families have added pressures and responsibilities, which makes it even more difficult for them to cope and be involved with their children's education. It is evident that the non-involvement of parents, for various reasons, may frustrate the educators. Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009:17) conclude by stating that parents complain that teachers treat them with disrespect and do not make them feel welcome at school.

It is in this regard that Angle et al. (2007:57) suggest that the most suitable way to secure parental involvement is for teachers to take into consideration that parents may have certain limits regarding their own literacy skills, and to ensure that the parents feel comfortable by being involved with activities which are well known to them, and with which they can identify. Angle et al. (2007) further recommend that training sessions should be arranged with parents, with follow-up sessions after each training session, so that parents can be adequately equipped and confident in what they have been taught, in order to impart the knowledge to their children. Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009:91) point out that reading with understanding (as an aspect of parental support) and the ability to make sense of ideas, form part of one's most basic literacy skills. They agree that one should be able to articulate ideas

in a sensible way, whether orally or in writing. It is thus very important for parents, who are the child's "first and most influential teacher", to assist learners with their literacy skills and to actively engage with them, as these skills would need a lot of practice, especially if children's language of instruction is their second or third language.

The culture of poverty is evident in the areas in which learners at the research site reside. These areas are notorious for high levels of unemployment, over-crowdedness, a large percentage of single parent households, and low levels of education of parents. Landsberg et al. (2005:28) indicate that "opposing issues such as ill health, malnutrition, a deficiency of benefits, unsupportive surroundings (informal settlements and squatter camps), inadequate common status and a negative opinion of the future" contributes to the culture of poverty. Landsberg et al. (2005) further argue that these insalubrious conditions are created by fundamentals such as, inadequate salaries, joblessness, and malnutrition, overpopulation, differences, violence, criminality and substance abuse. According to Landsberg et al. (2005:28) this could prolong the ethos of inadequacy. Coleman (2013: 118) agrees with the views of Landsberg et al.(2005:28):"It is particularly stressful for families with limited incomes, since family members may have to work two or three jobs in order to pay their bills." In some of these families, as noted by Coleman (2013:118), it is essential for parents to support their extended family also, even if it means working long hours to provide food for such a family. This has a great impact on family life, especially in instances where time does not allow parents to give the necessary dedicated attention to their children's schoolwork.

Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009:160) affirm "poverty is a primary factor that places children at risk of failure at school". They support the sentiments of Landsberg et al. (2005:28): poverty within families includes aspects such as a lack of homes or jobs, a lack of food, inadequate nourishment, health problems, behavioural problems and inferior educational achievement and scholastic problems. It is therefore important for teachers to involve such parents from impoverished backgrounds so that there can be a significant and workable support structure at school, to stimulate the learners' interest, and for parents to have regular contact sessions with regard to the learning endeavours of their children.

In this way, schools can intervene by supporting such families and by having a positive attitude towards children and family members of low-income households. Teachers should also acquaint themselves with the surroundings of their pupils, and be sensitive to and have respect for the circumstances of these families (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009:163).

2.5 Parental support or involvement

Botha et al. (2006:234) define parental involvement as "the participation of parents in a wide range of school-based and home-based activities to improve their children's education".

This concept includes the amount of structural support given to the school, by parents, which can take the form of cooperation and participation, which leads to partnership.

Todd (2007) describes cooperation as an entity whereby parents support the school by expressing loyalty in the form of overseeing the children's homework. Participation, according to Todd (2007), can be viewed as parents serving on different committees at school, and assisting with various functions held at school. Botha et al. (2006:235) note that partnerships comprise the highest level of parental involvement at school level, referring to instances where parents avail themselves to serve on school governing bodies and where they (the parents)engage with pertinent decision making, focusing on the school as a place of teaching and learning.

Based on the literature consulted, it is evident that 'parental involvement' is not seen as a new concept in pedagogical research. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2001:195) indicate that in the last decade, a great deal of attention has been paid to ways of how to actively involve and encourage parental participation in education. Mofoka (2004:9) contends that very "few parents seem to be aware of the value of their involvement in their children's schooling", and further alludes to the fact that the South African educational system has long acknowledged the involvement of parents in education, but that "parental involvement [has] manifested itself in different forms in different racial groups". In line with the National Curriculum Statement, OBE regards parental involvement in all schools as very significant and urges parents to inspire, motivate and "facilitate their children's learning endeavour" (Van der Horst & McDonald, 1997:5).

Ripley (2004:52) suggests that parents should set aside time for their children's homework activities. These dedicated intervals will not only prioritise education, but also show children the importance of education in a parent – child relationship. According to Todd (2007: 71), "partnership with parents is once again an explicitly stated notion in the current delivery and development of schools and services". Therefore, active partnerships in this regard should enable learners to master their work with greater ease, especially in cases where their parents are actively involved in their homework. Bippus (2005:49) calculates that children between birth and 18 years spend approximately 10 percent of their active time at school, while the rest of their time they spend at home. It is for this reason that Bippus argues that

parents should take more responsibility for their children, and become more involved in their academic and social lives.

Keating (2007:5) in an article in the *Cape Argus*, citing consensual views gained from both teachers and principals on the reasons why "pupils are battling to read, write and count", concludes that all views support the reason that parents "fail to teach their children basic schooling skills, or assist them with schoolwork at home". The problem is that many parents do not know how to assist their children. It is advisable that parents assist their children from a young age with homework activities, so that they are able to cope with the work and become self-regulated and autonomous once they progress to a higher grade, especially in grades where the workload becomes more taxing and complex. This intervention should thus occur early in a child's life before it is too late. Parents should not only act if the results of their children are not at the required level.

2.5.1   The value of parental support

Mofoka (2004:21) supports the value and importance of parental involvement in education:

> It helps to strengthen parent-child relationships that can positively influence children's attitudes towards school, their academic progress and their behaviour. Parental involvement, in general, improves and promotes home-school relations, reduces misunderstandings and conflict, [and] prevents the school from becoming isolated from the community.

In view of the aforementioned statement, it is therefore of utmost importance that parents should be involved in their children's education and that efforts should be well planned, structured and monitored, to improve the child's performance in school.

2.5.2   Parental involvement: an international phenomenon

According to Snell et al. (2009:241), "Hispanic parents [define] themselves as highly involved, based on their participation in activities such as helping with homework, reading, providing nurturance, communicating, instilling cultural values, and feeding and preparing their children for school every day."

Parental involvement with learners' homework is seen as a universal phenomenon in education. In support of this, Hartas (2008:139) contends: "[Internationally], research consistently shows that what parents do with their children after hours is far more important to their children's academic achievement than parental social class or level of education." In a study by Arnold et al. (2008:74) in the urban areas of New England, the findings indicate

that parental involvement is crucial even in the lives of pre-schoolers. Brown (2007:116) view is that "despite the known advantages of parental involvement in education, weak connections still exist between African-American parents and their child's school".

2.5.3 Different ways of ensuring parental involvement

Involving parents in schools can be facilitated in various ways. Communication and engagement can take various forms, such as parent-teacher meetings, sport functions, fundraising efforts, literacy workshops or special events.

It is interesting from research studies gleaned on parental involvement that the supervisory role of parents in praising the child for achievements, can impact remarkably on the learning achievements of children. Botha et al. (2006:235) differentiate between various types of parental involvement, namely that of parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with the community. Parents who involve themselves in educating their children can be divided into four categories, as indicated by the framework outlined by Botha et al.(2006:236). In this framework they differentiate between:

- Parents who support their children at home and are always actively involved in school activities, to the extent that they may even be part of the organizational bodies. This level of involvement is classified as a type one parent.
- The type two parents are regarded as parents who support their children at home but who are not actively involved in school activities. These types of parents can be reached through communication media such as newsletters, circulars, SMSs and telephone calls.
- Type three parents are parents who may attend parent evenings and who may even contribute enthusiastically to some school activities. These types of parents do not give their children any assistance with schoolwork after hours, and are difficult to recognise.
- The parents comprising type four are those who do not play an active role in their children's schooling. These are considered absent parents who are difficult to contact, regardless of the communication strategies employed.

2.5.4 Guidelines for parental support

In a circular distributed to primary schools across the Western Cape Province, the WCED communiqué clearly states: "[R]esearch has shown that one of the major contributing factors

for good academic performance at school is the involvement and support the child gets at home from parents or caregivers." It is for this reason that the WCED developed a brochure titled 'Guidelines for Parental Support in Literacy/Languages and Numeracy/Mathematics'. This document further provides parents/ caregivers with ideas on how to actively support their child to develop good language and mathematical skills, from an early grade.

These suggested guidelines of how parents can actively participate in their children's education are set out in the brochure. Suggested ways include: parents sharing family stories with learners, to enthusiastically engage them in attentive listening and meaningful construction. It is recommended that parents read to their children every day. Furthermore, parents can read using authentic information and/or texts on cereal boxes, tinned foods and cleaning material containers, and use creativity through games like "I spy with my little eye, something that starts with the letter…(name a letter)". This way parents can instil the love for reading in a fun way.

In the workshop programme, as devised by Van Niekerk (2007),she provides a series of games in which the whole family can participate. However, it is imperative considering the auditory and visual nature of these games, that parents should have their children's eyesight and hearing tested every year.

In addition, as a way of fostering a learning culture in households, parents can give books or magazines to their children as gifts for special occasions, such as birthdays. However, parents should structure such activities linked to these gifts, making time to read a bedtime story and spending time engaging with children on themes and lessons learned. It is imperative that parents praise their children for completed work, and for work done well to boost their self-confidence in learning. It is advisable that the whole family also join their local library, to foster a reading culture within the immediate family environment. The communiqué of the WCED further highlighted the key role of parents in making decisions, linking this to the educational goals set for the child at a very early stage in his/her life.

2.6   The importance of the home environment

The home milieu is a very important factor, especially as a support mechanism for learners to reach their potential in education. Parents can encourage their children to participate in hobbies of their choice, such as sewing, reading, cooking, carpentry and stamp collecting. The whole family can participate in various sports, and parents or teachers can encourage children to join a sports club to stimulate and mentor their social participation.

Family excursions can also widen children's horizons and worldviews. Educational outings to the Victoria & Alfred Waterfront, Parliament and/or the Planetarium can be used to contribute to a healthy home environment (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009:84-85). Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) suggest that parents and children should have discussions about what children experienced during their day, as such conversations and discussions can lead to stronger parent and child interaction. As parents have the responsibility and obligation to assist their children at home, the responsibility also implies that parents should act as guardians, and assume the role of co-educators (De Wit, 2007:11). De Wit (2007: 11) states that the above are central to securing the academic success of the learner, hence the reason why a positive home milieu is considered such a necessary space to assist the learner.

A solid support system at home is of utmost importance because the home is seen as the primary place and space of support, where the parent educates the child, as well as a space where the child learns and adopts certain behavioural patterns. This will determine how the child will react or behave later in school, and may influence how the child will respond to schoolwork. The attitude of the child towards schoolwork will stem from the home background. The purpose of the home is to provide the following: caring, training and general education. As the child grows older, s/he will carry this on into the school setup.

The environment, in which learners reside, plays an important role in the way their behaviour develops, and this can also be considered an influential factor impacting on the success of their academic endeavours. Wolfendale (1992:37) regards the home as "complementary to school-based learning" It is therefore important that the circumstances at home should be conducive to learning. The intervention homework programme conducted with the Grade 4 parents, complemented the learning that took place in the Grade 4 classroom.

In addressing the anomalies of learner deportment, Weeks (2005:40) observed a clear correlation between low social status and unacceptable behaviour. He refers to the following as possible reasons:

- Parents' minimal degree of education and menial position at work. This can be the result of parents themselves often not valuing the importance of schooling. This can give rise to learners feeling less motivated to achieve and behave well at school. Weeks (2005:40) acknowledges that this reason may not apply to all situations, as some less wealthy parents are opting for avenues to ensure that their children's performance is satisfactory at school.

In view of this, Jowett et al. (1991:18) encourage parents to become involved in their children's schooling activities, as this will give them an insight into their children's deportment at school level.

- Working conditions of parents are also considered a further reason, since long hours prevent parents from supervising the behaviour of their children, as well as ensuring that their schoolwork is completed at home. The behaviour of parents in selected cases was also not conducive to learning, as this was not considered model behaviour for their children to emulate. This kind of milieu can produce a fertile breeding ground for all sorts of criminal activities, such as gangsterism. Learners, from a young age, can unintentionally become involved in criminal activities, especially in cases where learners in such environments are exposed to incidences of brutality and raucous behaviour. In such cases, learners grow up with the idea that these kinds of behaviour are the norm, especially in cases where inappropriate behaviour is never reprimanded, therefore becoming acceptable.

Weeks (2005:40) continuously cautions that there is no "culture of learning" in such surroundings, because there is nothing that stimulates interest in education, as there are no good language models. If these factors are addressed adequately, learners can adopt a positive view of school and learning. Learners who are denied these encounters are inclined to view school as an unfriendly and difficult place to make sense of, and to belong to.

Christenson and Sheridan (2001:149) support this view. Parental involvement is crucial and parents should make an effort to become actively involved in the school activities of their children, so that the children can experience the school as a friendly and helpful place.

2.7   The importance of the school environment

Christenson and Sheridan (2001:102) refer to the "climate" at school as

> a relatively enduring quality of the internal environment of an organization
> that is experienced by its members, that can influence their behaviour and
> can be described in terms of their values of a particular set of characteristics
> of the organization.

Christenson and Sheridan. (2001) maintain that parental involvement can improve the atmosphere at school, if the values of the home are supportive of the value system within the school environment. Weeks (2005:41) contends that it is probable that the school's setting can initiate or avoid problems with regard to behaviour, in otherwise well-balanced learners.

This might impact positively or negatively on the schoolwork of learners. Walker, Ramsey and Gresham (2004:285) emphasise why the environment at school should be regarded as important, declaring, "teachers need to do everything possible to involve parents in the schooling process and to assist them in using this influence to motivate their children's school performance". Parental involvement in a child's schooling is "important [especially] for parents [who are] fully in the driving seat alongside teachers and other professionals" (Todd, 2007:68).

In essence, it is evident that the curriculum can be seen as a factor that can easily contribute to academic and social despondence, as learners who find the curriculum pointless or impractical, usually isolate themselves from the duty of learning, and may demonstrate several unacceptable modes of behaviour such as not paying attention in class, not doing their homework, not preparing for tests, and bunking school (truancy). With the implementation of the homework programme, children were assured of the input of their parents in their schoolwork as the programme allowed parents to participate (Weeks, 2005:41).

If the curriculum does not mirror a learner's culture, home language, unique history and experiences of life, then the parents and learners would find it extraordinarily difficult, as they would be unable to easily identify with the content presented. It would in this instance be advisable for educators to convey the study material in such a way that it always has authentic significance for the learners. In essence, it is important that the subject matter should at all times be relevant and conceptually accessible to the learner, and for teachers to make lessons more relevant, stimulating and consequential. The intervention programme, as designed and developed by Van Niekerk (2007),corresponded with the learners' everyday lives, as it dealt with topics like school, being late for school, shopping, the city, and so forth.

2.8   The benefits of partnerships between home, school and community

Cox-Petersen (2011: 4) is of the opinion that a partnership should be beneficial to all parties involved and refers to a partnership as "an agreement where two or more people or groups work together towards mutual goals".

These mutual goals refer parents' involvement in their children's schooling and in doing so, increasing their children's reading and reasoning abilities. Two-way communication regarding homework and children's schooling, which is very important, can be facilitated if educators talk to parents about their mutual goals. Such initiatives may reinforce and promote literacy activities at home, such as shared reading and reading aloud. These goals can improve the

literacy levels of children. In Bloom's Taxonomy, the focus is largely on the different levels of thinking. This may include some information on ways that the homework might support the goals of the parents and the school (Walker et al. 2004:5). In this instance, parents might be encouraged by the educator to comment on their child's performance in assignments. Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009:12) note:

> Effective schools communicate with parents in terms that make sense to them; they provide a range of appropriate opportunities for parents to see their children's work and discuss their progress; they help parents in providing practical encouragement and support for their children's school learning.

Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) aver that parents, learners and teachers should construct an awareness of mutual identity and "common purpose" that will emphasise the mutual goals. Christenson and Sheridan (2001:37) endorse this view, noting that partnerships have reference to "a mutual effort towards a shared goal". This implies that families and teachers need to work together by sharing their responsibilities in the interest of the learners.

Todd (2007:70) refers to the models of partnership between the home and school by illustrating their importance in the formation of such partnerships.
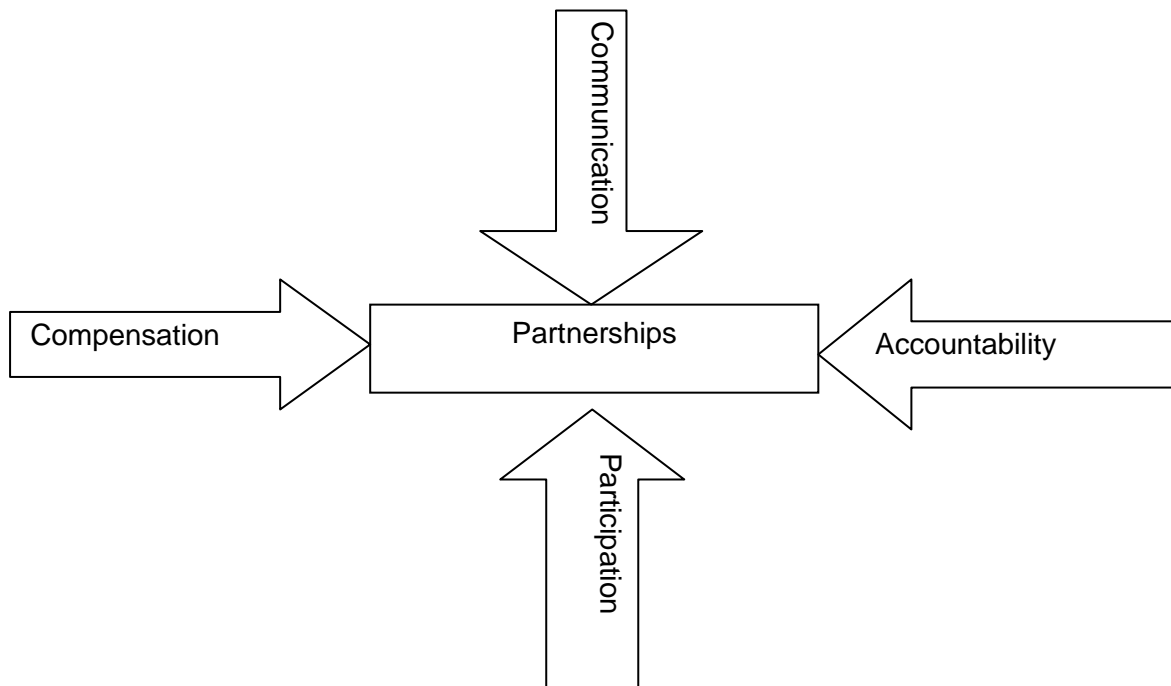
Figure 2.1: Models of partnership (Todd, 2007:70)

Todd (2007:70) explains the different models of the partnership:

Compensation is an underlying belief that inequality in education might be overcome without structural changes, by changing attitudes; parental interest is therefore crucial for any achievements. Teachers have the task to facilitate greater involvement of parents and parents need the involvement of professionals. As far as communication is concerned, the parents' involvement is dependent upon the level of information that parents have about the school and about the progress of their children. They need to look for opportunities for communication and to develop them in their most effective form. The participation aspect emphasises the goals and complementary roles of teachers and parents, and these assume a partnership of equals.

Consequently, the homework programme at the research site was introduced to the parents, so that all stakeholders involved could benefit from it. This met both the academic, social and cognitive demands of the learners, while empowering the parents in the process. Homework has advantages for parents and children. It affords learners a second opportunity to do the necessary revision and to equip them to do preparations for the following day's lesson. As a result, homework can cause a stronger parent-and-child relationship to develop. According to Eita (2007:18), the purpose of homework is to create a sense of educational partnership with parents. Cox-Petersen (2011:06) concurs: "Educational partnerships take time and effort to develop, but once they are developed and sustained, the benefits are endless for all groups and individuals."

Considering the theoretical framework consulted for this study, it is evident that learners can benefit from a partnership between the home and school, especially in instances where the aim is to improve the learning processes of learners, with the help of their parents, and in liaison with the teacher. Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009:14) mirror this view: "[T]he people who benefit most from an effective working relationship between teachers and families are children." They found that children show improvement in their academic achievements, when their parents are interested in their schoolwork. Cox-Petersen (2011:8) is of the opinion that learners will benefit from such a partnership by gaining "higher achievement and motivation to learn, and [having] a positive attitude towards school", as well as a "better quality [of] homework". It is evident from her study that parents who are actively involved in their children's schoolwork will ensure that their children feel secure, and in this way decrease the chances of their children becoming possible drop-outs.

A positive atmosphere can be created between the home and the school if there is active collaboration between the parent and teacher. If parents understand the responsibility of the

teacher, then they also have a much clearer perception of what is expected of them in the context of such a support programme. Programmes, such as the one used in the study, will also boost the parents' "self-confidence about their ability to work in a school and with the learners" (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009:80). Parents and family members will feel valued and respected by the school and this will enhance parent and teacher relationships.

Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009:71) further note: "[T]he needs of the school should be identified in order to determine how parent volunteers can be used to address these needs." These needs can encompass children who need help with reading, or with homework activities.

Parents and other family members can become involved in helping with these needs through fundraising initiatives, and/or other school activities, such as sports and/or with maintenance of the school building. The parents can then actively engage in their children's schoolwork by assisting at school, thereby immersing themselves in their children's schooling. Parents, for example, can assist in the classroom where teachers have large numbers of learners, to allow the teacher to spend additional time on other important activities such as teaching. Parents can assist in unpacking and setting up apparatus, or clearing up in classrooms. It is important that these parents be seen as helpers and not as 'surrogates' for the teacher. Teachers can also make use of other parents, on the condition that they possess key skills, to assist in classrooms at school.

Parental involvement through established partnerships with schools can be viewed as an equally "empowering experience" for all, that is, the learners, the parents and the educators (Ingram & Worrall, 1993:82).According to Walker et al. (2004:2), different stakeholders (learners, parents and educators) within school communities can play an important role in facilitating learner involvement in homework. These stakeholders can be educators and/or any other professionals who work within the spaces of children's education, as well as parents. Although this emphasises the levels of responsibility to a large extent, a higher sense of responsibility lies in getting the parents involved in their children's schoolwork and for them to successfully attain the outcomes.

Cox-Petersen (2011:21) indicates that schools, the school community, and parents constitute a partnership, as they all play an immense part in the education of children. Some of the activities are shared, whereas some are separate. Some of the shared activities noted by Cox-Petersen (2011:21) include "social skills, communication, work ethics, character education and safety". In addition, shared responsibilities include "academic content, school rules, culture and home rules". For the relationships to flourish, on-involvement of parents should be avoided if educators and other stakeholders such as non-governmental

organisations (NGOs) and religious groups take into consideration language and cultural differences. These entities can offer parents various ways to communicate with the school and, in doing so, parents might find it easier to be of help at school or at home.

In addition to the importance of literacy, Leonhardt (1993:50) contends that being a brilliant reader enhances the child's self-image, and that stakeholders such as parents and teachers should acknowledge the child's achievements. In Leonhardt's view, parents should be encouraged to ask children for their views of stories read. This will show parents the child's level of interest towards what was read.

The Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) classifies literacy as "the ability to read and use written information and to write for different purposes". The RNCS further identifies 'literacy' as "part of a general ability to make sense of one's world" (DoE, 2002:127). Literacy, according to Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009:91), is also seen "as the ability to read with understanding and express oneself both verbally and in writing". These policies suggest that children should have sufficient practice in their literacy skills after school, if they want to ensure that they have enough transferable skills to complement the professional demands needed outside. However, according to the READ Educational Trust (2009:4), there are no common classifications and specifications of literacy, although the most collective definition is the competency to read and write at a particular age. Supplementary to this, the READ Educational Trust (2009:4) contends, "literacy [as a practice] is no longer exclusively understood as an individual phenomenon, but is seen also as a contextual and societal one". Today, the spectrum of literacy includes:

- alphabetical literacy, which refers to a person's being able to write his or her own name;
- functional reading and writing literacy, which allows a person to read or write on the most elementary and basic levels of everyday life.

The spectrum of literacy further includes:
- social literacy that empowers one to read, write and communicate effectively using the cultural language of a particular community (e.g., social and linguistic norms, unspoken communication customs, etc.);
- information literacy, which requires people to use critical thinking skills to locate, evaluate and use information in order to become independent learners;

- digital information literacy and emerging literacies such as computer, network, software, visual, multimedia, audio, tool, and Internet literacy (READ Educational Trust, 2009:4).

2.8.1 The school organisation

According to Weeks (2005:42), the institution and regulations of the school should create meaning relevant to the learners, so that they are able to accept and respect these. Learners can become rebellious if confronted with too many rules, or if the rules have become redundant, especially if utilised in a punitive and/or domineering way. This could later result in poor performance at school. Sands et al. (2000:337) share the same sentiment regarding the school as an organisation:"To teach learners how to think and be more strategic in their learning, teachers must structure, direct, model and facilitate overt opportunities for them to develop, use and evaluate their own critical thinking and learning strategies."

2.8.2 The atmosphere at the school (school ethos)

The general atmosphere of a school carries the message that all learners are important, that they are respected, and that a great deal is expected of them. This type of atmosphere brings out the best in learners. It is therefore of utmost importance that learners from different family types and different cultures feel welcome within a school environment.

According to Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009:154), there are many explanations why children are raised in families with diverse settings such as single parents, extended families and nuclear families. They suggest that, considering these types of family dynamics and their influences on learner characteristics, teachers should offer constructive assistance to parents. These types of assistance can be in the form of consistent and flexible avenues, for example, for meetings. Many single parents often find it difficult to attend meetings due to work or other commitments. Teachers should show a positive attitude towards children from a single-parent family. The school should, in such cases, provide transport for parents where needed for PTA meetings. In collaboration with the single parent, the teacher can then discuss behavioural problems and compile a list of suggestions regarding discipline and parenting competence to assist the parent with the cognitive development of the child.

In families where children are in the custody of their grandparents, teachers should be supportive to such an extent that grandparent-teacher liaisons enhance the atmosphere of learning for the learner. One of the ways could be where teachers "recognise custodial

grandparents as primary caregivers" (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009:156). Teachers should update information such as the contact details of grandparents on a regular basis. Informative meetings regarding the curriculum and other important matters should also be conveyed to the grandparents. Special social events such as honouring grandparents can be held at school. Volunteers at school can assist grandparents to complete relevant forms, and support grandparents administratively, as far as possible.

2.8.3   A positive and inviting school climate

Parents need to feel welcome at the school to ensure that they visit the school without feeling self-conscious and insecure, as they might feel intimidated by teachers. Parents need to feel motivated to pay a visit to the school. Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009:138) suggest that schools organise a "parent involvement action team" which should supplement and support effective parental involvement. If parents are not able to communicate because of language challenges at the school, someone needs to assist them to communicate effectively. Most parents are aware of this shortcoming and bring an interpreter along when visiting the school, and this should be encouraged. If parents' dress code (e.g. traditional dress or working clothes) makes them feel uncomfortable, the school should ensure that all attempts are made to make them feel accepted.

2.8.4   The teacher

Since, for the greater part of the day, learners are under the supervision of teachers at school, the impact of teachers on the behaviour of learners is extremely important. It is expected of educators to ensure that learners are safe, as they spend most of their time at school. Connolly et al. (1995:10) maintain that the rights of children have previously not been fully acknowledged. The situation at school should be free from exploitation and should be "uplifting", "stimulating", "safe" and "secure", as learners have the right to feel protected at school.

2.9   Homework policies

Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009:87) are of the opinion that "homework is the reason why parents' guide and oversee the homework activities at home as homework plays an integral part of the 'learning process'". In the WCED context, guidelines also provide information on homework policies, and how teachers should monitor, and parents should discuss schoolwork at home. These guidelines provide information on how to assist learners to improve skills in various class and school assessments. Suggested guidelines include the

use of a regular schedule for homework that requires learners to discuss with their families what they are learning in class. Activity calendars, diaries or homework books with activities for parents and learners should be provided to parents. Coleman (2013:62) states that such calendars should serve two objectives, that is, serve as "reminders about upcoming family involvement activities, workshops, events and parent-teacher conferences", and provide an outline of straightforward and concise educational activities which the parent and child can do at home, but which are correlated with work done at school.

2.9.1   Parental efficacy relating to homework

Efficacy, relating to parental involvement in the educational sense, has reference to the effectiveness of parents in assisting their children with homework. Green and Hoover-Dempsey (2007:265) state that some parents want to become so involved with their children's schooling, that they embark on home-schooling their children. In doing so, they become highly engaged with their children's education. They are of the opinion that "these parents have a strong sense of efficacy supporting their beliefs that they can teach their children and give them a full education outside of an organised school system". Coleman (2013:78) views self-efficacy "as the core belief that we possess the skills and knowledge needed to work collaboratively with families in advancing children's education". In the National Reading Strategy (DoE, 2008:9), the important influences that the educational backgrounds of parents have on the achievement of a child are documented. Parents who have a solid educational background will be able to assist their children with their schoolwork with greater ease.

In the National Reading Strategy document, policy implementers highlight with concern that uneducated or functionally literate parents find it difficult to assist their children if they themselves do not understand the various tasks at hand. With regard to the level of the parents' education, Mofoka (2004:58) notes, "all principals attribute poor involvement to poor level of education". Mofoka (2004) maintains that parents often feel intimidated by the language used by teachers". It is evident that the language used by teachers should facilitate greater understanding between the parent and child, rather than cause a linguistic and pedagogical divide in terms of teaching and learning.

2.9.2   The attitudes of parents towards their children's schoolwork

It is crucial for parents to have a positive attitude as far as their children's schoolwork is concerned, as a negative attitude can be detrimental to their children's education. Bippus (2005:49) cautions teachers and principals:

> Even when educational reformers do consider what may be done to help children being raised by irresponsible parents, they generally focus instead on strategies to hold schools more accountable. Instead of addressing parent accountability, the reformers ignore the worst of parenting.

Walker et al. (2004:6) maintain adults can have an impact on children's enthusiasm with regard to homework activities, by giving them honest praise for the work, and explicit feedback and advice when their performance is sub-standard. Parents can show their support towards their children, boosting self-confidence and a level of selfhood, by assuring them that they (the parents) know the child is able to do the work, based on instances from current learning situations.

2.10   The stakeholders in facilitating reading

According to the National Reading Strategy (DoE, 2008:18), "The Department of Education should continuously promote reading campaigns with all its educators, principals, district officials and parent communities". This document further suggests that the following stakeholders should take a more pro-active role in facilitating reading competence among learners in general.

(a)   Firstly, the child is fundamental to improving his or her reading capability. Ultimately it is the child who should want to improve, so that s/he can read fluently and with comprehension.

(b)   Secondly, the teacher has to actively teach reading, supported by the principal and school management team (SMT). These stakeholders should establish a milieu that endorses reading and the teaching of reading.

(c)   Thirdly, parents and the community need to value reading and books. Wherever possible, they should read to their children and encourage them to practise reading.

(d)   Finally, the Department of Education (DoE) at all levels, national, provincial and district, must provide the necessary resources and support required for the National Reading Strategy to succeed.

The diagram below depicts important stakeholders in the teaching and promotion of reading among learners:
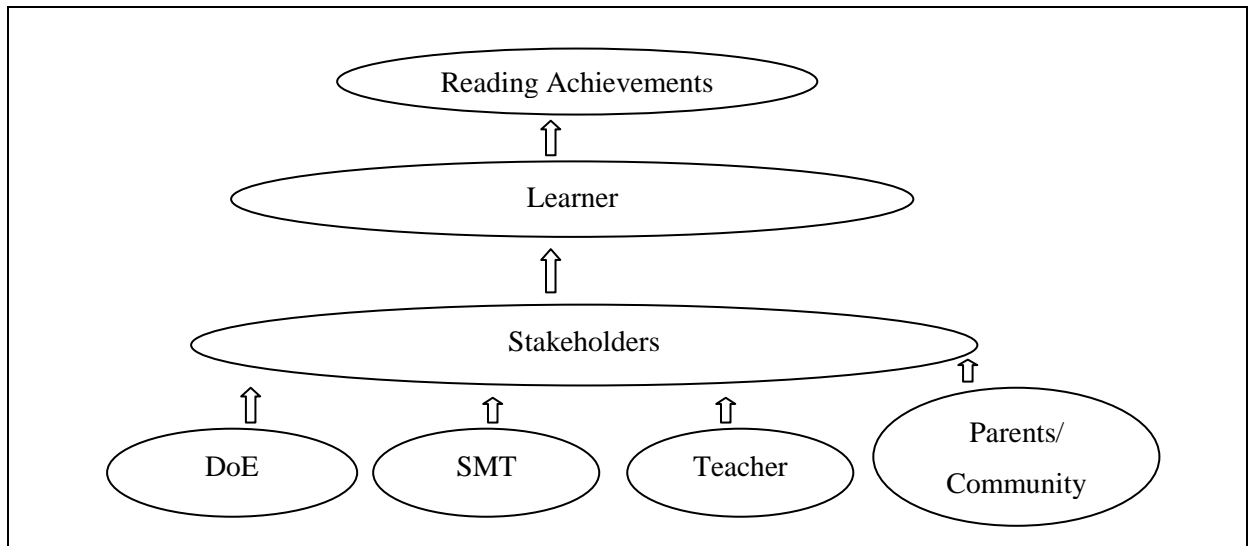
Figure 2.2: Stakeholders in teaching and learning (adapted from DoE, 2008:13)

2.10.1   Family involvement in literacy

The literacy activities of families differ. Whereas some parents opt for excursions and academic literature, some parents and family members read newspaper articles, books, magazines, recipes etc. In most African cultures, parents tell or read stories to their children, and in more affluent areas, households would engage with computers and various types of technology. Other families may have an inadequate number of literacy activities for a number of reasons. One of the reasons may be that there are some parents who cannot read well, or who cannot read at all. Other reasons may include a lack of developmentally appropriate literacy material like books, newspapers, and magazines. In South Africa, the technological divide is still wide and most households do not have access to reliable networks and electronic resources. However, regardless of the affordability of technology and resources, it is still recommended that families do become involved in their children's literacy at home and at school.

Lilly and Green (2004:97) make mention of "a model for parental involvement in literacy", a model devised and modified into different levels for parents to participate in the literacy of their children, to strengthen the partnership between home and school. The model also includes suggestions for literacy strategies at each level.

Table 2.1: Involving families in children's literacy (Lilly & Green, 2004:98)

Level	Description	Literacy Strategies
Level One: Parenting	Families provide the primary literacy environment for their children. Teachers can support families with basic child-rearing information and activities that are complementary with home literacy practices.	• Literacy portraits • Family literacy workshops
Level Two: Communication	Teachers have an obligation to engage in regular written and oral communication with families. Ongoing communication creates a continuing dialogue about literacy practices that flows between home and preschool settings	• Newsletters & calendars • Literacy brochures • Travelling friend • Literacy dialogue journals
Level Three: Volunteering	Working caregivers and those who stay at home need opportunities to participate in the literacy lives of their children, at day care and preschool. A variety of experiences and times for involvement will foster family contributions.	• Literacy helpers • Family stories • Family albums
Level Four: Learning at Home	Families vary in their perceptions about literacy, their home routines, and the ability to work with their children. Teachers need to suggest home literacy activities that are relevant to the children and families with whom they work.	• Home visits • Home-learning activities • Family lending library

Botha et al. (2006:235) concur: parental involvement, where parents are supported by the school, can lead to and complement an "optimum learning environment at home". Botha et al. (2006) recommend that schools should continuously "convey and receive messages to and from parents," to such a degree that communication channels between the school and home are established and strengthened. Botha et al. (2006) view the aspect of volunteering as important, and describe volunteering as the "recruitment and organizing of parental help". They refer to the learning at home as "the school's role in improving the capacity of parents to help their children at home with their school work".

2.10.2 Language and cultural differences

Landsberg et al. (2005:37) refer to the cultural differences in South Africa, claiming there is an abundance of evidence indicating that cultural differences exist among South Africa's

diverse population, and negatively impacting on language development. Landsberg et al. (2005:37) refer to the diversity grouped in the category of ethnicity, which runs concurrently with the difference in multilingualism and spoken languages.

2.10.3   English as a First Additional Language

In this study, the school where the research took place uses Afrikaans as the official language of learning and teaching (LoLT). In order to address the demands of various foreign nationals, English literacy is utilised as a conduit to transfer knowledge, owing to the language diversity at the research site. Landsberg et al. (2005:153) suggest that the following important question should be asked, which can shed light on barriers to learning that English First Additional Language learners may experience, namely: "How does the home language differ from the LoTL (i.e. the phonological and linguistic demands of each language)?"

At the research site, some of learners speak the same language at home as the LoTL, which in this case is Afrikaans. For other learners, their mother tongue differs from the LoTL. Sanders (2006:74) states that efforts, such as extra time in classes, additional classes and/or other interventions, should be implemented to accommodate learners whose additional language is English. In this way, the school is able to accommodate such learners, using English as a vehicle to equip the parents of Grade 4 learners, and to address the challenges of language diversity.

According to Landsberg et al. (2005:153), various aspects in terms of language literacies can be addressed, that can shed light on the challenges of English as a First Additional Language, especially in terms of what learners may experience. Some of these aspects may include that the languages in which the learners converse at the research site, are the languages that parents and family members are most familiar with, and can express themselves in academically and/or socially. At the school, although Afrikaans serves as medium of instruction, English is taught as the First Additional Language. All educators at the research site are bilingual and the parents and learners' peers are used as interpreters if the need arises.   At the research site the learners are exposed to English in the Foundation Phase, from Grade 1to Grade 3. The Intermediate Phase includes Grade 4 to Grade 6, while the Senior Phase constitutes Grade 7. Krouse (1994:355-362) includes under communication skills:

- Listening skills, which comprise phonic discrimination, understanding a passage and yes/no type answers.
- Speaking skills such as pronunciation, intonation, directed response, rejoinders (expressions of social courtesy), stylised idiomatic expressions, conversational responses, directions, descriptions.
- Narrations.

According to Krouse (1994:355-362), reading skills are much broader than conventional perception, and include oral reading, comprehension, and verse speaking, whereas writing skills comprise completing sentences, creative writing, spelling and language use, all regarded as skills with which learners communicate (Landsberg et al., 2005:154). In addition, the READ Educational Trust (2009:25) refers to every class at school as a "language classroom". This document contends that every classroom should be "print-rich, with text sources appropriate to the learning area and grade". Lilly and Green (2004:10) support this view: "When there are books, magazines, newspapers, newspapers advertisements, and/or electronic print resources around the home and preschool, children develop the idea that letters and words are important and that they convey meaning." Lilly and Green (2004:10) further note, "language and repetition of books create patterns that appeal to children and help them in their learning".

2.10.4   Support for English as First Additional Language learners

According to the Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R–9(schools): Languages: English – First Additional Language (DoE, 2002:4):

> Learners need to become competent in their additional language and at the same time maintain and develop their home language. The home language should be used for learning and teaching at all times. It is stated that where learners' home language is a language other than the language of learning and teaching, the LoTL should be introduced in Grade 1 (Landsberg et al., 2005:155).

In this regard, it is evident that a triadic relationship between parent-learner-school is important, as the First Additional Language can play a pivotal role by allowing the child to feel secure, especially while engaging communicatively with the language. Landberg et al. (2005:155) recommend, "teachers need to encourage a climate of acceptance of these learners by their peers by explaining that the multilingual learners need to learn in their second language and that they need to be proud of their home language". This viewpoint is important, as language can serve as a form of intellectual capital, and if the mother tongue of

the learner is not respected, it will hinder self-confidence, especially in oral work and/or class interaction. This lack of confidence can easily be relayed to written work.

2.10.5   Second language learning in a multicultural classroom

The READ Educational Trust (2009:21) refers to the language in education policy as "a guide to develop language literacy". To complement learning, classrooms may be divided into centres for writing, computer and listening activities (the latter two to integrate digital literacy practices at an early stage), based on various topics for a limited time (week/month), so that learners can rotate and be exposed to various aspects of learning. These activities can include the sharing of books and resources, conversations, art projects, thinking, and writing activities, and volunteers such as a parent, grandparent or learners who can assist. Plenty of scrap paper, headphones, tape recorders, and a television set and video recorder may be considered useful, as these can act as educational stimuli in the classroom.

2.10.6   Teacher's attitude towards the importance of preparation for an additional language lesson

Lesson plans, especially considering the additional language aspects, may be compiled in such a way that the outcomes motivate the learners to do their best. Landsberg et al. (2005:157) outline certain criteria that a lesson plan should contain, namely the learning area, learning area integration, learning outcomes, assessment standards, activities, teaching methods, learning activity, resources and a timeframe. It could also contain curriculum adaptations, adapted teaching methods, adapted learner activities, adapted resources and adapted time frames. The following could also be included in second language lesson plans to assess the learning designs, resources and materials, namely explicit assessment activities, assessment methods, assessment techniques and resources.

In addition, educators should have an affirmative approach toward the learner's home language and culture, as it is essential that educators maintain lessons at the appropriate level. If educators have a positive approach, a positive atmosphere will radiate and create an environment conducive to learning.

2.11   Homework space and monitoring tools

It is important that learners be allowed to conduct their homework and preparation in comfortable spaces conducive to learning. According to The National Reading Strategy (DoE, 2008:13), the different stakeholders (including parents) could ensure (as far as

possible) that ample and sufficient space be provided for the learners to do their homework. These spaces could include a comfortable and quiet environment where distractions are minimal. Ticknor (2007:6) supports this, proposing that parents establish a homework routine by setting a specific time each day to ensure that homework is dealt with and completed. Consistent rules should be maintained for the completion of homework. It is important that learners should not be distracted while they do their homework. If circumstances at home are not conducive to work, teachers or other stakeholders could intervene to provide a comfortable and relaxed atmosphere, and a space suitable for learners to complete their homework after school or at a communal place.

Stakeholders can implement different forms of monitoring homework:

- Sign-off sheets where parents or other responsible adults or caregivers need to sign after completion of the homework.
- Comments and remarks forms.
- Suggestion forms.

The intervention programme that the researcher implemented at the research site was aimed at assisting parents in scaffolding the learning processes of their children, to equip them to become independent thinkers. The homework programme was based on Bloom's Taxonomy, which addresses the different levels of thinking.

Table 2.2: An overview of Bloom's Taxonomy, adapted from Van der Horst and McDonald (1997:37-38)

LEVEL SIX	Evaluation
LEVEL FIVE	Synthesis
LEVEL FOUR	Analysis
LEVEL THREE	Application
LEVEL TWO	Comprehension
LEVEL ONE	Knowledge

Coleman (2013:163) argues that the teacher should also "acknowledge achievements" of learners in class: "In addition to reporting a child's individual achievement, you might emphasize her or his hard work and contribution to the success of the class as a whole."

2.12   Action research

Somekh and Zeichner (2009:6) explain action research as a model "developed in Europe and the USA in the first half of the twentieth century … its take up in many countries can be seen as a product of the 'World of Flows', a modern-day approach to educational reform". Somekh and Zeichner (2009:6) further explain that action research "brings along an independent obligation to oppose domination and cultivate and maintain justice". In a study conducted by Henry and Kemmis (1985:3), they state that action research is a learning process that is systematic. The researcher is focused on the relevance of action research and critical theory, in order to emancipate the participants and to explore to what extent it can be seen as "radical and emancipatory" (Horkheimer, 1972:208).

Stringer (2008:1) states: "Action research is a distinctive approach to inquiry that is directly relevant to classroom instruction and learning."Action research therefore "provides the means for teachers to enhance their teaching and improve learning" (Stringer, 2008:1).The listening and language homework programme of Van Niekerk (2007) was therefore based on an action research model, as the teacher (researcher) wanted to improve her teaching at the research site. In order to gauge the effect of such a programme, Riding et al. (1995:1) caution that "a methodical, iterative approach embracing problem identification, action planning, implementation, evaluation, and reflection" should be considered and that the insights gained from the initial cycle, should then feed into the planning of the second cycle, for which an action plan should be modified and the research process repeated again. Mahani and Molki (2012:211) contend that action research is conducted through a "series of cyclical or spiral stages". They further suggest that it allows the researcher "to go backward and forward throughout the cyclical process until a desirable solution is reached". Munn-Giddings (2012:72) supports this viewpoint: "The action research (AR) process is one that continually alternates between enquiry and action."

2.13   The steps in the action research cycle

The steps in the research cycle consist of various stages: the planning stage, the acting stage, the observation stage, and the reflecting stage. The stages are further described below.

2.13.1   Planning stage

Mahani and Molki (2012:211) indicate that the planning stage in the action research cycle is where the researcher identifies the problem, and acknowledges that a change of action is

required. The researcher noticed that parental involvement were lacking and thought of ways to get the parents involved as OBE expected teachers to give homework to learners. Planning is also the first stage within the Riding et al. (1995:1) cycle, and involves an analysis of the problem before a strategic plan of action is compiled (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988:11). During the planning stage of this study, the researcher evaluated the existing situation and found that parents struggled to assist learners with their homework. The researcher therefore devised ways of how to have a constructive influence that would be beneficial to both the parent and learner.

2.13.2   Acting stage

This stage involves the implementation of the strategic plan (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988:12). The homework programme was implemented, and consisted of six sessions of one hour each. During these sessions, parents were equipped with ways of how to assist their children with homework. Parents were encouraged to interact with both teacher and learner during the implementation phases of the programme, as action research is specially suited to research in education, since it is about changing the researcher's practice and also about learning.

2.13.3   Observing stage

During this phase, the observer (educator) should be consistent with the monitoring aspect, and take notes on what was implemented and do pro-active planning (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988:13). The educator observed, through monitoring, how the parents interacted with the programme. Observations of how the learners responded to the programme were done in class context, and learners' performances were monitored accordingly.

2.13.4   Reflecting stage

Hong and Lawrence (2011:3) view the reflecting stage as a significant component of self-study, which means it takes place in the researcher's own practice, and "lends itself to a qualitative inquiry". The researcher planned the next sessions in advance and made the necessary adjustments (based on observations) accordingly, to allow parents a better opportunity to interact with the content and scaffold the learning processes of the learners. This stage reflects on the outcomes (results) of the evaluation, according to Kemmis and McTaggart (1988:13).
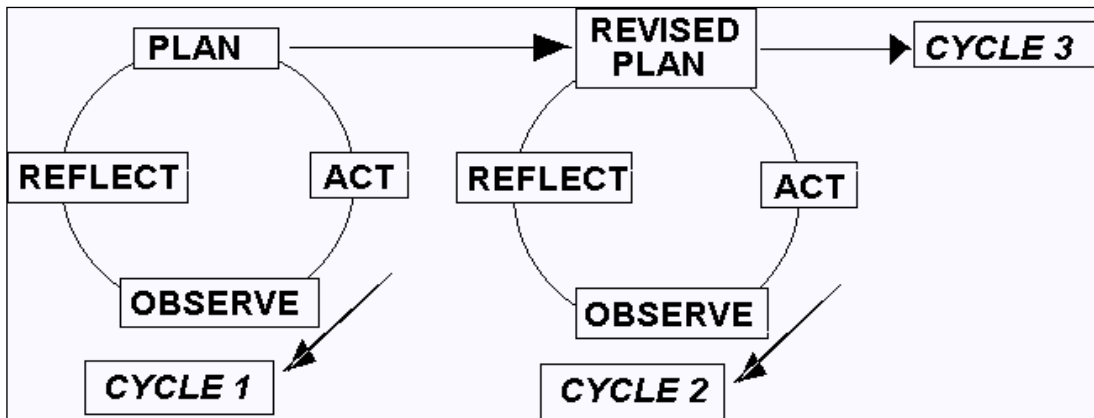
Figure 2.3: The action research cycle (Riding et al., 1995)

In addition, the six-step action research model of Ferrance (2000:8) entails that educators will embark on a cycle of asking questions, gathering information, reflecting, and choosing a schedule of activities.
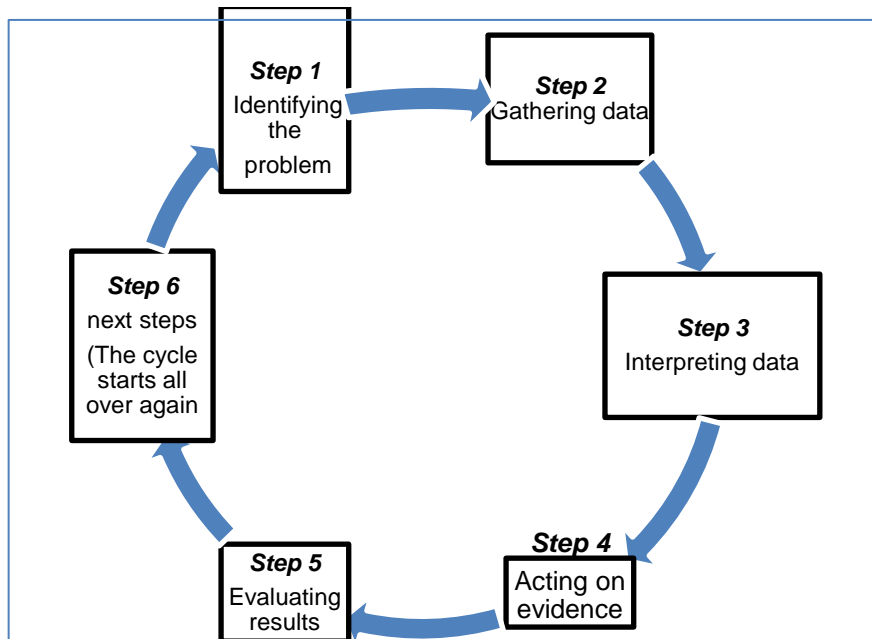
Figure 2.4: Ferrance's adapted Action Research Model (2000)

The six-step cycle, sketched by Ferrance (2000:8), reflects the processes where the researcher discovers what is wrong with the current situation (the problem), collects the information (data), understands the data, then acts on the data. The data is then reflected upon (evaluated) and this is then the starting point of the next cycle (2) where the whole process will start over again. For the purpose of this study, Ferrance's model was implemented in Chapter 3.

2.14   Conclusion

In this chapter, it is evident from the literature that parental involvement, the relationship between the home and the school, and the effectiveness of literacy development are all key elements in assisting learners with their academic endeavours. The relationship between the school, home, and school community is paramount. Parents should therefore be supported in assisting their children, and their support should be structured and acknowledged, so that their effectiveness can impact on their children's learning. The next chapter focuses on research design and the methods used in this study.

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

3.1   Introduction

This chapter focuses on the research design and framework used for the research questions, aims and objectives of this study. The qualitative research design framework was used as a way of ascertaining how the parents of Grade 4 learners could be supported, when assisting their children with English literacy homework tasks and activities.

In this study, an intervention programme was used as an instrument, using English (as subject area), to establish common ground in parental involvement activities. This chapter includes a discussion on the research design and methodological framework used by the researcher, and the process of obtaining the relevant data is explained. Furthermore, this chapter highlights key points of action research as it relates to the critical theory paradigm used in this study.

3.2   Research questions

The following research questions were addressed:

- How can parents be supported to assist their children with English literacy homework?
- What strategies can be implemented to involve parents of Grade 4 learners with English literacy homework?

3.3   The research site

The research site is a primary school, based in the southern suburbs of the Cape Peninsula, with 290 registered primary school learners. Although the school is situated in an affluent area in the broader Cape Town area, most learners come from very poor socio-economic circumstances. Many live in informal settlements or on farms where their parents work as farm labourers.

The school has quite a number of multilingual learners. Many children speak Afrikaans and isiXhosa as a first language. Amid these difficult circumstances, the school still continues to operate as a symbol of hope for underprivileged learners. Initially classified as a "coloured

school" (Union of South Africa, 1911:105), many of the families residing in the immediate surroundings of the school were affected by the forced removal laws of the 1960s. Since then the school has become a commuter school. Learners make use of different modes of transport such as farm and public transport to travel to and from school. Financial constraints impact on transport to and from school, often resulting in high absenteeism and irregular attendance rates of learners.

The school comprises Grade R to Grade 7 learners, with only one class per grade. The family composition of the learners ranges from single parents and nuclear families to extended families. Parental involvement at the research site was virtually non-existent prior to the intervention programme. The reasons, as shared by parents, were mainly due to different parenting patterns, low self-esteem with regard to subject knowledge, and low educational levels of parents; also, most were not acquainted with the OBE framework and expectations. Parents also mentioned work-related issues such as long hours during harvest time on the neighbouring wine farms, which also prevented their providing concentrated support to their children. Parents who reside outside the area indicated that they made use of different modes of transport, and that the lack of finances in many instances negatively impacted on their participation and involvement in their children's schoolwork.

The data collected at the research site took the form of questionnaires, a focus group interview with parents, and data obtained from learners' homework books. The respondents consisted of parents whose children were in Grade 4 at the research site at the time the research was conducted. There were 38 learners enrolled for the Grade 4 class, consisting of 18 girls and 20 boys. The learners came from diverse backgrounds, and comprised a variety of cultural and language groups.

Based on the information obtained from the school's CEMIS, it is evident that diversity is not only found in terms of family dynamics and socio-economic circumstances, but is also reflected in terms of home languages, migration status, and level of poverty, as indicated in the table below.

Table 3.1: A statistical breakdown of the sample group of learners

Medium of instruction	Afrikaans
Second language of instruction	English
Learners' mother tongue:	N=38
Afrikaans	26
English	2
isiXhosa	8
chiShona	2
Number of learners that reside with both parents	19
Number of learners who reside with a single parent	8
Number of learners who reside with a single parent within extended family	6
Number of learners who reside with a guardian	2
Number of learners who reside with grandparents	3
Number of immigrants	2
Number of learners that receive a social grant	16
Number of learners that benefit from the school's nutrition programme	34

3.4   Research design

The research design in this study was devised in such a way that information obtained would constructively and ethically align with the research design framework.

Fouché and De Vos (2005) define research design as the plan that the researcher intends to use when conducting his/her research. In this case, the researcher opted for a case study, based on an identified action research model, as applied to the parents of a group of 38 learners in Grade 4 from a school in the Western Cape. The researcher engaged with research participants (parents) on an on-going basis via SMSs and telephone, and by having informal conversations. The research design employed a qualitative research approach, and relevant data was obtained from research instruments in the form of self-administered questionnaires. In the focus group interview, respondents were asked to share their opinions

and concerns about the intervention programme, to ascertain how educators could best support them to assist with their children's homework.

3.4.1   Research instruments

The research instruments consisted of a set of multiple data resources, to inform the educator about her learners' performance. In this study, it became evident that parents were the critical stakeholders, and it was necessary to juxtapose our own practices and our learners' performance against exemplary research-based practices in similar settings (as supported by Calhoun, 2009). The instruments employed consisted of self-administered questionnaires, homework sessions with parents, a focus group interview, observations of parents and learners in the natural class setting, CASS marks of learners, and field notes.

3.4.1.1 Self-administered questionnaires

Each of the 38 parents of the Grade 4 class received a questionnaire compiled by the researcher. The questionnaire consisted of seven questions. The aim of the questionnaire was to ascertain the parents' perceptions of their ability to assist their children with homework. This questionnaire was themed based on observational enquiries, as the researcher noticed that parents struggled to assist their children with the homework given in class. It was expected of the parents to choose the option to which they were most able to relate. The questionnaire made provision for the parents, to substantiate their views when answering certain questions.

3.4.1.2 The listening and language homework programme, level 2 (Van Niekerk, 2007)

The listening and language homework programme identified as an intervention, was devised by Liesel van Niekerk (2007) and consists of 28 different themes. Each theme comprises different language skills: reading, reasoning, memory and vocabulary skills. It also corresponds with the different levels of thinking, as stipulated in Bloom's Taxonomy. The researcher decided to utilise this homework programme as an intervention mechanism, to equip parents of the Grade 4 learners to assist their children with their homework. The aim was to actively involve parents with their children's school- work, yet in a way that was relevant and fun. In this study, cognitive engagement was crucial, especially as a way of supporting parents through the homework programme, and the six sessions held on selected Saturdays.

3.4.1.3 The focus group interview

Nine of the parents (respondents) of the Grade 4 class were selected to constitute a parental focus group at the end of the session. The researcher compiled a questionnaire to determine if the intervention programme had been successful or not. Combined with the self-administered questionnaires, the focus group interview served as the third tool to collect additional information.

3.4.1.4 Observation

This took place during the homework sessions with parents. The researcher observed respondents while the sessions were in progress, and made copious notes as parents responded and interacted during the sessions. The learners of those parents who attended the sessions were also observed during formal contact time at school.

3.4.1.5 Documentary evidence (CASS marks)

According to OBE guidelines, it is expected that each learner's work (tasks) be assessed formatively. The researcher did just that by using the learners' Cass marks.

3.4.1.6 Field notes

The researcher kept field notes derived from informal discussions with parents, as well as discussions with her colleagues and WCED officials regarding the involvement of parents with homework issues and the lack thereof at the school. These conversations were documented at regular intervals.

Field notes were compiled based on participant observation. According to Babbie and Mouton, (2001:188-199), this is crucial when validation of facts takes place. After the data has been collected by the different data collecting tools, a comparison should be drawn between intervention session observations and focus group sessions. Data analysis and verification of facts took place before conclusions were drafted and recommendations are suggested in the final chapter.

3.5 A qualitative research approach

This study was framed by a qualitative research approach, which enabled the researcher to learn directly about the communal world of the respondents by investigating the involvement

and participation of the parents. This is in line with the thinking of Fer (2004), who notes that "researchers are more interested in qualitative studies, involving an interpretive approach to … subject matter to provide an in-depth description of a particular situation or setting in a particular classroom, school, or practice" (Fer, 2004:562). He contends that "intricacy, appropriateness, investigation, and common sense" are the key words in qualitative research. Fer (2004:562) confirms that a variety of research types can be utilised in teaching, such as case studies, grounded theory and participative inquiry.

In this study the researcher decided to use a case study approach. The reason was that the study could be confined to the parents of one class as an "entity", which allowed the researcher to gather information that could delve deeper than the surface to get to the heart of learners' dilemmas and parents' involvement in the children's learning at home. Neuman (1997:331-335) refers to qualitative research by outlining six key characteristics of a qualitative researcher. Neuman (1997:331-335) states:"The significance of common perspective for understanding the societal world is emphasized by qualitative researchers." Neuman (1997:331-335) continues: "The researcher's integrity is a real issue." Neuman concludes by saying: "The passage of time is an integral part of qualitative research." McMillan & Schumacher (1993:37) echo this view and state: "Qualitative data comprises texts in the configuration of effective oral descriptions."

As qualitative research has to do with human beings, it provided the researcher in this particular study with an indication of the direct situation that the respondents were experiencing, namely that they struggled to assist their children with homework activities. The case study approach used provided the researcher with an in-depth awareness of people's lives and culture, which reflected immense diversity. The integrity of the researcher ensured that the evidence was recorded and reflected accurately. It was for this purpose that the evidence was recorded on an electronic device during the focus group interview. The presence of the researcher enabled her to understand the social aspects involved in this study, and allowed the researcher to clarify the purpose of the investigation. The researcher encouraged the respondents to give their input, to make suggestions, and to interact spontaneously.

Support was provided to parents in the form of an intervention programme to align with the two research questions. The intervention programme consisted of a series of homework sessions during which the parents were 'taught' how to support their children with English literacy homework activities. The researcher implemented some of the strategies by having parents as partners in their children's schooling to boost the children's morale by knowing that their parents supported them. The researcher concentrated on bridging the divide

between home and school by improving the collaboration between these two entities. The qualitative research method was chosen, since it was appropriate to the context, to reflect and evaluate the sequence of events as they unfolded.

3.6   The function of the researcher

At the research site the researcher noticed that the parents experienced great difficulty in assisting their children with their homework. Consequently, the researcher distributed questionnaires to the parents, which was the first step in the action research cycle. In the action research process, the researcher's task was to ascertain how best she could revitalise her environment, and to bring about positive change.

Ferguson (2012:9) states that adults in particular have been found to learn more effectively by doing or experiencing. The parents of the Grade 4 learners at the research site engaged in the homework programme and were extremely involved in the programme. Through the active engagement of the parents, their children also became more motivated.

Adult learning specialist, David Kolb, describes the learning process as a four-phase cycle in which the learner does something concrete or has a specific experience which provides a basis for the learner's observation and reflection on the experience and his/her own response to it. These observations are then assimilated into a conceptual framework, and related to other concepts in the learner's past experience and knowledge, from which implications for action are then derived. This is then tested and applied in different situations (Kolb, 1984:21).

3.7   Validity and reliability in qualitative research

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010:330), validity in qualitative research refers to the realities of the world. McMillan and Schumacher (2010:330) note that there is broad agreement on the use of pertinent research terms in qualitative research, but disagreement on the names of specific concepts. That is why general terms such as 'validity', 'flexibility' and 'extension of findings' are used as the most common criteria for evidence-based inquiry. Suter (2012:346) states that the validity of qualitative research is often referred to as 'trustworthiness' or 'credibility'. Wiersma and Jurs (2005:5) also refer to validity, and state that something needs to be based "on fact or evidence in order for it to be valid, that is, capable of being justified".

Feldman (2007:30) states:

> To demonstrate validity in qualitative studies, such as narrative forms of action research, there need to be expectations for the types of things that action researchers ought to pay attention to in how they inquire into their practice, and ways to assess how well that has been done.

The CASS marks reflected were valid and meticulously awarded. Respondents were asked to be honest, sincere and open in their responses, as authenticity of data refers to the correctness with which the data is presented. The parents had to respond without revealing their identities. The focus group interview was conducted using a recording device to ensure that authenticity could be validated.

3.8   The intervention programme

A homework programme as intervention to facilitate greater parental involvement was introduced to the parents of the Grade 4 class in 2009. Table 3.2 indicates the sessions that took place at the school (as research site) on specific days.

Table 3.2: Sessions that took place at the research site in 2009

Days	Dates	Times
Saturday	25 April 2009	10:00 –12:00
Saturday	16 May 2009	10:00 – 14:00
Saturday	23 May 2009	10:00 – 14:00
Saturday	06 June 2009	10:00 – 10:45 10:45 – 11:30 11:30 – 12:15
Saturday	25 July 2009	10:00 – 10:45 10:45 – 11:30 11:30 – 12:15
Saturday	22 August 2009	10:00 – 10:45 10:45 – 11:30 11:30 – 12:15

During the first three sessions in 2009, all the parents or representatives of learners' families met at the school from 10:00 to 12:00. Parents, grandparents, a guardian, a social worker from children's home, cousin, and aunts attended the sessions as representatives of the Grade 4 learners. The parents of the learners constituted the majority of representatives.

The other members of the families formed part of the representatives owing to the composition of the family structures.

After the third session, parents informed the researcher that the time slot did not suit all parental representatives, and that the times therefore had to be reconsidered. Parents and other representatives then met at the research site (school) at different times. The researcher made the necessary changes to accommodate the parents' needs. The times changed to three sessions per day in 2009 to accommodate the representatives. The data collected was obtained via questionnaires which the parents completed prior to the listening and language intervention programme. The intervention in 2009 was a period of trial and error that could serve as a "pilot" to the actual study that commenced in 2010.

The intervention programme commenced with the Grade 4 parents in 2010 and took place over a period of six sessions, which ranged from February 2010 to June 2010. Parents who found it extremely difficult to come to the research site because of problems with transport were accommodated in a community hall closer to their homes. The researcher made the necessary reservations at the hall well in advance. Therefore, the sessions were held at the research site (school) as well as in a local community hall which was much more central and convenient for the majority of parents. The parents could choose the venue and the time most suitable for them.

Table 3.3: The timeslots at the different venues

10:00 TO 11:OO	Research site (school)
11:30 TO 12:30	Community hall

The researcher interacted with parents, grandmothers, older brothers and sisters, as well as aunts at the two venues during the different time slots. Table 3.4 indicates the dates and time slots.

Table 3.4: Indicates the date and time slots of the homework sessions in 2010

Days	Dates	Venue	Times
Saturday	27 Feb 2010	School	10:00 – 12:00
Saturday	13 March 2010	School	10:00 – 12:00
Saturday	24 April 2010	School	10:00 – 11:00
		Community hall	11:30 – 12:30
Saturday	08 May 2010	School	10:00 – 11:00
		Community hall	11:30 – 12:30
Saturday	29 May 2010	School	10:00 – 11:00
		Community hall	11:30 – 12:30
Saturday	12 June 2010	School	10:00 – 11:00
		Community hall	11:30 – 12:30

The table below indicates when the sessions took place and how many participants attended at the two different venues.

Table 3.5: A breakdown of dates and attendance

When were these sessions held?	Where were they held?		How many people attended the sessions? Total
	Research site School	Community hall	
Saturday 27 February 2010	5	Not applicable (N/A)	5
Saturday 13 March 2010	4	Not applicable (N/A)	4
Saturday 24 April 2010	1	3	4
Saturday 8 May 2010	8	6	14
Saturday 29 May 2010	6	0	6
Saturday 12 June 2010	3	0	3

3.8.1   Background to the intervention programme

An English literacy homework programme was implemented to assist parents to help their children with homework. After an initial analysis conducted by means of a questionnaire focusing on the parents' ability to assist their children with homework, the researcher decided to follow an English language and listening homework programme. The programme opted for was devised by Liesel van Niekerk, who is a speech and hearing teacher. This programme, which is commonly referred to as "Listening and Language Home Programme", consisted of different components of literacy such as reading, comprehension, vocabulary, listening, speaking, language study, spelling, sentence memory and auditory reception. This corresponds with the six main Learning Outcomes according to the Revised National Curriculum Statement (DoE, 2002:6):

- **Learning Outcome 1:Listening**

  The learner will be able to listen for information and enjoyment, and respond appropriately and critically in a wide range of situations.

- **Learning Outcome 2: Speaking**

  The learner will be able to communicate confidently and effectively in spoken language in a wide range of situations.

- **Learning Outcome 3: Reading and Viewing**

  The learner will be able to read and view for information and enjoyment, and respond critically to the aesthetic, cultural and emotional values in texts.

- **Learning Outcome 4: Writing**

  The learner will be able to write different kinds of factual and imaginative texts for a wide range of purposes.

- **Learning Outcome 5: Thinking and Reasoning**

  The learner will be able to use language to think and reason, as well as to access, process and use information for learning.

- **Learning Outcome 6: Language Structure and Use**

  The learner will know and be able to use the sounds, words and grammar of the language to create and interpret texts.

The intervention programme included all the above-mentioned outcomes, as the parents were asked to support the outcomes while overseeing the programme at home, based on the training they had received as part of the intervention sessions.

3.8.2   A breakdown of the sessions

The language and listening programme that were used were thematically divided into weeks based on the different topics. During each session, three weeks were set aside per theme, and sessions were introduced by the researcher, with guidelines on how the programme was to be used. Each parent received a worksheet on the different themes and topics during each session. The researcher explained how the different sections of the worksheets should be completed with their children at home. The worksheets were set out in such a way that learners were only required to complete the sessions that were marked with an identifiable icon. The parents had to sign and date the page each time an activity was completed. Parents were urged not to move to the next activity before the child had mastered the content of the previous one.

Table3.6: The different themes of the homework programme (Van Niekerk, 2007)

The School	
The Classroom	Late For School

The City	
The Shopping Mall	Occupations

Transport	
The Service Station	The Railway Station

Road Safety	
The Bicycle	The Motorcar

The Supermarket	
Odd One Out	Let Us Bake

Animals		
The Zoo	The Farm	Animal Games

Each theme was followed by exercises in the form of comprehension, vocabulary, memory activities, and sentence construction. Each of these themes represented a full action research cycle. The researcher explained the exercises to the parents during the homework sessions. The researcher handed a copy of the exercises to each participant who attended the workshops. Participants then followed as the researcher explained, facilitating interaction

that then took place as the parents interacted with the exercises and with the researcher. The researcher made notes, reflecting on these sessions, and showing how parents reacted to the programme.

3.9   Action research

An action research framework was used as a suitable method to enhance the level of involvement and, it was hoped, the emancipation of the Grade 4 parents at the selected site. Somekh and Zeichner (2009:5) portray action research as a "proposition that has discursive power because it embodies a collision of terms". In generating research knowledge *and* improving social action *at the same time*, "action research … would challenge the normative values of two distinct ways of being –that of the scholar and the activist".

Supplementary to all the above, action research is also described as "proceeding in a spiral of steps, which is composed of planning, action and the evaluation of the result of action" (Kemmis & McTaggert, 1990:8). Carson (1990:168) supports this view: "The process of critical action research is collaborative and follows a cycle consisting of moments of reflection, planning, acting, observing, reflecting, re-planning, etc. which takes place in a spiral fashion." Kemmis (2001:92)believes that "this form of action research aims not only at improving outcomes, and improving the self-understandings of practitioners, but also at assisting practitioners to arrive at a critique of their social or educational work and work settings".

According to all these definitions of action research, it is clear that action research has many benefits, including that of treating the process as collaborative. In other words, while the research is carried out, all the stakeholders such as the principal, educator, parents and school community interact with one another and work collaboratively. This empowers all involved. Abrams (as cited in McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:445) maintains that action research is a benefit to educators in the sense that it empowers and assists them. Another advantage is that it also involves individuals such as the educator, learners and parents.

Ferrance (2000:8) notes that action research is a plan that educators will embark on as a cycle of asking questions, gathering information, reflecting, and choosing a schedule of activities. The six-step cycle, sketched by Ferrance (2000:8) was interpreted and executed as indicated below.

Step 1: Recognising and establishing the problem

The first step in the process demands that the teacher (as researcher) should recognise, acknowledge and establish a real problem within the school context. This step further implies that the teacher, as researcher, must define the problem and design a plan of action to address the problem that would ultimately lead to improvement of the situation and at best, resolve the problem to the advantage of all stakeholders (Ferrance, 2000:8).

In contextualising this step to the actual problem identified, the researcher noticed that parents had great difficulty in assisting their children with homework. One of these reasons was the heavy workload that the learners have to deal with on a regular basis. The OBE curriculum expects learners to cope with nine learning areas from Grade 4 upward, whereas they deal with only three learning areas in Grades 1 to 3. It is not only the number of learning areas that increases, but also the volume of work covered and the density of content.

Step 2: Gathering and grouping information

In Step 2, the researcher must use several sources of information and data-gathering methods relevant to the problem.

The methods (instruments) that were used to gather the information were homework sessions, questionnaires, a focus group interview, field notes and classroom observations. Right from the start of the study, each Grade 4 parent received a questionnaire (see Appendix F) regarding their ability to help their children with homework. During the homework sessions the researcher conducted a workshop on the homework programme with the parents as a way to empower them to assist their children with their homework. Each parent received a copy of the programme during the sessions, which they took home to implement what they had learned. Nine of the respondents formed the focus group. As the research study progressed, the researcher made copious field notes of the informal conversations with parents, colleagues and other stakeholders. The researcher also observed the learners 'progress during contact time in the classroom. The participants were observed during the homework sessions. The observations were recorded by the researcher.

Step 3: Analysis and evaluation of information

This step necessitated that the researcher gives concentrated attention to the research questions identified, and analyse major themes that emerged from the data. The researcher

at the research site identified different themes while the information was analysed, namely parental involvement, support groups, and emancipation (Ferrance, 2000:8).

Step 4: Change teaching practice based on the analysis of the information

While the one change in parental attitude towards their children's schoolwork was occurring, the researcher continued to document observations and information. After the first few homework sessions, the researcher changed the starting times of the sessions, as they were not convenient for all the parents. The venues where the sessions were held were changed, as most of the parents were unable to attend the sessions at the research site, owing to transport problems and working conditions. After the first session of the homework programme, the parents had a changed perception of how to assist their children, as their prior knowledge of OBE had been very limited. In observing the representatives, it became apparent that interaction during these sessions and the hands-on approach assisted parents in their thinking.

Step 5: Reflection

Reflection on the process ultimately serves as an evaluation of the cycle to determine if improvement occurred or not, and whether the data presented does support the findings. Improvement was evident in the learners' work, especially in those whose parents assisted them with their homework. The reflection also provides indicators of what changes are necessary and how changes could be implemented.

Step 6: Then the cycle starts all over again

Ferrance (2000:9) suggests that the researcher should write down questions emerging from reflections on the action research and plan the next actions. The 'steps', in effect, then drive the process towards improved results in ensuing cycles.
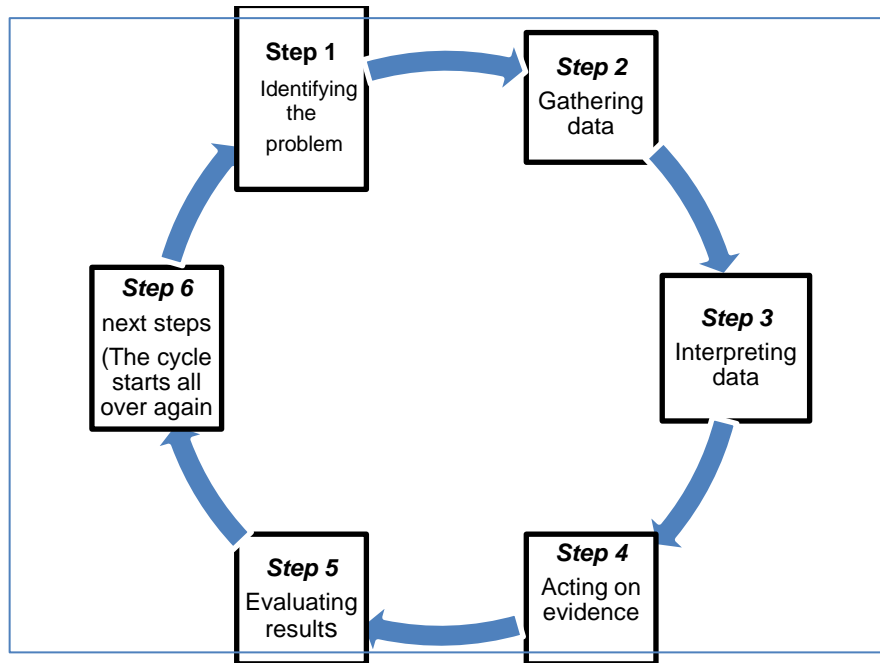
Figure 3.1: Ferrance's adapted Action Research model (2000:9)

3.9.1   Stages of the action research cycle

The action research model consists of different cycles. Each cycle comprises various stages, such as the planning, acting, observing and reflecting stages.

3.9.1.1 Planning

After drawing upon my analysis of the problem at the research site, it was recognised that parents find it difficult to assist their children with homework. This problem necessitated an intervention programme to empower parents to assist their children with their schoolwork.

De Wit (2007:35) contends that certain aspects, namely competence, full information and comprehension, need to be addressed before a study can be conducted. This aspect was endorsed by the parents' willingness to buy into the intervention programme. They were keen participants through their eagerness to be empowered with the knowledge and skills to assist their children with their schoolwork. For the purpose of this study, the respondents were the parents and other family members of the Grade 4 learners.

The researcher explained to them what the study entailed by informing them of the types of instruments used in the study. Subsequently, all relevant information, such as the venues where the homework sessions were held, as well as the timeslots, was conveyed to the respondents well in advance. They were all well informed via letters, telephone calls (see

Appendix H) and SMSs. The correspondence included the researcher's contact details, where parents could contact the researcher if necessary.

The instruments were set up in such a way that the respondents could easily understand the content. They were, however, encouraged to interact with the researcher on a regular basis if they were uncertain about something. The methodology used in this study allowed the researcher, as an educator-researcher, to reflect (in the field notes) continuously on the researcher's actions and the changes effected by such actions. The intervention programme was implemented to bring about change in the way that parents could assist their children with homework. The Department of Education (DoE) requires that parents become actively involved in their children's educational development (Mestry & Grobler, 2007:176). By selecting Ferrance's (2000:9) action research model to change the researcher's classroom practice, the parents, who were the participants in this study, became agents of change. The more the parents understood, the more they became involved. Furthermore, Outcomes Based Education (OBE) stresses that educators give learners homework so that parents might interact with educators in the educational activities of their children; hence the planning stage for the intervention programme to involve parents in their children's homework came to fruition.

The intervention programme consisted of interaction with the parents on a monthly basis. Various topics and themes were dealt with during these interactive sessions.

The researcher discussed the issue of effective parental involvement and its absence at the school with the principal prior to the study. He too expressed his concern regarding the matter and supported the researcher in this endeavour. He assisted with arrangements and encouraged the Grade 4 parents, during PTA and class meetings at school to attend the sessions. At some of the sessions the principal welcomed the respondents and also conveyed his appreciation to them for attending the homework sessions.

He informed the WCED officials during their visits to the school about the intervention programme. They wholeheartedly supported the venture. The SGB members also endorsed the programme and encouraged the staff as well as the Grade 4 parents to give their full support. Parents were consulted via letters, telephone calls and SMSs regarding the intervention programme.

During the consultation process the researcher explained to the respondents that the intervention programme would take the form of six homework sessions. The respondents aired their views and indicated that they were willing to attend the homework sessions since

they wanted to assist their children with their schoolwork to the best of their ability. They mentioned that they were eager to become empowered as they had very limited knowledge of OBE. The researcher consulted circulars from the WCED where stakeholders such as principals and educators were encouraged to engage learners in homework; parental involvement was also stressed. The circular (WCED, 2007) was accompanied by a pamphlet encouraging parents to support their children with homework, and was consulted by the researcher. This pamphlet was then distributed to all the parents.

Ethical issues pertaining to research of this nature were addressed prior to the research commencing. Permission to conduct the homework sessions at school with the parents was requested from the WCED (see Appendix A), the principal (see Appendix B), and the parents, and was granted to the researcher. Parents were asked to complete informed consent forms (see Appendix E) whereby they agreed to the conditions and granted permission to the researcher to conduct the homework sessions with them and generate data as deemed fit. They furthermore agreed that all the information gained during these sessions could be used for the purpose of the study.

Additionally permission was requested from Liesel van Niekerk (see Appendix C) for the use of the homework programme devised by her and was granted.

The principal permitted the researcher to gain access to CEMIS for information pertaining to the learners that was relevant to the study. The researcher reassured the participants that all information obtained would be dealt with confidentially.

During the planning stage the researcher communicated via letters to the parents and representatives about the logistical issues – mainly that the school and the community centre would be used as venues for the sessions. They were also informed by letter well in advance of the times of the sessions. The researcher contacted the management team of the community centre in person and telephonically for the use of the community centre to accommodate the parents of the area during the homework sessions. The data was recorded in the field notes and by voice recorder (during the focus group interview). The notes were kept to help the researcher with the planning of the next steps in the action research cycle.

The researcher planned the homework sessions thoroughly and provided parents with the necessary material for completion of homework activities. This was done with the help of the staff at school. All assisted in the preparation of the material prior to the sessions in some way. Help was given with the making of the photocopies utilised during the homework sessions, so that the parents could interact effectively with the researcher during the

sessions. The parents, on the other hand, interacted with their children at home by means of the homework programme. Other material that was used to put the homework programme into practice was an overhead projector, transparencies, overhead pens, pencils, and scissors.

3.9.1.2 Acting/Implementation

During 2010 the homework sessions took place from February to June. The sessions took place at the research site as well as the community centre. These sessions were changed to one-hour sessions (see Table 3.4) at each venue to accommodate most of the parents who came from diverse areas.

Parents who could not attend were asked to send a representative in their place. Grandparents, sisters and other family members attended the homework sessions as substitutes.

Those who attended the sessions engaged actively. Parents were allowed to participate by asking questions and were requested to give their input and interact with the researcher constantly during the duration of the sessions. The homework programme consisted of different themes, which were handled in accordance with the action research model.

3.9.1.3 Observing

Marshall and Rossman (2010:139-140) declare, "observations are central to qualitative research and [are] a fundamental and highly important method in all qualitative inquiry". The researcher observed constantly how parents responded to the programme by means of their body language and facial expressions. The researcher then interviewed the parents on their perceptions of the importance of parental involvement. The responses to the programme were captured through questionnaires, the homework programme, and the focus group. The responses received were very positive. Parents interacted throughout these sessions by asking questions and contributing in various ways, such as referring to events which they had encountered while implementing the programme at home with their children (for example, compiling a shopping list or reading a recipe while baking a cake).

3.9.1.4 Reflecting

After the first two monthly sessions with the Grade 4 parents of 2010, it was found that most of them were unable to attend the sessions because of a lack of transport. The spiral effect

of the action research came into effect, because the researcher had to further plan how to accommodate these parents. It was then decided to just have one session at the research site instead of three. This session was shifted from the 10:00 to 11:00 timeslot, while the second session was moved to another venue, the community hall, where the session was scheduled from 11:30 to 12:30.

3.10   The different themes of the homework sessions and the six-step action research cycle of Ferrance (2000:9)

The six themes of the listening and language homework programme correspond with the six steps of the action research model of Ferrance (2000). The implementation of the intervention programme is discussed using the action research cycle to guide the researcher through the different phases of identifying the problem, gathering the data, interpreting the data, acting on the evidence, evaluating the results and preparing for the next cycle in the spiral effect of the action research model. The intervention programme encompasses the following themes: the school, the city, transport, road safety, the supermarket, and animals. Through these cycles of the intervention model, the researcher aimed at including parents as agents of change.

3.10.1   Cycle One. Session One. The School

Language is the most significant instrument of human communication. The researcher therefore introduced this crucial topic to the parents. This homework programme was intended to help parents assist their children in expanding their language and listening proficiency.

Step 1: Identifying the problem
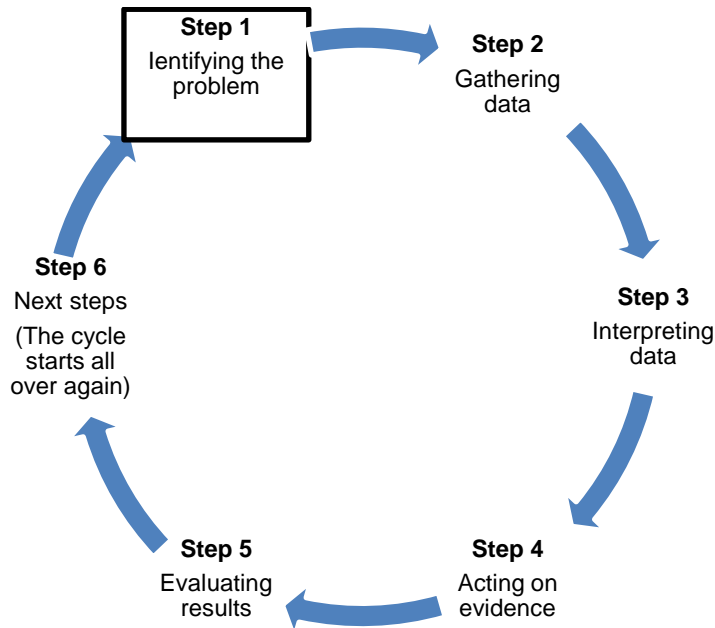
Figure 3.2: Adapted six-step action research model of Ferrance (2000:9) indicating Step 1for the theme on "The School"

This is the first step in the spiral effect of the action research model. During this step, the researcher identified the problem at the research site, as aligned to the research problem indicated in Chapter 1 of this research study. It became evident that parental involvement in homework activities of learners had always been lacking. In order to address this problem, the researcher issued 38 questionnaires to the parents of the Grade 4 class.

The data gleaned from these questionnaires provided the researcher with the necessary starting point in the research cycle. The homework intervention programme was implemented so that all the stakeholders could benefit from it and improve their low levels of literacy.

Step 2: Gathering data
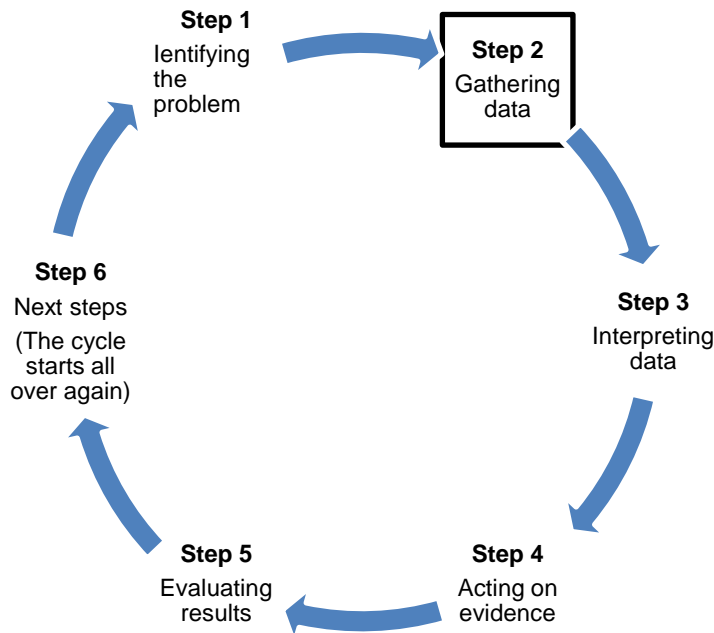
Figure 3.3: Adapted six-step action research model of Ferrance (2000:9) indicating Step 2 for the theme on "The School"

During the Step 2, information was gathered via self-administered questionnaires, homework sessions, field notes and observation. For the purposes of the session, all the participants received copies of the worksheets. A briefing session then followed to introduce parents to the various language skills required of learners during language activities in class and at home. These skills are also language curriculum outcome requirements. The participants engaged during this session by asking questions, making comments and sharing their experiences with the researcher and the rest of the group regarding the exercises on the worksheets. During this session, the researcher observed and recorded that participants were eager and enthusiastic. They also co-operated by following the instructions on the worksheets that their children completed at home (see Figure 3.4 below).
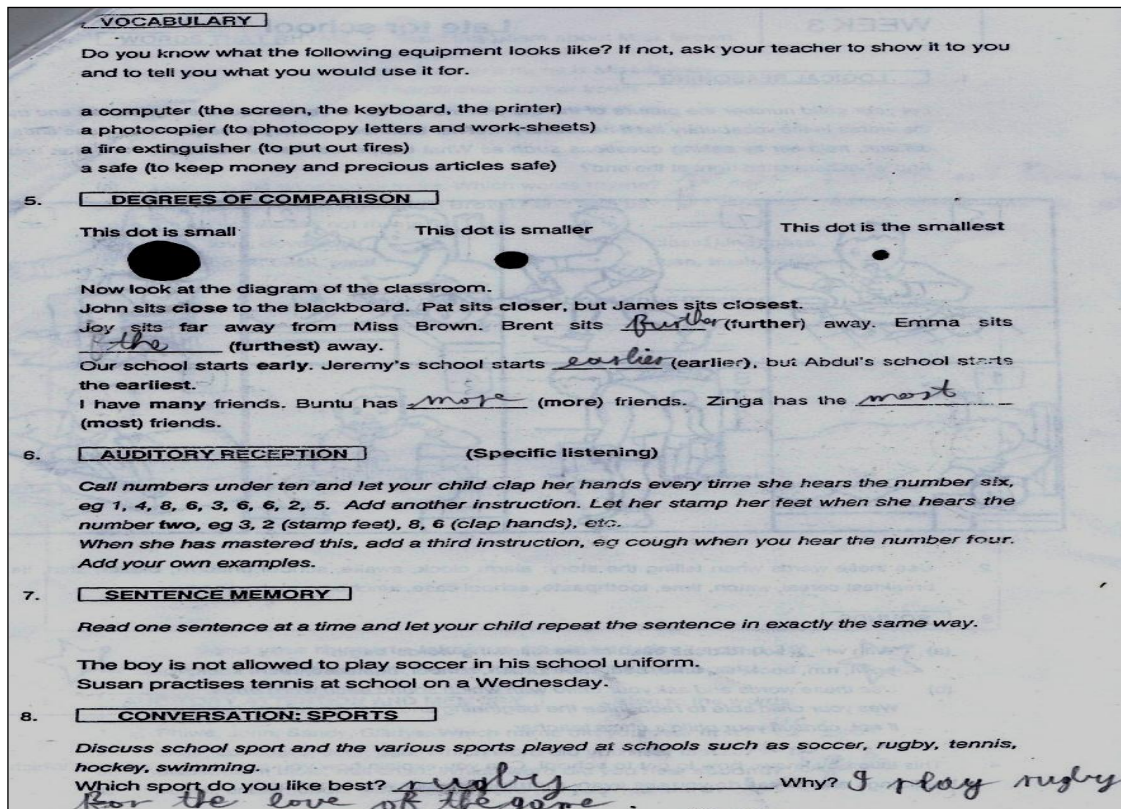
**Figure 3.4: A completed work sheet for the theme on "The Classroom"**

Step 3: Interpreting data
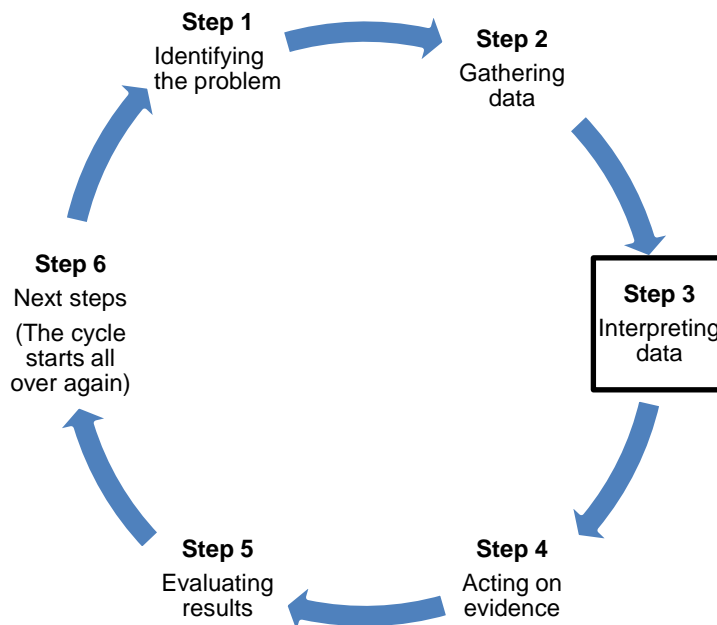
Figure 3.5: Adapted six-step action research model of Ferrance (2000:9) indicating Step3 for the theme on "The School"

The researcher interpreted the data in Step 3 gathered during the previous step. This data was recorded by the researcher and set the tone for the next step. The findings of this data are recorded in Chapter 4.

Step 4: Acting on evidence
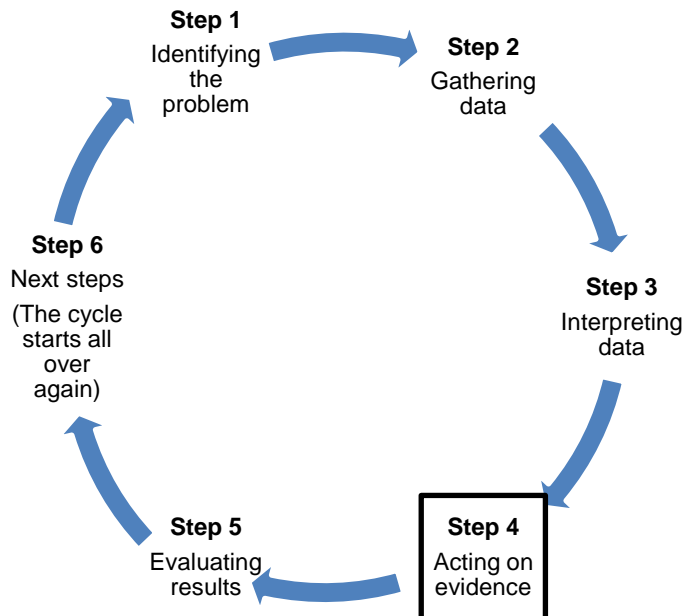
Figure 3.6: Adapted six-step action research model of Ferrance (2000:9) indicating Step 4 for the theme on "The School"

The outcome of the data prompted the researcher to act on it in Step 4.The researcher planned the session well in advance before it was conducted. The researcher noticed that those participants identified as foreigners in the sample profile, experienced difficulties in assisting their children with their homework when given in Afrikaans, as their mother tongues differed from Afrikaans, which is the LoLT at the school. Consequently the homework programme was done in English, and this was used as a conduit so that all the participants could understand the language. This allowed parents to assist their children with their homework.

Step 5: Evaluating results

Figure 3.7: Adapted six-step action research model of Ferrance (2000:9) indicating Step 5 for the theme on "The School"

Photocopies of the relevant worksheets were made, and the requisite stationery items were gathered for the parents to engage actively with the researcher during the homework sessions. The caretakers assisted in setting up the room. Caretakers organised the overhead projector and transparencies, as these were used as teaching aids during 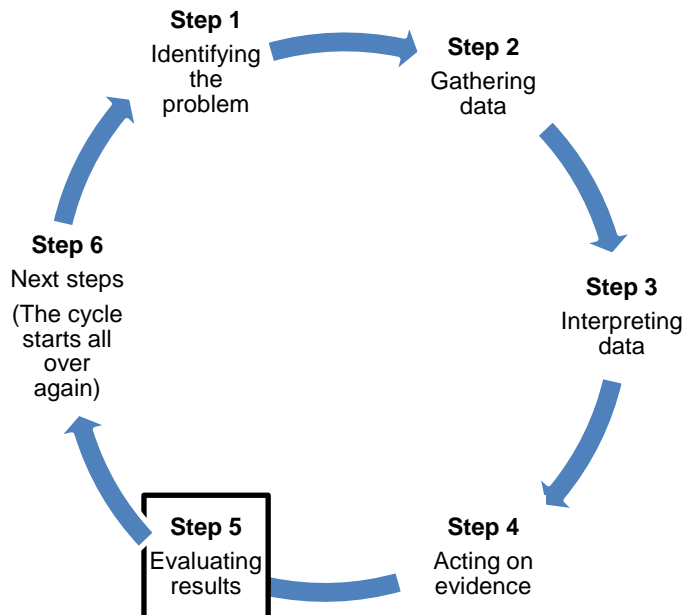the course of the session to give respondents step-by-step instructions on implementing the programme. The researcher dealt with each section by reading the content to the parents and explaining what was expected of them at home. In addition, parents were encouraged to interact with the researcher while the sessions were in progress, to eliminate any uncertainty regarding the homework programme. Meticulous care was taken to ensure that parents followed the instructions on the worksheets by ticking off each exercise as they completed it. This was done for them to follow the step-by-step process. This allowed the researcher to support the participants who found it difficult to understand the instructions. Parents were instructed to identify possible problems that their children might experience while doing their homework activities. The purpose of this was so that parents could have strategies on how to support their children in consolidating the work during language homework activities before continuing with the next exercise.

Parents were encouraged to praise their children for all the work completed and/or attempted. They were reminded to sign and date all completed work. They were also constantly encouraged to make use of their dictionaries and to impart the skill to their children. During this session, the researcher therefore concentrated on developing the respondents' dictionary skills by engaging them in activities where they had to find the

meanings of words in the activity sheets. The exercise also included a section were the children were encouraged to have a conversation with their parents on the topic of sport. It was expected of them to have a discussion on the various sports offered at their school. They had to identify their favourite sport and were encouraged to substantiate their answers.

The researcher encouraged the participants to ask questions during the session and in doing so their questioning skills came into play. The respondents enjoyed playing the memory game that formed part of the activities in this session. They told the researcher that they could not wait to play the game at home with their children.

Information was also given on how to complete the exercises with their children. The researcher encouraged the parents to establish a routine to interact with the learners' homework programme on a daily basis.

Figure 3.8: An example of an activity sheet from the listening and language homework programme on the theme "Late for School"

The researcher asked the respondents to send the completed worksheets done with their children at home, after the session, to school. During Step 5 the researcher evaluated the data to see if there were any improvements. The researcher noted there was improvement in the work of those learners represented at the homework session (see Figure 4.17).

After evaluating the results, it was found that participants had gained confidence in assisting their children with their English language homework. The researcher observed during contact time in class that those learners, whose parents had represented them at the homework session, responded enthusiastically to the lessons. These observations were recorded accordingly. The researcher noticed that the participants had developed certain skills, such as language, reasoning and memory skills (see Figure 1.2).

Step 6: Next steps
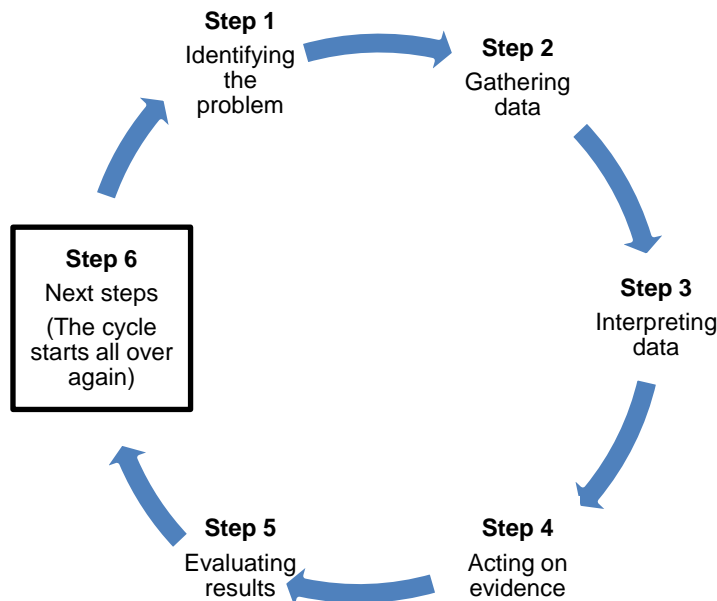
Figure 3.9: Adapted six-step action research model of Ferrance (2000:9) indicating Step 6 for the theme on "The School"

The observations made in the previous steps provided the basis for the next steps. The learners who were presented during the first session told the researcher that their parents were eager to attend the next session. Some parents contacted the researcher telephonically and via SMS and confirmed that they had thoroughly enjoyed the session. The researcher recorded this in the field notes dated 3 March 2010.

3.10.2 Cycle Two. Session Two. The City

This section was linked with the previous cycle, and covered a different theme and topic as part of the English literacy programme.

Step 1: Identifying the problem

The group met in March 2010 at the research site for their one hour of discussion.

The second cycle of the research spiral commenced. This was aiming at discussing and addressing the findings found in Cycle One. One of the parents who attended the first session could not attend the second one because of working commitments. The participants expressed their concern about parents who did not attend the sessions.

The new topic to be discussed was: "The City". The topic was further divided into: *The Shopping Mall* and *Occupations.*

Step 2: Gathering data

The researcher noticed in the way the learners responded in class that their attitude towards their work had changed. Learners were very eager to answer questions and to pass remarks pertaining to the lessons. They mentioned to the researcher that their parents had inquired when the next session would take place and that they could not wait for it to start.

 During the second session the parents shared their experiences with the researcher by mentioning that their children were excited while engaging with the activities on the worksheets, especially the family game. The poem that the learners had to write about their teacher also elicited a sense of participation and involvement. The researcher recorded the information conveyed by the participants.

Step 3: Interpreting data

The researcher scrutinised the learners' worksheets on the topic of the school, as well as their homework activity sheets, to gather information for this session. Parents were requested to sign and date the pages after completion.

Step 4: Acting on evidence

The researcher analysed the data gathered via the language activity sheets, homework books, and oral responses of the children. It was evident that the parents were eager to continue with the homework programme as per the homework activity sheets. The researcher intended implementing and integrating other learning areas such as Mathematics and Life Orientation (L.O.), and devised these worksheets.

The researcher prepared for this activity and copied the worksheets on "The City" that the respondents had to engage with during the session. Stationery (pens, pencils, crayons, fibre-tipped pens and scissors)was assembled before the session commenced. The overhead projector and transparencies were prepared in advance to accommodate the parents. The researcher perused the worksheets of the participants for the duration of the session and assisted them where necessary. The parents were introduced to an activity where Mathematics was integrated with the language activity on "The City". The activity with the Mathematics component was one where the participants had to assist their children to connect the numbers to display the different modes of transport customary in a city. An example of a learner's activity sheet on L.O.is included. The learners were required to connect the person with his/her equipment according to occupation. The researcher explained to the participants that OBE encourages integration between the different nine learning areas: Afrikaans, English, Mathematics (Maths), Natural Sciences (N.S.), Social Sciences (S.S.), Technology (Tech), Arts and Culture (A & C) Life Orientation (L.O.) and Economic and Management Science (E.M.S).

8. **AUDITORY DISCRIMINATION**
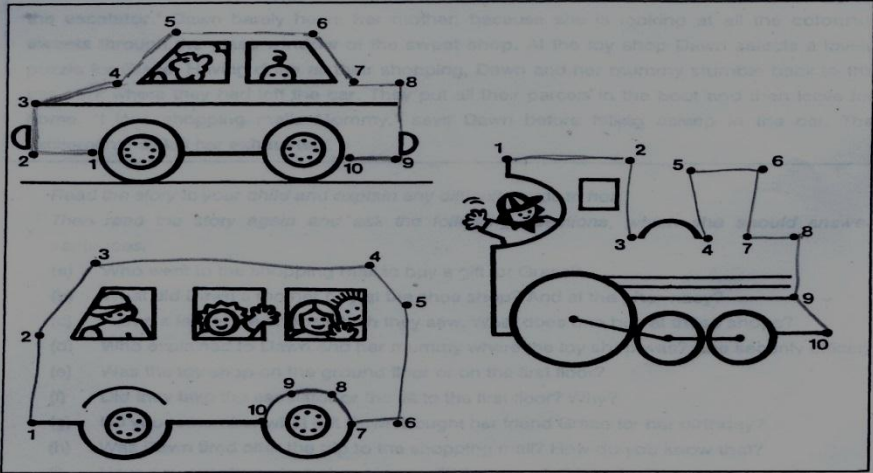
Look at the picture of the city on p 12. Imagine you are one of the pupils standing outside the school. What sounds would you hear standing there?

Name something which makes a . . .

siren at police van
boot low sound
Train loud sound
clock makes a sat sound

high sound (the siren of the ambulance)
low sound (a truck moving off)
loud sound (the hooter of a car)
soft sound (the typing of a secretary in the office)

Listen to all the sounds when next you are in the city and tell Mommy what you hear.
Do you hear many birds in the city? Why not?

9. Connect the numbers and see what you have drawn. **Do it yourself!**

From: Edudots . . . One to ten
by: Educo

10. **CONVERSATION**

If you are in the city with your child, talk to her and show her the various buildings, who work in them and what kind of work they do. Also show her a lamp post, the corner of a street, a pedestrian crossing, roadworks, hawkers, a parking meter, a bus stop, a manhole, a tow truck and anything else of interest.

Figure 3.10: A learner's completed worksheet done at home on the theme "The City"
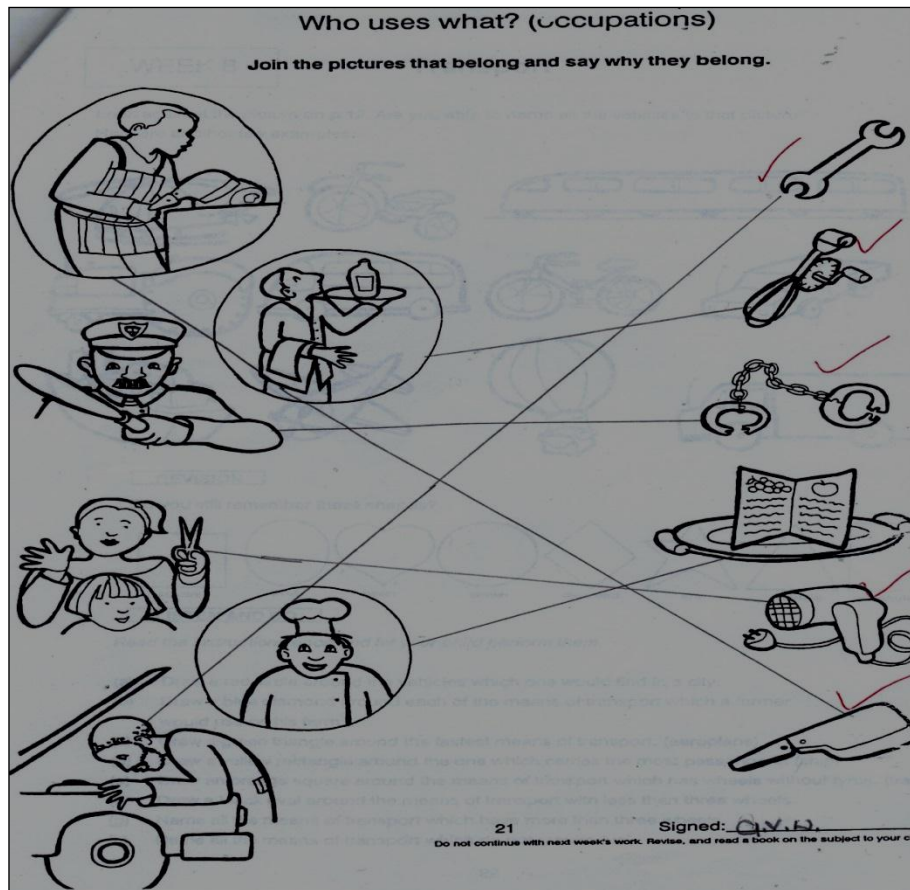
Figure 3.11: A learner's completed worksheet done at home on the theme "Occupations"

Step 5: Evaluating results

The researcher evaluated the results by analysing the homework activity sheets of the learners. The learners whose parents attended the session also performed much better in completing their activities in their class workbooks and in their assignments. The researcher reached the conclusion that the participants were self-assured in mastering skills such as logical reasoning, auditory discrimination, and communication skills that formed part of the activity on "The City". The parents were encouraged to have conversations with their children next time they visited the city by talking to them regarding the various buildings, the people that work in them and the kind of work that the people do. This information was a good starting point for the next phase in the action research cycle.

The participants who attended the first session mentioned to the participants who could not attend the first session what they had experienced during the first session and how useful the information had been for them and their children.

The participants interacted with the researcher on a regular basis during the session. There was also collaboration between the participants as they explained the worksheets to one another and the methods they would use when explaining the work to their children.

Step 6: Next steps

The researcher started to prepare for the next theme for the next session. The data collected during this session was done in the form of the homework sheets, and observations during the session as well as in the classroom context.

3.10.3 Cycle Three. Session Three. Transport

The researcher dealt with the theme on the different modes of transport and linked it with the previous topic on "The City" as various modes of transport are encountered in a city.

Step 1: Identifying the problem

The researcher met the group again in April 2010. This time the researcher met the one group of parents at the school, and the other group at the community hall. The community workers, based at the community centre, were very helpful and friendly. They allocated a room for the researcher where the session could be conducted. The children were very excited when they saw the researcher, their teacher, in their neighbourhood. The parents felt proud that the programme was presented in their area and they thanked the researcher for accommodating them.

The researcher realised that the parents were now even more confident in assisting their children with language homework from what could be gauged from the activity sheets done in the first two sessions. They could also identify with confidence the content of the activities. The researcher planned the integration of the other learning areas by scrutinising the worksheets of the other topics of the listening and language homework programme. The researcher linked the different topics with the different learning areas, for example, the topic on transport was linked with the learning area on Social Sciences (S.S.) as it covers land, air and sea transport. It also was also integrated with Mathematics as the activity necessitated learners to draw certain shapes (circle, square, oval diamond, triangle, rectangle) around the different vehicles. (It was expected of learners to draw a circle around the vehicles that one finds in a city.) (Van Niekerk, 2007:22). The activity in class context included the reading of timetables (see Appendix J).The topic was further integrated with Natural Sciences (N.S.) as the activity referred to transport used on a farm, for example, a tractor and a truck.

Step 2: Gathering data

The data was gathered through the homework activity sheets the parents sent to school after they had completed them with their children, as well as their completed assignments in class. The activities in class included a mind map learners had to compile by either pasting or writing down the different modes of transport. These included land, sea and air transport as indicated in the figure below.

Figure 3.12: An example of an activity used in class context on the theme "Transport"

The learners also did sentence sequences on the topic by combining the sentences with words like 'first', 'then', 'next' and 'finally' (see Appendix K).

Step 3: Interpreting data

The researcher interpreted the data and started to plan for the next language activities. These activities were integrated with Social Sciences as the activities also concentrated on the different modes of transport such as the bicycle, motorcar and transport used on a farm (see Appendix L).

Step 4: Acting on evidence

Once again the researcher planned thoroughly for this homework session. The worksheets were copied and stapled. Each copy had a cover page and the respondents could write the names of their children on it. This contributed to the booklets being personalised. The necessary stationery was collected and was readily available for each participant. The researcher encouraged the parents during the session by assisting them with the activities which they found challenging.
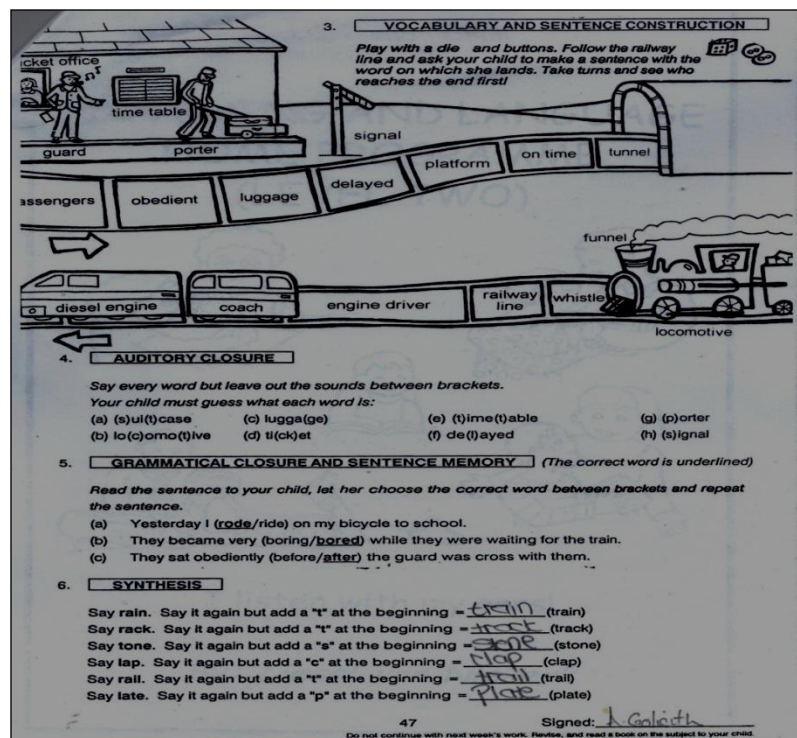
Figure 3.13: A learner's completed worksheet done at home on the theme "The Railway Station"

Step 5: Evaluating results

The researcher reflected on the session and gained data through the observations, worksheets, homework intervention programme activity sheets, class activities, homework books and activities done in class context.

Step 6: Next steps

The outcomes on the reflections during this session were the starting point for the next cycle on the topic of road safety. The participants wanted to know if they could also be assisted in other learning areas. They asserted that they felt confident with English.

3.10.4 Cycle Four. Session Four. Road Safety

Step 1: Identifying the problem

In May 2010, a group of eight participants met with the researcher at the school for one hour. Afterwards, the researcher met with the remaining six participants at the community centre. This session was held in an upstairs room at the community centre. The researcher decided to deal with the topic of road safety with the parents during the session. This topic also deals with labelling of the different parts of the bicycle and the motorcar, to build learners' vocabulary. The researcher drew the attention of parents to the importance of road safety for children. The parents contributed to the discussions by mentioning that they did indicate to their children how important it was to adhere to the rules of the road and that they would emphasise road safety even more in future.
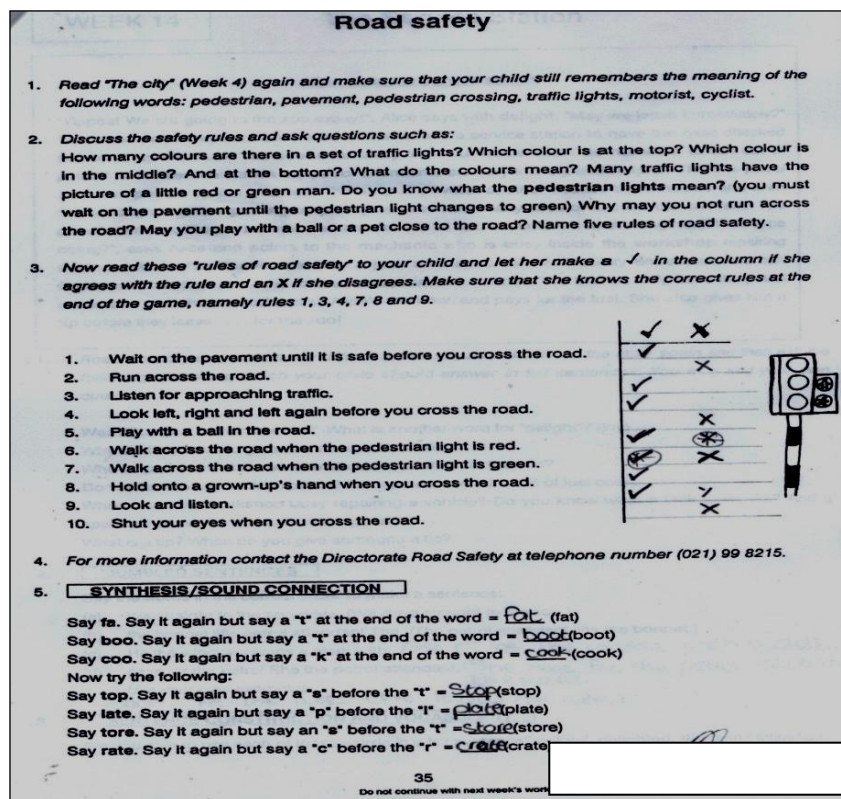
Figure 3.14: A learner's completed worksheet done at home on the theme "Transport"

Step 2: Gathering data

The researcher gathered from the data in the learners' books in class that they had difficulty in completing the exercises on the aspects of road safety.

Step 3: Interpreting data

The researcher interpreted the data and decided to incorporate the language lesson with Social Sciences. The topic of the different modes of transport is a sub-division of Social Sciences that lends itself to expanding learners' vocabulary and sentence construction.

Step 4: Acting on evidence

During this step the researcher met with the participants at the two venues. An example of the activity sheets on the topic was handed to them. (See Figure 3.14.)The researcher explained what was expected of the participants in respect of the exercises to be done by their children. The researcher explained to them that the lesson was integrated with Social Sciences. They expressed their appreciation and were happy to be able to assist their children in other learning areas as well, as the children had homework in all nine learning areas.

Step 5: Evaluating results

The researcher evaluated the results of the activities. The learners brought their completed copies, which their parents had signed, to school.

Step 6: Next steps

The researcher started to gather information for the start of the next cycle in the action research model by enquiring from the parents at the session whether or not they took their children along when they did their shopping. They were encouraged to substantiate their answers. The aim of the researcher was to gauge if the children only accompanied their parents for the fun of it, or whether the parents and children interacted with each other in an educational but fun-filled way.

3.10.5   Cycle Five. Session Five. The Supermarket

During this session parents and learners were expected to complete the exercises on the topic.

Step 1: Identifying the problem

In the previous cycle, the researcher identified the parents' need for integration into other learning areas, as the parents were extremely vocal about the need to integrate these. She decided to introduce them to the theme on "The Supermarket", as these activity sheets integrated the language aspect with E.M.S.

Step 2: Gathering data

The data was once more gathered from the activity sheets and from the participants during Cycle 4. The participants communicated to the researcher that their children enjoyed going to the shops with them. They could now easily identify the different departments in the shops and were able to collect the items for their parents, for example, soap, toothpaste and deodorant in the toiletries section. They were also able to collect the ingredients from the bakery section that was needed for baking bread, a cake, etc.

Step 3: Interpreting data

The information that was retrieved from the activity sheets and observations during the previous cycle prompted the researcher to act on the information. This led to Step 4 in the cycle of this particular theme.

Step 4: Acting on evidence

The group met at the beginning of May as well as towards the end of May 2010 as with the previous cycle, owing to the adjustment of the school terms as a result of the 2010 FIFA World Cup ™ in South Africa. The researcher met with six participants at the school. No one attended the session at the community hall. They sent their apologies and mentioned that they had family commitments. They requested (via their children) the worksheets so that they could assist their children at home.

For the duration of the session at school the participants were introduced to the worksheet on the supermarket. The researcher pointed out to the participants that the topic was further

subdivided into *Odd One Out* and *Listening Games* on "The Supermarket". The aim of this activity was to ascertain if learners could distinguish between what fits in and what doesn't. These activities consist of pictures, as well as words, that belong together or not. This topic included an activity on 'Let us bake!' The researcher guided the participants through the activities and assisted them where necessary. The participants' attention was drawn to the integration with the language activities and E.M.S. The baking activity could lead to entrepreneurial skills as learners could be taught to become bakers and start their own bakeries.

Step 5: Evaluating results

The results from the completed activity sheets were reflected upon. The researcher planned the next step emanating from the findings from the activity sheets, work in the workbooks, assignments and projects learners had to complete in class.

Step 6: Next steps

The researcher planned the next and last cycle in the action research cycle. This session dealt with animals.

3.10.6   Cycle Six. Session Six. Animals

During Session Six the topic on various animals such as pets, farm and wild animals was dealt with.

Step 1: Identifying the problem

The researcher noticed that there was still one learning area that had to be integrated with the language activity, namely N.S., and planned to introduce the parents to it in the last cycle.

Step 2: Gathering data

The data was gathered from previous sessions through the listening and language homework programme, the workbooks of the learners, and the participants' contributions.

Step 3: Interpreting data

The researcher decided to introduce the topic on animals in order to integrate the N.S. learning area with the homework programme.

Step 4: Acting on evidence
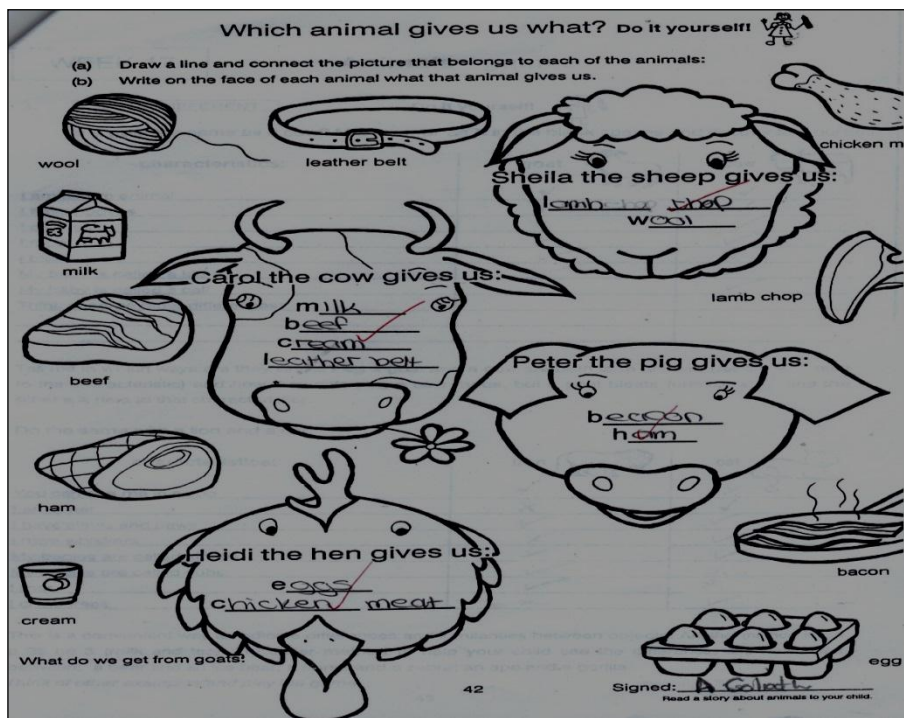
Figure 3.15: A learner's completed worksheet done at home on the theme "The Farm"

The researcher met the participants during this last phase (June 2010) of the action research model. It happened before the end of the second term. The theme under discussion was about animals with topics such as The Zoo, The Farm, and Animal Games. The participants were introduced to the activities and the researcher explained to them what they entailed. The researcher showed them how to complete the activities that they in turn had to explain to their children at home. Included is an example of how the learners completed such an activity sheet about animals and the products obtained from them.

Step 5: Evaluating results

The researcher evaluated the results and found that the parents valued the intervention programme as it helped them in assisting their children with their homework.

Planning for this session was done through the information that was obtained from the reflection phase. The information assisted the researcher in doing the planning for the theme

on animals. The researcher gathered all the material, such as worksheets, stationery, overhead projector, transparencies, transparency pens, scissors and glue.

The respondents were actively involved during the action phase. They actively engaged in the activities on the work sheets.

Observation took place during the sessions as the respondents interacted with the programme. The learners were also observed while they completed their activities in class.

3.11   Questionnaires

Questionnaires (see Appendix F) were used to gather the data so that the researcher was able to give a well-drafted description of the involvement of parents of the Grade 4 class. The questionnaires were given to all the parents before the intervention programme started. This was done to determine whether the parents were capable of assisting their children with homework activities.

Before the questionnaire was designed, it became evident that questions had to be clear and concise for respondents to find them easy to understand and follow.

3.12   Planning of the focus group

For this research study, the researcher had to have a clear idea of the specific information that was needed, and why the information would be relevant, before the focus group session was conducted. It is for this reason that a group of nine multilingual individuals were chosen. The participants were 'pre-screened' via telephonic conversations, letters and face-to-face discussions. This was done to ensure that they would be representative of the diverse language and cultural groups.

The table below indicates the various language groups of the participants of the focus group.

Table 3.7: A breakdown of respondents based on first-language groupings

Different home languages	Number of respondents
Afrikaans	4
English	1
isiXhosa	2
xiTsonga	1
Tswana	1
	9

Anderson (1990:203) suggests "participants must have some common characteristics related to what is being focused upon". In this case, the aim of the focus group interview was to have a group of parents, with children in one grade, to determine whether or not the homework intervention programme was beneficial to the participants and the learners, across languages and/or cultures.

The focus group interview was conducted using open-ended questions. This was done to stimulate an environment in which participants could feel free to discuss their concerns and issues regarding their children's progress and their own involvement in assisting the children with their homework. For this, the researcher occupied the role of group moderator/mediator. According to Anderson (1990:204), the moderator should be comfortable with the group processes and that s/he should encourage the respondents to participate in the discussion. The moderator should balance the contributions of those who form part of the focus group. Anderson (1990) advises the moderator to listen both actively and attentively to all the oral contributions of the respondents and to paraphrase and summarise what was said.

Furthermore, Anderson (1990:204) suggests that the moderator should be "empathetic and sensitive and … function as a facilitator and not a performer". The moderator should be "aware of past, present and future perspectives during the session". It is vital that the moderator keeps the discussion moving and focused, and knows when to wrap up.

In essence, the role of the moderator is significant. Good group leadership qualities and interpersonal skills are required to conduct a group successfully.

Table 3.8: Profile of the focus group

Respondents	1 F.T.	2 G.J.	3 C.L.	4 N.B.	5 A.J.	6 M.C.	7 A.S.	8 M.J.	9 G.L.
Relationship to learner	Granny	Mother	Mother	Mother	Father	Father	Mother	Sister	Father
Ethnicity	Xhosa	Coloured	Coloured	Xhosa	Coloured	Malawian	Zimbab-wian	Coloured	Coloured
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Female	Male	Male	Female	Female	Male
Home language	Xhosa	Afrikaans	Afrikaans	Xhosa	English	Tswana	Shona	Afrikaans	Afrikaans

The focus group comprised grandparents, sisters and other family members. Each representative of the focus group was asked to sign an attendance register. The focus group interview was conducted at the research site. The researcher informed the respondents timeously of the date, time, and place where the interview would be conducted. Rabiee (2004:656) underscores the importance of this: "In order to maximise participation it is important to obtain an agreed date from the informants well in advance of the interviews and to remind them a few days before they start." The interview took place one evening during the third term of 2010 at the research site. This was done to accommodate the nine respondents. The researcher had to prepare the venue for the interview and arrived half an hour before the interview was scheduled. With the permission of the respondents, the interview was recorded on an electronic recording device. The responses were recorded to ensure that the information collected was true and accurate and could be listened to again for purposes of analysis and interpretation.

The researcher welcomed the respondents as they arrived and thus created a relaxing atmosphere.

The researcher conducted the interview with the respondents (see Appendix G).Each respondent answered the questions to the best of his or her ability. The respondents shared their experiences with the researcher and other participants, and provided feedback on their experience with the intervention programme.

In this regard, Dos Reis (2007:36) views the focus group interview "as a research tool that is highly consistent with current trends in educational research, and which aims at

understanding more about what respondents think and feel". The researcher asked focused questions to create and stimulate an environment that was supportive and encouraged discussion. This can also be done to encourage the expression of different viewpoints and opinions of the various respondents. Focus group interviews are further recommended because they constitute an appropriate method for gathering information in almost every area, since their design is effortless. A focus group consists of a selected group of respondents that the researcher selects. The group that was chosen was the best equipped to discuss the aspects the researcher hoped to investigate and explore.

3.13   Conducting the focus group

The researcher used the advice of Anderson (1990:204). Everybody present was encouraged to participate in the discussion. They were asked to respond openly and honestly to the questions. The researcher listened attentively and was very sensitive to the way the participants responded to the questions, and by doing so remained flexible and adaptive. The input of each participant was recognised and recorded. The contribution of each participant was respected as each comment was regarded as important. No one dominated the interview (group). This was done to exercise effective control while the interview for the focus group was conducted.

The interview was conducted in English, as it was an English intervention programme with nine multilingual parents. The focus group interview was conducted and completed on 16 September 2010 at the research site, to provide an environment in which the participants felt at ease and comfortable. The participants were familiar with the school environment by this time. The principal and head of department (HOD) assisted by transporting the participants to and from the school as they all came from different areas.

3.13.1   Advantages of focus group interviews

Focus group research involves organised discussions with a selected group of individuals to gain information about their views of and experiences with a topic. Smit and Liebenberg (2003:1) note the following regarding the advantages of focus group interviews: "Focus group interviews make it easier to conduct less structured interviews." The researcher used a focus group to obtain several perspectives from parents of the Grade 4 learners about the same topics. The topics under discussion were home language, support groups, parental involvement, keeping control by signing the homework, time management, and the value of the intervention programme.

The advantages of focus group research include obtaining insight into people's shared understandings of problems experienced in assisting learners with their homework. In this study, the focus group offered the participants the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and what they had gained from attending the homework sessions. The parents' limited knowledge of the curriculum, their working conditions, transport problems, and poverty contributed to the problems.

The role of the researcher is very significant. Good group leadership and interpersonal skills are required to moderate a group successfully.

3.13.2 Disadvantages of focus group interviews

Focus groups are about exploration and guidance, but do not afford clear and definite answers. Each participant responded individually in respect of his or her experiences of the intervention programme. In essence, it is clear that focus groups have their advantages and disadvantages, depending on the research aims, objectives and overall need.

3.14   Ethical Considerations

Marshall and Rossman (2010:82) described ethical considerations as "generic – informed consent and protecting participants' anonymity, as well as situation specific". Permission to conduct the study at the school was obtained from the WCED (see Appendix A).This encompassed a description of the research project, copies of the questionnaires, the name of the school where the research was conducted, and the duration of the research. The principal also granted permission for the use of the school facilities as research site (see Appendix B). In addition to this, a permission letter was obtained from a member of the United Church Trust for the use of the church hall to accommodate the parents and guardians of the Grade 4 learners who participated in the study (see Appendix D).

Every individual who was part of this project and who agreed to participate, namely the parents or their representatives, was assured of anonymity and confidentiality. The researcher also promised to give feedback to participants.

All parents were requested to complete an informed consent form (see Appendix E), granting permission for information collected to be used for research purposes by the researcher. Participants therefore gave approval for the researcher to use the collected data that formed part of the study.

3.15   Conclusion

This chapter presented an overview of the research methods used for this study.   The design, as well as the sample and factors pertaining to validity and reliability in qualitative research, was described. A qualitative research design was used to investigate the parents' ability to assist their children with homework and to stimulate parental involvement in learners' homework. It was also done to enhance parents' skills to assist their children with their homework.

In Chapter 4, the data collected for this study will be presented by means of the analysis of the questionnaires, the intervention programme, the learners' CASS marks and the focus group interview.

CHAPTER 4
RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter the data presented in the questionnaires obtained from the parents of the 38 Grade 4 learners, the focus group interview with nine of these parents or family representatives, and the information gathered from the homework sessions that parents attended, are presented.

Data obtained from the informal communication with parents, observation of learners in class during contact time, field notes, homework activities reflected in their homework books, and CASS marks were triangulated to reflect themes that emerged from the data process.

4.2 Analysis of questionnaires

Parents were engaged by means of questionnaires (see Appendix F) that they had to complete prior to the homework sessions to determine their level of involvement with their children's work, and their capability to assist their children with homework. Each of the questions consisted of options parents could select. There was also a section in each question for parents or family representatives to clarify, give reasons for, or provide additional information in respect of the question.

Parents' responses were recorded on a spread sheet and are represented in graphic form or in bar charts. There are 38 learners in the Grade 4 class, but of the 38 questionnaires issued, only 25 were returned.

Question One: Does your child get homework on a regular basis?
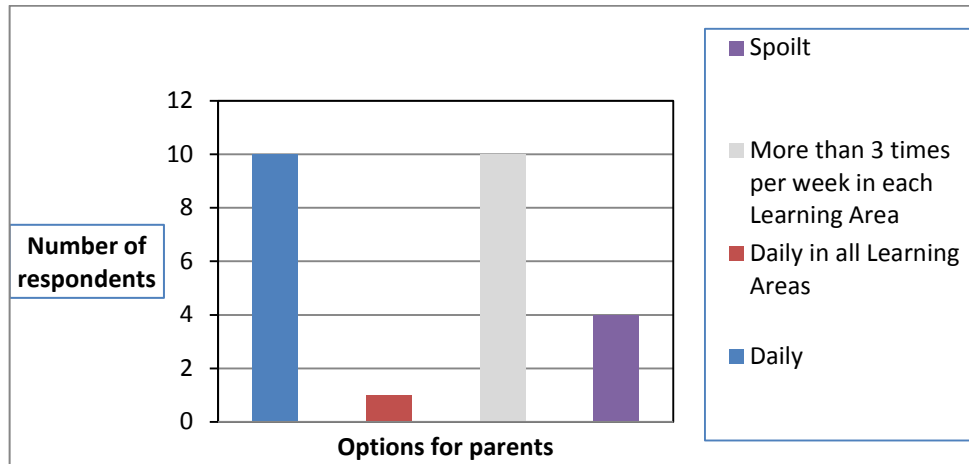
Figure 4.1: A statistical breakdown of the regular submission of homework

Of the 38 questionnaires that were forwarded to parents, 25 were returned. Only ten (40%) of the respondents indicated that their children got homework on a daily basis, whereas one (4%) indicated that her or his child got homework daily covering all Learning Areas. An additional ten (40%) indicated that their children received homework more than three times per week in each Learning Area. Of the questionnaires, four (16%) were spoilt as respondents chose more than one option despite the instructions clearly stating how to complete the questionnaire. The aim of this question was to determine the level of parental involvement to ascertain whether parents were aware of the fact that their children did receive homework regularly.

The second questionnaire was aimed at determining whether parents assisted their children with their homework. The following graph indicates the number of parents who assist their children with homework.

Question Two: Do you assist your child with homework?
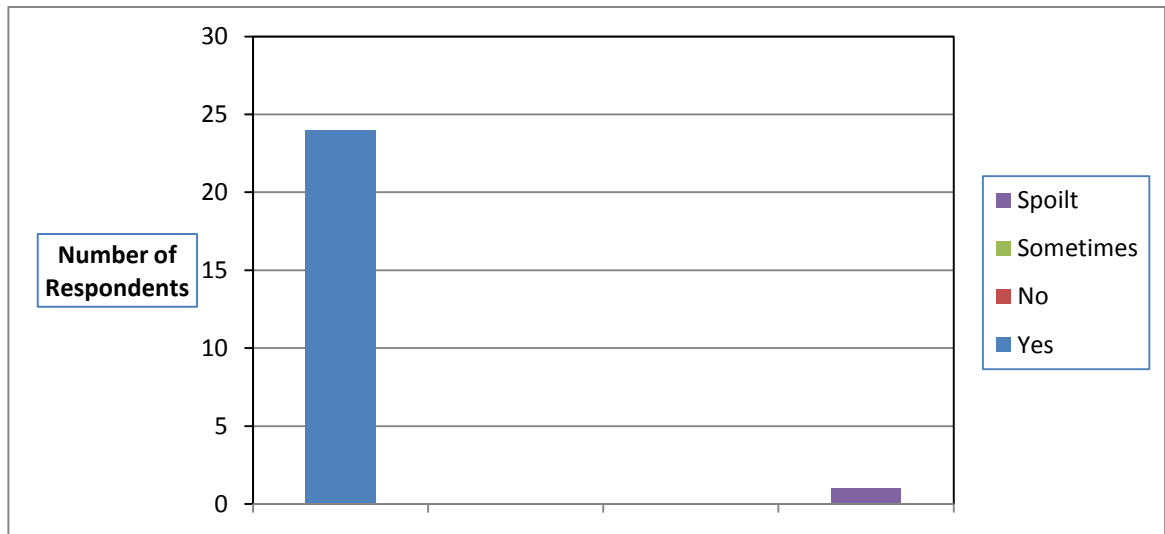
Figure 4.2: Parents' assistance with homework

The figure above shows that of the 25 respondents, 24 (96%) indicated that they assisted their children with their homework; one (4%) of the questionnaires was spoilt, in the sense that the parents indicated that they both did and did not assist their children with homework.

Question 3 pertained to parents' or family representatives' familiarity with the homework of the children. The intent was to ascertain their perceptions regarding their understanding of homework problems.

Question Three: Do you understand the homework?
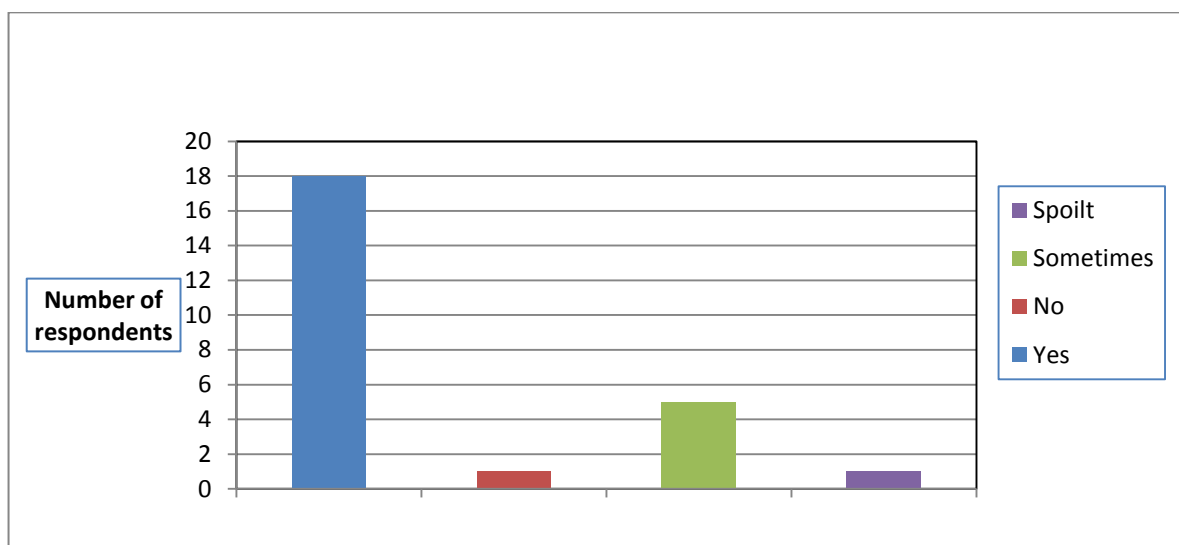
Figure 4.3: The parents' grasp of the homework

Parents that indicated that they understood the homework comprised18 (72%). Respondents who indicated 'no' to this question, consisted of one (4%), and parents who indicated that they only sometimes understood the homework, were five (20%), while one (4%) questionnaire was spoilt.

In Question 4, parents were required to reflect on the type of homework learners got at school. The purpose was to determine whether they knew that learners received written assignments, activity sheets and projects on a regular basis.

Question Four: What is the nature of the homework that your child gets at school?
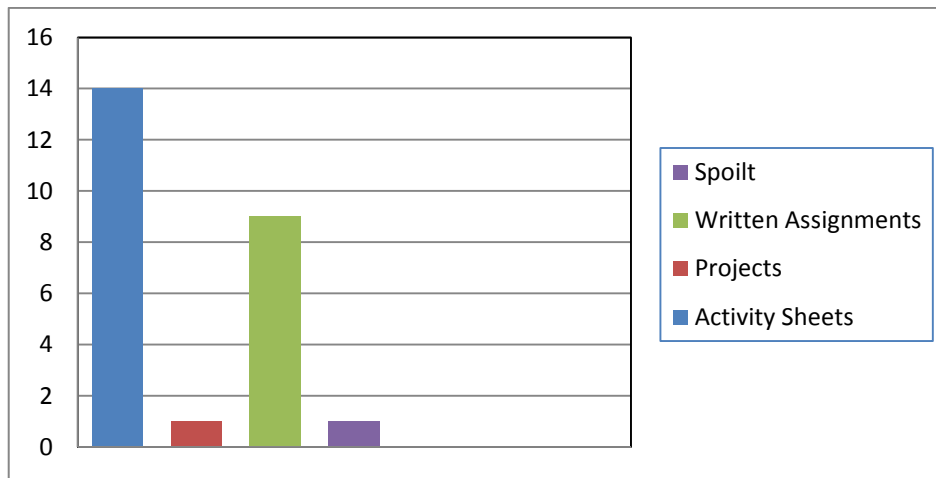
Figure4.4: The nature of the homework given to learners

In the above figure, the majority of parents, 14 (56%) indicated that their children received homework in the form of activity sheets. One (4%) specified that his or her child got homework in the form of projects, nine (36%) referred to the homework as written assignments, and one (4%) indicated that his/her children get homework in more than one of the options.

In Question 5 parents were asked whether or not they signed their children's homework activities. This was done to ascertain whether the parents interacted with their children's homework activities.

Question Five: Do you sign the homework?
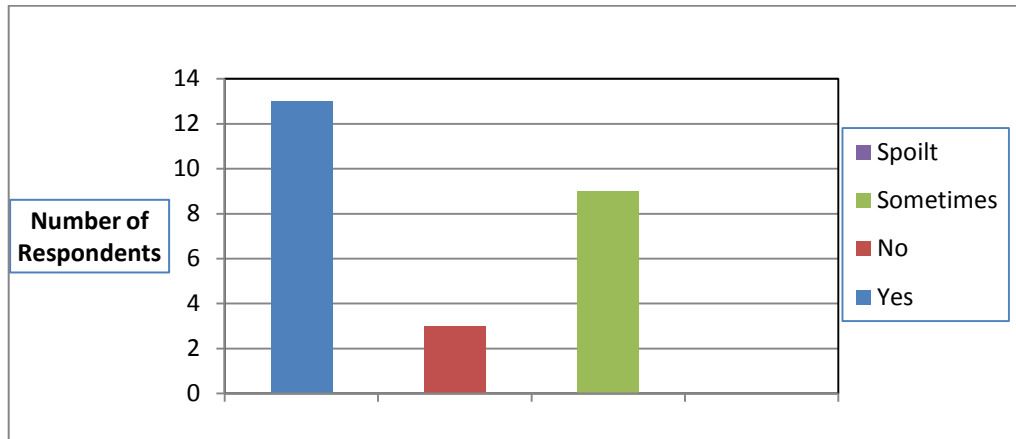
Figure 4.5: The number of parents indicating that they do sign off the homework checked

Of the total number of respondents, 13 (52%) responded 'yes' to the question, compared with the three (12%) who indicated 'no', and nine (36%) who replied 'sometimes'.

In Question 6 parents were asked if they set aside a time to help their children with their homework. The researcher wanted to ensure that parents do sit with their children while completing their homework.

Question Six: Do you have a specific time when you sit with your child to assist him or her with the homework?
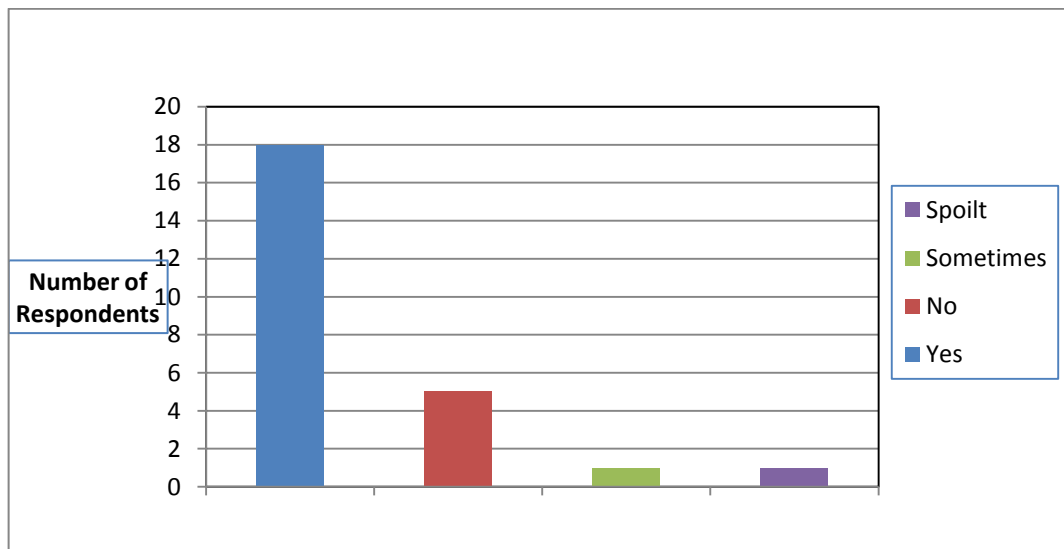
Figure 4.6: Time intervals on the allocated time question

Of the 25 respondents, 18 (72%) replied 'yes' to the question, five (20%) indicated 'no', one (4%) indicated 'sometimes'; one (4%) of the questionnaires was spoilt. Twenty parents substantiated their answers as to whether or not they had a specific time that they spent with their children's homework.

The researcher wanted to ascertain in Question 7whetherparents did communicate with the educator when in doubt regarding their children's homework activities.

Question Seven: Do you liaise with the educator if you are uncertain about certain aspects of the homework?
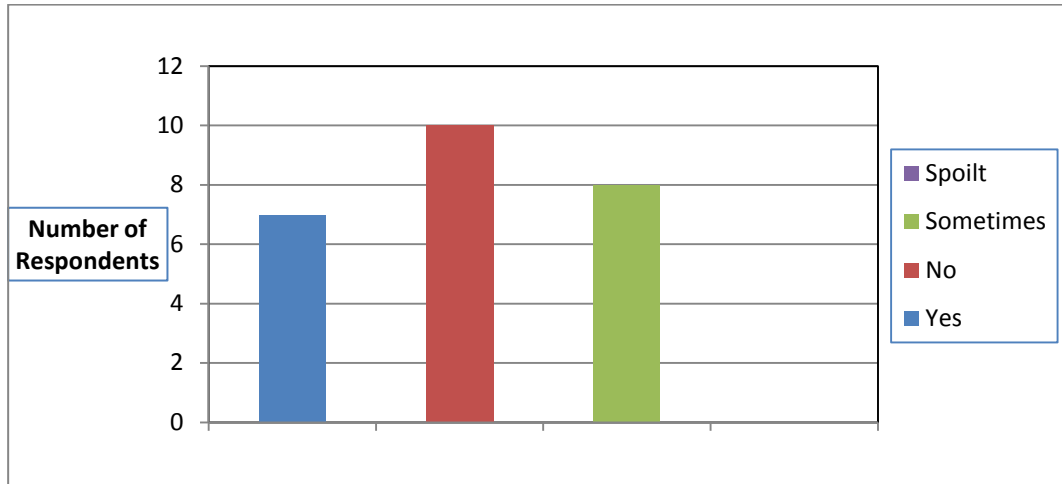
Figure 4.7: Parents reflecting on the frequency of liaison with teachers

On the question to whether they liaised on a regular basis if they were uncertain about certain aspects of the homework, a mere seven (28%) respondents replied affirmatively to the question, that they did communicate if uncertain about how to assist their children, compared with the ten (40%) who indicated that they did not interact. Eight (32%) respondents indicated that they sometimes liaised with the educator.

4.3   Intervention programme

The listening and language intervention homework programme in English literacy was decided upon after analysis of the questionnaires. It was evident from the questionnaires that the parents could benefit from the listening and language homework programme devised by Liesel van Niekerk, as these homework sessions were held to assist the parents with content knowledge and skills that their children had to master at this grade level. This programme, designed by Van Niekerk (2007), was aimed at parents who wanted to take an active role in contributing to a homework series for their children. Written permission was obtained from Van Niekerk to use her programme for the purpose of the research (see Appendix C).

The fluctuation in the attendance of the participants was due to transport problems they experienced. They also informed the researcher verbally, telephonically and via SMS that they had work commitments that made it difficult for them to attend. The fourth and fifth sessions were better attended because of the mid-year examination.

Attendance of respondents per session

	1st session	2nd session	3rd session	4th session	5th session	6th session
■ School	5	4	1	8	6	3
■ Westlake	0	0	3	6	0	0
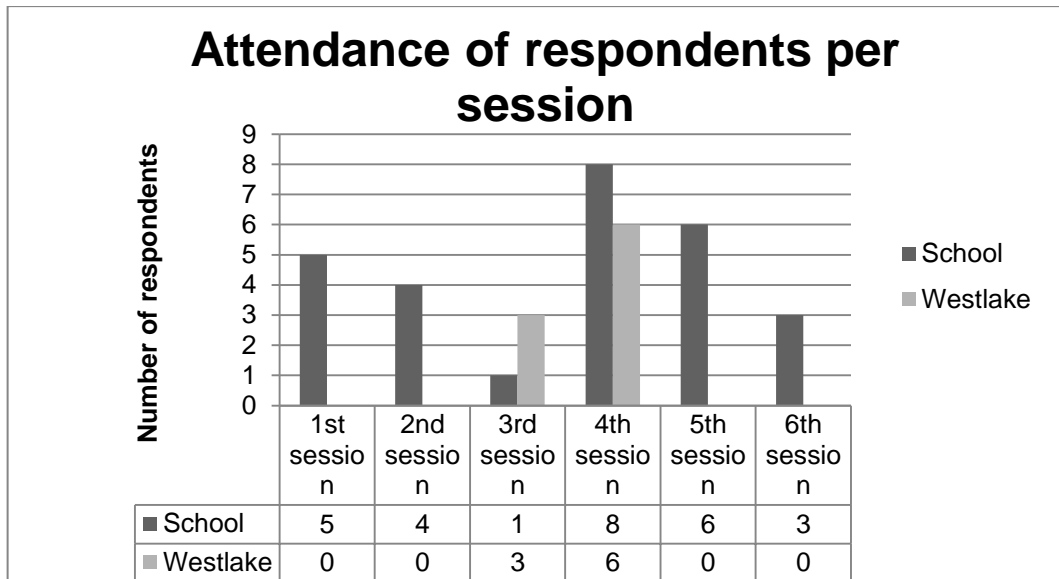
Figure 4.8: Attendance of homework programme at the different venues

4.4 The language diversity

The language diversity of the respondents elicited their own descriptions, as well as their own literacy encounters of reading and writing. Many of these parents at times found it difficult to express themselves in English.

However, the parents indicated during the focus group interview that this had had no negative impact on their involvement, because they also involved others to help with the homework if they were unable to read and write in the language of the homework.

4.5 Presentation of findings of the intervention programme

The researcher's findings during the implementation of the intervention programme were about the parents' willingness to gain assistance to be able to help their children with their homework. The parents were also eager to be equipped in the different learning areas in order for them to assist their children in all the learning areas.

4.5.1 Evaluating the worksheets of the intervention programme of the learners

The parents reported at each homework session that their children were capable of completing the exercises at home under their supervision, and with their assistance. After scrutinising the worksheets that were dealt with during these homework sessions with the parents, it was evident that the learners could master the worksheets. The purpose of the exercises on the worksheets was to improve the language development of the learners.

Parents felt at ease to ask questions and to pass comments on situations that they could identify with. They very eagerly relayed their experiences during the session with regard to certain themes like: "Our School", "The City" and "The Supermarket". They shared incidents that had occurred in their households regarding their children's schooling. Parents and representatives said that they had had an enjoyable time assisting their children to write the rhyme about their teacher. This was evident in the activity that the learners did with their parents. Other parents spoke about occurrences that they had experienced in the city as a family. The researcher recorded all the observations that were made during the session in the field notes.

The mothers especially were very enthusiastic about the theme of the supermarket, as they conveyed their experiences when their children accompanied them to do the shopping. They mentioned passionately that their children helped them with the shopping and how they wrote the shopping list. Parents said that they found it easier to assist their children with their homework after engaging in the homework programme.

4.5.1.1 Cycle One. Session One. The School
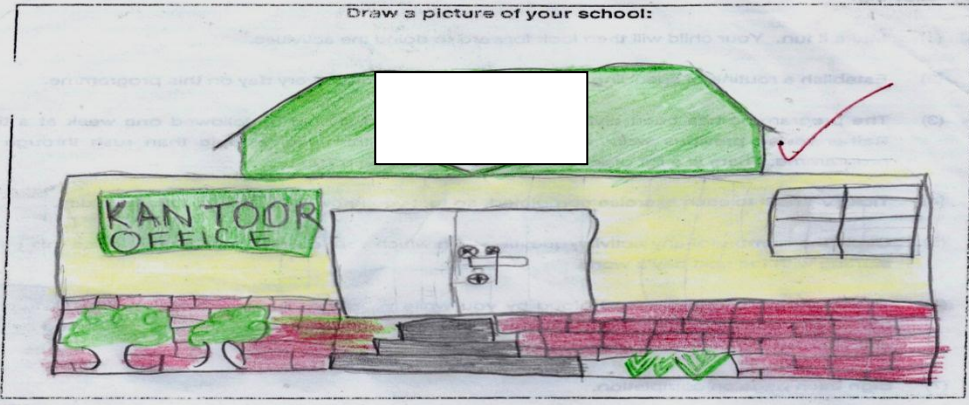
The first session with the parents and family representatives was conducted on 27 February 2010. The following themes were covered:

a) The School
b) The Classroom
c) Late for School

Parents/representatives engaged with their children at home during the ensuing month when the same themes were dealt with at school. The themes were intertwined in all learning areas and focused on transferring and applying acquired knowledge to different types of exercises, for example, drawing a picture of their school (Arts and Culture), completing sentences regarding their school (Literacy) and engaging with a word sum (Mathematics).
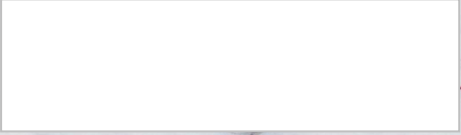
Figure4.9: A learner's completed worksheet from the homework programme done at home on the theme "The School"

After an assessment of the first homework programme session, it was evident that the parents were interested in establishing a partnership with the school. The second cycle of the action research spiral, namely Cycle Two, *Session Two*, was implemented. The researcher prepared the worksheets in advance to make the necessary provision for the parents who attended the second homework programme and in doing so, strengthened the relationship between the home and school.

The 'acting' phase of the action research cycle refers to the monthly workshops that were held with parents and representatives. The parents and other family representatives that attended the workshops emphasised that they enjoyed the interaction with one another as well as with the learning material.

A. J. said that the interaction and responses during the implementation of the homework programme were overwhelming. He also mentioned that he wished that the homework programme could continue so that his son could be motivated to achieve "something more".

During the 'observation' phase, class activities such as teaching and learning were reflected in the research instruments, like the learners' workbooks, classroom observations, homework sheets and homework books.

4.5.1.2   Cycle Two. Session Two. The City

During the second session the researcher interacted with themes like:

a) The City
b) The Shopping Mall
c) Occupations

These activities included pasting of items found in the different departments in a supermarket. Learners had to put the items in the appropriate categories such as bread in the bakery, dairy products like milk, in the dairy section, meat in the butchery section and deodorant in the toiletries section.

Learners decided to paste beautiful pictures (See Figure 4.10) of items that one is able to buy at a shopping mall (Arts, Culture and Technology). The literacy aspects came into play where learners completed sentences about what they can buy at different shops. They finished the sentences regarding the different shops and did the auditory sequential memory as well as the sentence memory exercises. The learners concluded the exercises on the different sounds.

Figure 4.10: A learner's completed worksheet from the homework programme done at home on the theme "The Supermarket"

The themes on "The City "corresponded once more with learning areas such as Mathematics, as the learners connected the dots (numbers) on the worksheets (see Figure 3.10) to complete the pictures of the different modes of transport associated with a city.

Cycle 3 of the action plan commenced when the times of the third session changed again to suit the parents. This time the researcher changed the times as well as the venues. The sessions were adjusted to two classes consisting of one hour each. The first class was held at the research site to accommodate the parents who lived near the school and on the surroundings farms. The other class was moved to a new venue to accommodate those parents who struggled to get to the research site due to transport problems. The venue was a community hall in a sub-economic suburb that was within walking distance for the parents.

4.5.1.3   Cycle Three. Session Three. Transport

During the focus group interview, parents indicated that learners were able to engage with different levels of exercises for the duration of Session Three, while the researcher dealt with themes like:

a) Transport
b) The Service Station
c) The Railway Station

These topics consisted of vocabulary, auditory association, reasoning, and analysis exercises that the parents had to do with their children. It also tested their comprehension skills as learners had to read with comprehension.
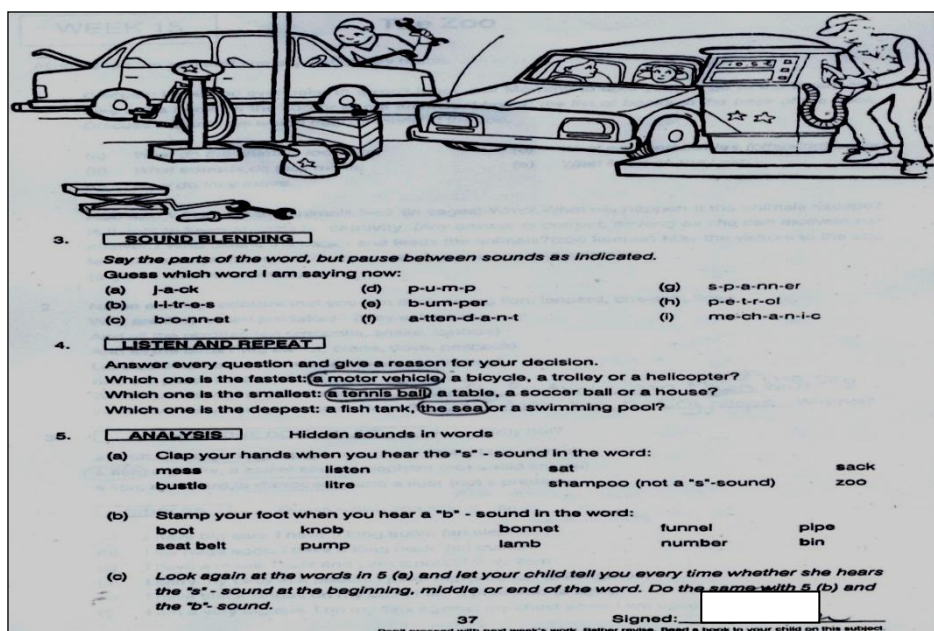
Figure 4.11: A learner's completed worksheet done at home on the theme "The Service Station"

4.5.1.4 Cycle Four. Session Four. Road Safety

This session comprised the following topics:

a) Road Safety

b) The Bicycle

c) The Motor Car

The parents and their children could identify with the theme on "Road Safety", as the issue of safety on our roads affects all road users. The researcher emphasised the importance of knowing and acknowledging road signs as well as their meanings. The learners did an activity on road signs in class and how to keep safe on the road while using a bicycle.(See Figure 4.12 below.)
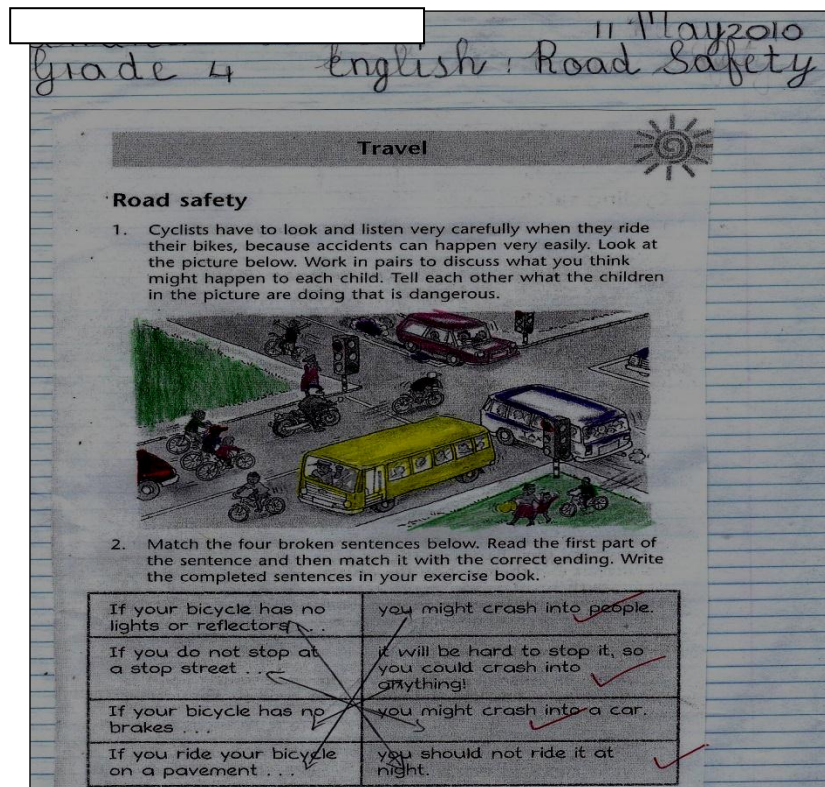
Figure 4.12: A learner's completed worksheet done in class on the theme "Travel"

This exercise prompted the learners to be part of a group discussion to match sentences and to write the completed sentences in their exercise book. (See Figure 4.13 below.)
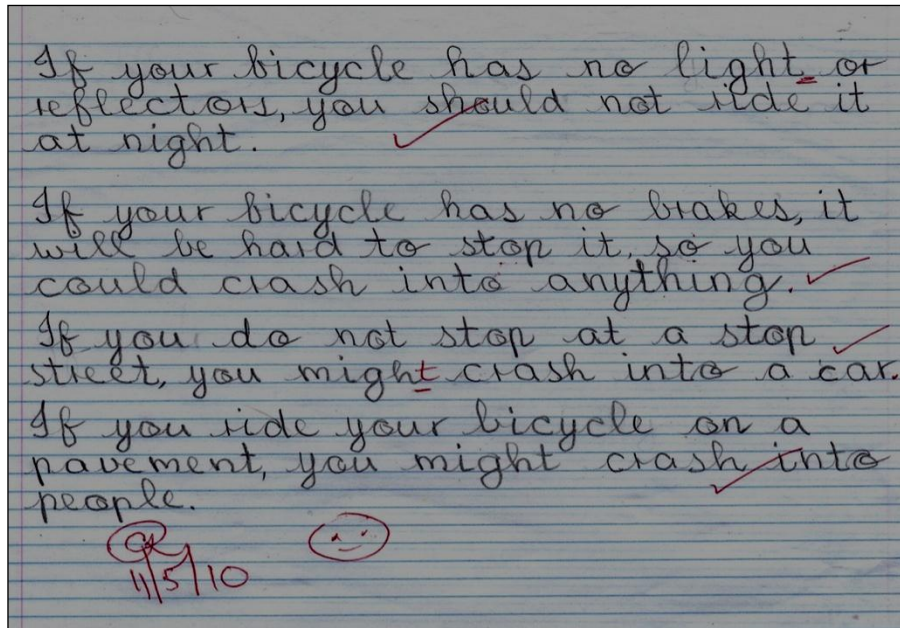
Figure 4.13: A learner's completed worksheet in class on the theme "Travel"

The attendance at the fourth session held on Saturday, 8 May 2010, showed an escalation in the attendance at both venues due to a parent – teacher meeting that was held prior to the homework programme. The researcher emphasised the importance of parental involvement and reminded the parents of the mid-year examination in June of that year which was fast approaching.

4.5.1.5   Cycle Five. Session Five. The Supermarket

Session Five concentrated on the following themes:

a) Odd one out!
b) Listening Games
c) Let Us Bake

These themes consisted of exercises that stimulated the learners' vocabulary skills, how to put items in different categories, as well as auditory associations to assist in completing sentences. During the focus group interview, A.J. shared with the group that he assisted his son with the baking of the fridge cakes because his wife was working. Some of the children were very excited when they brought their fridge cakes to school for the teacher to taste. The learners were observed during contact time in class and the researcher noticed that the learners' listening and reasoning skills had improved because they could carry out activities in class context as well as at home. See Figure 4.17.
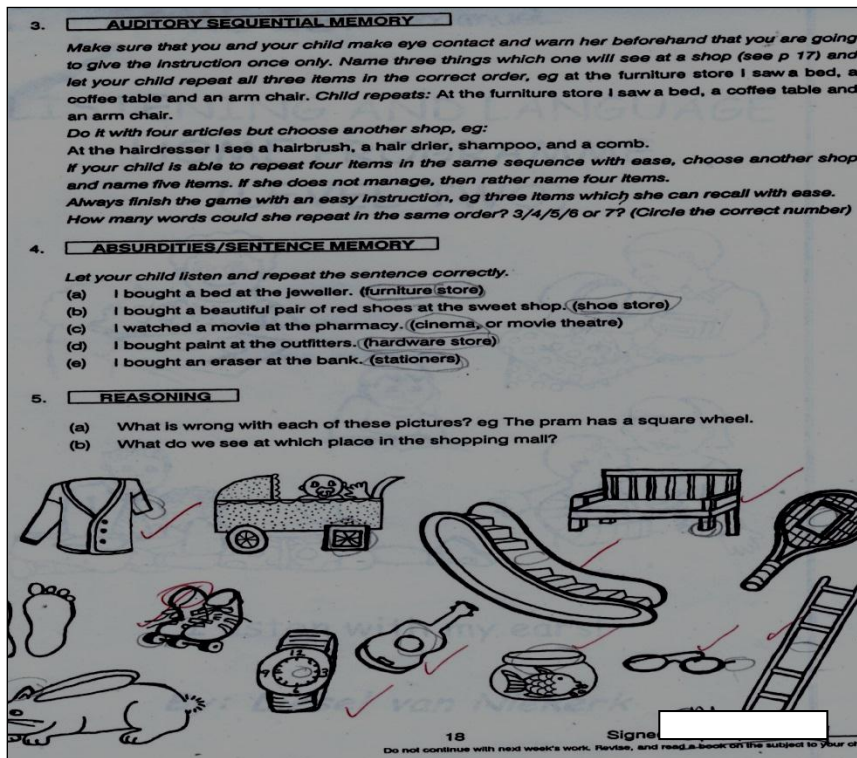
Figure 4.14: A learner's completed worksheet from the homework programme done at home on the theme "Odd One Out"

4.5.1.6   Cycle Six. Session Six. Animals

Session Six consisted of the following themes:

a) The Zoo

b) The Farm

c) Animal Games

It was required of the parents and their children to listen, discuss and read the instructions.

The memory games included words and figures as well as listening exercises.
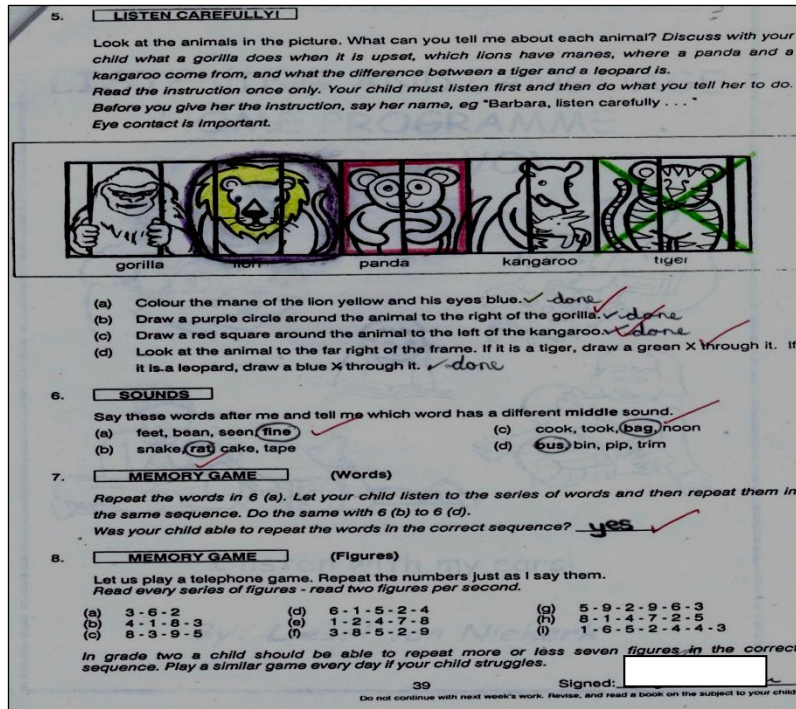
Figure 4.15: A learner's completed worksheet from the homework programme on the theme "The Zoo"

The learners' vocabulary, spelling, grammar, memorisation and basic comprehension skills were put into practice in these exercises. Learners were motivated to do a reflection on the meaning of the text as this helped to improve their literacy levels. See Figure 4.16 below.
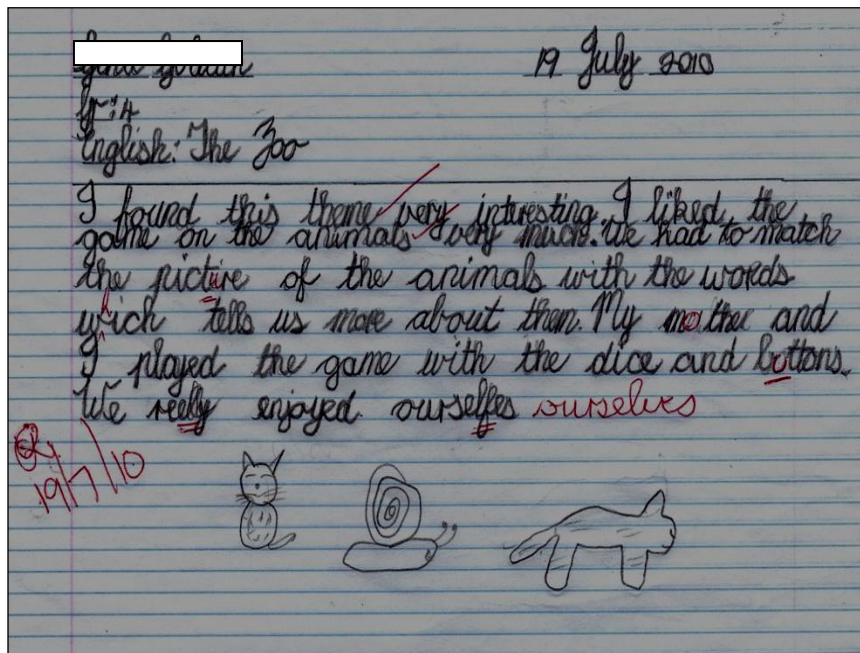
Figure 4.16: A learner's reflection on work done on the theme "The Zoo"

Parents reported during the focus group interview that their children were quite capable of completing the exercises with ease, as it was a team effort between them and their children. C.L. commented:

> *My kind bring gereeld huiswerk huis toe, en dan is ek altyd daar om vir hom te help om die huiswerk te doen.*Translation: My child brings homework home regularly and then I am always there to help him.

They also mentioned that both they and their children enjoyed it thoroughly. This activity allowed learners to interact with the reading of the timetable for the arrival and departure times of the trains. It also integrated with Mathematics, as they had to work out how long they would have to wait for a train if they arrived at the station at a certain time.

4.6Monitoring of learners' progress

The progress and development of the 38 learners were monitored by means of data collected from their exercise booklets and English Continuous Assessment Standards (CASS) marks for 2010.See Figure 4.17 below.
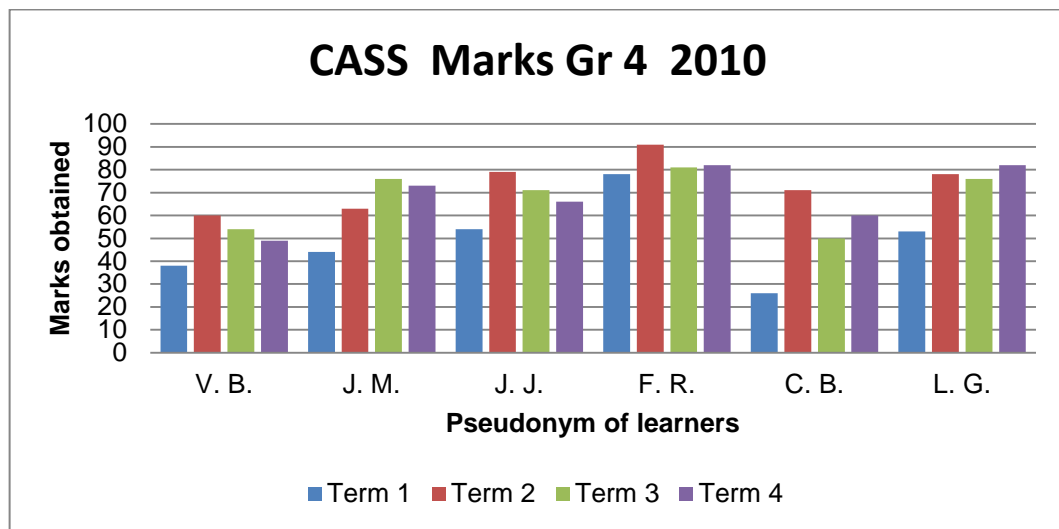
Figure 4.17: A comparison in learner's English CASS marks over a period of the 4 terms.

The information in Figure 4.17 shows that six of the 38 learners' results increased, especially during the second term, while the intervention programme was implemented. The names were chosen randomly from those representatives who attended the homework sessions. It furthermore shows improvement during the other terms, compared with the first term. Observations in the class context offered another dimension to data collected from learners, as their own involvement in homework and understanding of what was required for homework assignments was monitored in class. The observations were made during the first monthly homework workshop with parents and the observations were recorded. The learners

were very eager and motivated to answer questions and complete activities. Learners were able to recognise examples and activities with which their parents had assisted them at home and were very excited when doing so. C.L. mentioned that she had attended the homework sessions to be able to help her child. She pointed out that they had found the various themes and activities very interesting.

The learners were constantly observed during contact time after the homework sessions to monitor their involvement as well as their progress. Some of the learners showed signs of being uninterested, especially in difficult sections of the work. It was evident, however, that with the parents' assistance with homework, that both parents and learners had put more effort into their attempts to answer the questions in the best way possible. The learners made sure that the homework was not just completed, but was done to the best of their abilities. This was evident in their homework books. There was a huge improvement in the percentage of submissions of homework.

After the third homework session, the learners showed considerably greater interest in their work.

4.7   Outline of the focus group

Nine of the 38 parents comprised the focus group. These parents came from multilingual backgrounds. Four parents spoke Afrikaans as first language, one parent indicated English as mother tongue, two parents spoke isiXhosa, one parent spoke chiShona and one parent spoke xiTsonga. The researcher interviewed the parents in English. The interview questions were translated into Afrikaans at the request of some of the parents. The respondents were encouraged to answer in either English or Afrikaans.

4.8   The focus group session

The session was held at the research site with the nine respondents, after the intervention programme was completed. Parents were asked to respond honestly and openly to the questions. The following themes were prominent during the focus group session.

4.8.1 The different home languages

At the research site, with the huge diversity in home languages, the researcher concentrated on giving English literacy homework for the duration of the homework programme to enable the parent and child to work together. The parents who used a different language at home

found it equally difficult to assist their children if the homework had to be done in Afrikaans. Parents were then able to use English as a guide to assist their children with their homework. One parent (A.J.**)** expressed his views regarding their home languages:

> Our home languages are both English and Afrikaans. I feel that it can only benefit my son by learning two languages.

Parents whose home language was other than English or Afrikaans struggled to help their children if the homework was in Afrikaans.

4.8.2 Support groups and parental involvement

The respondents mentioned that they had to ask other people to help them and their children to do the Afrikaans homework. In response to this, F.T. who speaks isiXhosa, indicated that she had to call upon another girl who speaks Afrikaans to assist her and her granddaughter to do the homework**.** A.S., whose mother tongue is chiShona, indicated:

> I do help my child um… with the homework when it comes in English but …um…when it comes in Afrikaans I have to let her go and ask her friend. I cannot help her then. I ask a friend because I do not understand Afrikaans.

Agreeing with this view was N.B. who indicated that she had to request the assistance of a girl where she worked to assist her daughter with the Afrikaans homework. M.C. indicated that his Afrikaans was very poor but that he asked his eldest daughter to help her younger sister.

The researcher wanted, during the focus group interview, to gauge the extent of parental involvement by enquiring from them their level of competency if they needed to assist children with homework in a language other than English. Parents noted that they were now more aware that their children brought homework home and that they felt confident to help them because of the homework intervention programme. The respondent, N.B., indicated that she had noticed that her daughter "does not struggle as much with her work" now that she assisted her with it. She further indicated that her daughter "did not understand a lot of the exercises given as homework before".

A.S. shared the same sentiment and indicated that she "never noticed whether her daughter brought homework home before, but nowadays she was more vigilant". According to her, the daughter was performing much better now that she and her husband (who also attended the homework sessions) were assisting their daughter.

G.L. proudly indicated that his son brought homework home more often. He mentioned that his child is "sometimes able to do the work on his own", but then he checked it afterwards.

Because of the homework sessions, parents, family members and the children have built new relationships with one another. F.T. indicated that she and her grandchild worked very well together during the homework session. According to her, this did not happen prior to the intervention programme, as she (the grandmother) was not well acquainted with all the demands of the education system. Since attending the homework sessions, she felt better equipped to assist her child with the homework. C.L. commented:

> *My kind bring gereeld huiswerk huis toe, en dan is ek altyd daar om vir hom te help om die huiswerk te doen.* Translation: My child brings homework home regularly and then I am always there to help him.

Another mother said, "*Sover ek weet kry hulle gereeld huiswerk op 'n gereelde basis en dan is ek daar om haar te ondersteun om die huiswerk te doen.*"Translation:"As far as I know they do get homework on a regular basis and then I am there to help her to do her homework."

4.8.3 Ensuring parental commitment

It is very important for children to know that their parents are committed and that the parents will assist them. Children will then know what they must do, what is expected of them, and whether they do it properly, especially knowing that their parents will check their work. Ticknor (2007:6) encourages parents to have a positive attitude towards their children's homework projects. She maintains that homework is not always fun for children, but parents can change the way children feel about their homework if they too have a positive attitude. Ticknor further suggests that parents' guide their children with their homework instead of doing the homework for them. Parents will have their fingers on the pulse of their children's education by checking their homework. This also implies that parents are constantly involved in their children's activities. Learners do feel very confident if parents show a keen interest in their schoolwork. I have noticed during classes that these learners do not hesitate to contribute during class activities.

 F.T. maintained that she did sign the homework of her grandchild but admitted that she sometimes forgot to sign it. M.C. echoed that he too signed his daughter's homework. He responded that "there are times when she would remind" him to sign the work. N.B. noted that she signed her daughter's homework regularly, to which G.J. responded: "*Ja, ek teken*

die huiswerk op 'n gereelde basis." Translation: "Yes, I sign the homework on a regular basis."

Other parents and family representatives, on the other hand, responded differently to this statement by stating:

> *Meeste van die tye my kind hy sê nie ek moet die huiswerk moet ek onderteken nie so daar is baie tye wat ek glad nie sy huiswerk onderteken nie maar ek sien oor daar lat hy die huiswerk net gedaan kry,* Translation: Most of the time my child doesn't say that I must sign the homework so there are a lot of times that I don't sign the homework but I oversee that he does his homework.C.L.

M.J. confirmed the view of C.L., indicating that she did not sign her brother's homework, but that she saw to it that he did the homework. A.J. replied that he, likewise, did not sign his son's work but that he kept a watchful eye on him while he was busy with his work.

Homework has many benefits for parents, learners and educators as it fosters a positive spirit among them.

4.8.4 Time management

This is an important aspect of homework activities, as sufficient time should be set aside to do the homework. When asked if the parents had a specific time that they sat with their children, this is what M.C. said:

> Um, actually I do have got[*sic*] a specific time that I sit with my child. I want to do something for her so …ur…. we do have a little time to spend … the homework book and so on so … we have got a special time actually before she go [*sic*] to other children. First of all we do have to do the schoolwork and do homework and so on. I ask her if she have [*sic*] homework when she comes from school.

A.J. indicated that because he was unemployed, he had a lot of time to spend with his son while doing his homework. He stated that his son did his homework as soon as he came home from school. When that was done, he allowed him to go and play with his friends.
C.L. declared that the time when she sat with her son sometimes differed. She said sometimes he did the homework immediately when he came from school. On other days she first allowed him to watch his cartoons on television. Then there were times that they sat with the homework just before her television programmes started. She said that it sometimes did happen that he only did his homework after his bath; then they did the homework before his bedtime.

N.B. responded by saying that she sat with her daughter after work when she had spare time. Similarly, A.S. stated that she helped her daughter when she came from work. She mentioned that her daughter's homework was done most of the time by the time she returned home – then she just made sure it was correct.

F.T.said:

> Every time when she comes from school that is the first thing that I ask because I am always at home. I say the first thing she can look in the bag and just ask Do you have homework? So now she knows then she just go[*sic*] to the bedroom.

Finally G.J. affirmed that she first saw to it that she finished her work at home so that she had enough time to spend with her daughter.

4.9   The value of the homework sessions

The researcher wanted to ascertain from the respondents whether they found the programme fruitful and whether it was advantageous to them and their children. Parents indicated that they and their children had learned a lot from the programme that was divided into the different themes.

One parental representative said that her granddaughter was now able to assist her by compiling a grocery list prior to visiting a store, and this boosted her morale, as she could now help her grandmother with her shopping. A.J. said it was a very interesting process to spend so much time with his child. He undertook to continue helping his son in this way. He alluded to the fact that he wished such a programme would continue, as he had found it very stimulating.

 G.L. referred to the various techniques used during the sessions and his wife C.L. said that she had found them very helpful:

> *Die klasse wat ons op Saterdae bygewoon het was vir my um... baie interessant; dit was vir my baie um... dit het vir my baie gehelp want sometimes het die kind saam met werk huis toe gekom um... dan kan ek nie vir die kind help saam met die huiswerk nie want ek het nie verstaan waaroor gaan dit nie en toe ek nou die klasse beginne bywoon het op Saterdae um... het dit vir my baie gehelp om lekker saam met hom te kan sit om hom te help saam met daai huiswerk en dit was vir ons altwee prêt gewees.* Translation: The classes that we attended on Saturdays were very interesting to me um... it was for me a lot it helped me a lot um... because sometimes the child came home with homework then I could not help the child with his homework because I did not understand the homework but it helped me a lot when I attended the classes on Saturdays to sit with him and to help him with the homework. We enjoyed it.

N.B. mentioned that her daughter liked to answer the questions in response to the stories prescribed. G.J. indicated that she and her daughter found the games very enjoyable. In view of the reading exercises, A.S mentioned that:

> My daughter responded very well to those questions, especially the reading ones when she comes across new words and taking them home reading them again and again and she is improving even when she is reading something else and come across the words she knows that she can do it [*sic*].

A.J. said:

> My son's response was actually overwhelming ...um because sometimes when I miss a session on a Saturday then he jump down my throat ... saying why weren't I there because he need that papers … um ...because it is almost like a … um... it is almost like a homework and you find um ... you find for the child that the child learns more things ... he learns certain things that he does not know about, say for instance like the city or even baking; those I don't know what he had to bake because … um ... I had um ... to bake it because I was I because um ...my wife was not here so I had to bake it and he said it does not taste nice but it was overwhelming because he learn a lot and the parents also learn a lot because it is good ... I would not mind if there was another session like that just to get him more motivated to do something.

Other parents indicated that they had enjoyed doing the programme and their children had found it very motivating.

4.10   Informal communication with parents

The researcher had informal conversations on a regular basis with parents, her colleagues, WCED officials and SGB members regarding the issue of parental involvement at the school. These conversations were recorded in the field notes. One of her colleagues mentioned that he did not give homework to his learners as he regarded it as time consuming because parents did not show any interest in their children's homework. He offered his help to assist me in my venture with the parental programme. The researcher informed WCED officials and SGB members regarding the parental involvement programme and kept them abreast of developments.

The researcher intended to school the parents in becoming involved in their children's homework. Therefore, she was involved in informal conversations with parents regarding their involvement and homework's importance in their children's schoolwork.

4.11   Conclusion

It is evident from the above-mentioned information that the diversity of languages at the research site made it difficult for parents to assist their children with the homework in other learning areas. The homework briefings were most certainly of consequence to learners as well as their parents or family representatives. The positive responses of the focus group respondents were most gratifying.

The parents played an important role in attending the intervention homework programme, as this equipped them to assist their children with their English literacy homework, irrespective of the language diversity at the research site. The respondents who were interviewed were from different racial groups.

Conclusions and recommendations emanating from the research are discussed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1   Introduction

In Chapter 4, the results from the research instruments, such as the questionnaires, intervention programme and focus group interview were discussed. Learners' homework activities were also used to illustrate the nature of the content covered during the intervention programme and followed up in class as homework activities to stimulate parental involvement. These research instruments were used as a conduit to establish collaboration between the home and the school.

This final chapter presents an overview of the research study, which includes a summary of the major findings and the implications of a lack of parental involvement on the academic endeavours of Grade 4 learners, as well as appropriate recommendations. This study authenticates the view that parental involvement is vital as a form of academic support, especially among learners studying in the Intermediate and Senior phases of their school career. This investigation showed a positive correlation between parental involvement and the progress of learners after assessment of their homework and classroom activities.

The research data and qualitative responses presented were collected from a group of parents of a Grade 4 class. The responses, as gleaned from the questionnaires, reflected that parents who actively supported the homework activities and who engaged actively, found the OBE approach very challenging. Parents also indicated that in instances where difficulties were experienced, there were clear liaisons forged with the educator to afford clarity on the problem areas.

Respondents agreed that it was important for parents to be actively involved in their children's schoolwork. Furthermore, parents echoed the sentiment that the relationship between activities at home and at school should be nurtured. The involvement of all key stakeholders in the education of learners is perceived as a significant feature to endorse a positive atmosphere that is conducive to learning.

5.2   Conclusions

The overall sentiment expressed by the parents regarding the English literacy homework programme was generally very positive. Participants experienced the English literacy intervention programme as a beneficial tool to ensure closer links between home and school.

5.2.1   English literacy as a conduit to assist learners with homework

In the diverse community served by this school, a variety of home languages are spoken. The English literacy homework programme was thus experienced as a useful avenue to link home and school by all parents. The language that respondents most commonly converse in at home, especially among family members for the purpose of interaction, is referred to as their home language or mother tongue. Parents whose mother tongue was Afrikaans benefitted from the study, as they were able to use the English language as an avenue to assist their children, especially with their homework. On the other hand, parents who indicated English as a home language, also found considerable value in this programme, as it assisted their children with critical thinking patterns, and enabled them to be of assistance to their children, and assist their children with a greater level of academic confidence. Parents whose home language was other than English or Afrikaans had a very positive attitude towards the programme and school.

5.2.2   Parental support to assist learners with homework

Parents formed support groups to assist one another. The camaraderie among the participants was therefore commendable. This was evident in the support groups the parents formed, and the respect they showed towards one another. The support groups formed by participants as a result of the English language programme interventions on Saturdays resulted in participants providing assistance also in other learning areas, for example, in Afrikaans, which was not the mother tongue of many of the learners and their families. These groups were formed as a result of the positive influences that the participants and the researcher had on one another, as everyone wanted to improve the process of learning. McNiff and Whitehead (2006:51) support this view: "[W]e are all influenced all the time. We learn from our books, families, friends and colleagues, according to the specific traditions of our particular culture." The parents and children all benefitted from the support that they received in the groups. Lilly and Green (2004:131) echoed this: "[T]he literacy materials in homes of bilingual or multilingual families may be in several languages. In some households, neighbours and friends may be called on to help translate letters and forms that arrive from school."

5.2.3 The importance of parental involvement

Parents and other participants in the programme realised the importance of being involved in their children's lives as learners. This became evident in the variety of ways in which they responded, for example, reading before bedtime or even telling bedtime stories. Parents were encouraged to ask questions during this time about the story and to ensure that they made story time an enjoyable and important time of their daily family life as it is one of the most valuable foundations for the development of language in learners. Furthermore, this programme urged parents to create a schedule comprising ten dedicated minutes every day with their children (Van Niekerk, 2007:4).

5.2.4 Parental efficacy was improved

Parental efficacy was improved since the parents interacted with the researcher at the school about their children's homework activities. The parents furthermore met the researcher's requests and suggestions related to homework, for example, signing completed tasks and participating in the homework intervention programme.

Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, Whetsel and Green (2004:2) state:

> Parents often become involved in their children's education through homework. Whether children do homework at home, complete it in after-school programs, work on it during the school day, homework can be a powerful tool for (a) letting parents and other adults know what the child is learning, (b) giving children and parents a reason to talk about what's going on at school, and (c) giving teachers an opportunity to hear from parents about children's learning.

They suggest that parents can become actively involved with their child's education, especially if they are aware of the ways in which schools can support or assist them. Parents should communicate with the teacher about the child's performance, progress and homework. Coleman (2013:78), however, cautions: "When applied to family-teacher partnerships, self-efficacy can be defined as the core belief that we possess the skills and knowledge needed to work collaboratively with families in advancing children's education."

As forms of cognitive support structures, parents created structures for the children's homework performance by having regular times for homework. Parents communicated and imposed the expectations, rules and standards for homework behaviour clearly to their children.

5.2.5　The value of the intervention programme

The intervention programme was considered to be extremely valuable by all parties. The listening and language programme assisted children in developing their general understanding of English and gave them insight into the content knowledge needed in the OBE curriculum. It allowed the parents to become actively involved in their children's work. The programme assisted the children to become motivated, self-assured and to develop memory, reading, comprehension, vocabulary and reasoning skills. This fun-filled programme of authentic and relatable exercises, inspired them (the children) to think creatively, and to challenge conventional views, linked to the exercises completed. The programme expanded their general awareness of and insight into the topics completed. It ensured family involvement, as parents and children engaged in family activities such as the various family games, for example, "the chain game". G.L. referred to the different techniques that were used during the sessions and his wife C.L. supported him:

> *Die klasse wat ons op Saterdae bygewoon het was vir my um... baie interessant; dit was vir my baie um... dit het vir my baie gehelp want sometimes het die kind saam met werk huistoe gekom um ... dan kan ek nie vir die kind help saam met die huiswerk nie want ek het nie verstaan waaroor gaan dit nie en toe ek nou die klasse beginne bywoon het op Saterdae um... het dit vir my baie gehelp om lekker saam met hom te kan sit om hom te help saam met daai huiswerk en dit was vir ons altwee prêt gewees.* Translation: The classes that we attended on Saturdays was [*sic*] very interesting to me um... it was for me a lot it helped me a lot um... because sometimes the child came home with homework then I could not help the child with his homework because I did not understand the homework but it helped me a lot when I attended the classes on Saturdays to sit with him and to help him with the homework. We enjoyed it.

5.2.6　Strategies to involve parents with homework

The intervention strategies used in this study assisted parents in supporting their children with homework. Walker *et al.* (2004:4) are of the opinion that the focus on strategies that educators can use to encourage parents to become involved with their children's schoolwork often spearheads the interactive education objectives. According to them, parents might often be over-enthusiastic to provide assistance with their children's schooling, but they do not necessarily know how to assist with the tasks, or understand why their involvement is important. It is therefore suggested that parents should be encouraged to ask questions regarding their child's schooling. It is beneficial to all involved if the purpose of the homework is clearly communicated to parents. Parents and the educator communicated in the form of writing, and through telecommunication. In order to understand how the programme worked, the parents were tutored on the content of the homework programme, encouraged to ask questions, and asked to provide input; in this way interaction between parents and the

educator was fostered. Parents were encouraged to assist with problems their children encountered in completing their homework activities. The parents were assisted in helping their children to become independent thinkers as defined in Bloom's Taxonomy.

By employing different strategies to involve the parents with English literacy homework, language barriers between home and school were broken down. The parents were informed of how important it was to be positively involved with their children's schoolwork, and how to become active parents, so that all families, irrespective of culture, family types or income levels, could have a positive impact on their children's education.

The homework programme strengthened relationships between the teacher and the parents, especially in cases where foreigners, who were regarded as aliens, were included in this research study.

Further benefits of the study were the development of time management skills, as parents set aside certain slots to assist their children with homework. When asked whether parents had a specific time to sit down with their children, this is what M.C. said:

> Um, actually I do have a specific time that I sit with my child. I want to do something for her so …ur … we do have a little time to spend … ur … the homework book and so on so … we have got a special time actually. Before she go[*sic*] to other children, first of all we do have to do the schoolwork and do homework and so on. I ask her if she have [*sic*] homework when she comes from school.

The transport provided strengthened the affiliation between home and school as it emphasised the school's commitment in assisting parents to participate in the intervention programme. Learning opportunities and a positive learning environment were created via the homework programme, and integrated with authentic and relatable topics, making it easier for parents to assist their children with homework.

 An empowering atmosphere was established by means of the homework programme to strengthen relationships among parents and children. This further resulted in the establishment of a supportive community of learning among parents.

This worked for the group, and resulted in language barriers being broken down between the home and the school, as all the parents who participated in the intervention programme understood the language that the programme was presented in. There was also a better understanding between the parents and the educator, as the parents began to understand

how to assist their children with their schoolwork .Another strategy that worked was selecting English literacy, thus offering the programme through the medium of English.

5.2.7 Action research offered a creative means for emancipation of participants

The action research approach to the case study allowed key stakeholders to be empowered and emancipated to assist learners with homework. These stakeholders included the principal, educator, parents, learners and community members. The principal supported the intervention programme by offering the school as research site and meeting place. The educator was also the researcher and insider-participant. Parents were the participants of the intervention programme and formed a partnership with the school. The learners and the community members participated as support structures.

The questionnaires afforded parents a space to rate their level of involvement regarding their children's homework. The questionnaires also gave the researcher an indication of the degree of involvement of the parents before the intervention programme started.

5.2.8 The intervention programme

The intervention programme was structured to assist parents and learners to relate through everyday activities. The use of familiar themes allowed the whole family to participate as a unit. The programme assisted learners to improve their reading and comprehension abilities as well as their reasoning skills.

Positive collaboration between the parents, children and school were nurtured as parents were provided with a platform to provide feedback on their interaction with their children during these activities.

The activities that appeared in the learners' workbooks and activity sheets boosted the learners' self-confidence when they had to do these in class.

The programme inspired parents to actively engage with their children on a regular basis. Parents started to pay more attention to the attempts of their children. Parents were always encouraged during the programme to show interest in their children by listening to their children, and by responding to their children's questions to the best of their ability. Through the latter strategy, children developed skills to describe items with greater ease, as their vocabulary was broadened by the adult intervention and communication.

5.2.9 Parental involvement

The parents' morale was boosted as the homework intervention programme made them more confident to assist their children by means of supervising and checking their homework and schoolwork. The parents' positive attitude towards their children's schoolwork had a ripple effect on their children.

5.2.10 Ensuring parental commitment

Parents were always treated with dignity and compassion. The researcher ensured that the parents showed commitment towards their children's schoolwork by engaging them in the homework programme, as most parents have the best interests of their children at heart. This was evident in how effectively the parents supervised and checked the homework to ensure that their children did their homework, and in doing so, ensuring firmer parental involvement.

Parents set aside time to assist their children with homework activities and ensured that the homework was not done hastily. Parents and learners indicated that they found the homework sessions very helpful owing to the parents' involvement. The children experienced intensified feelings of safety, confidence and increased self-esteem.

5.2.11 Different literacy levels of thinking

The homework intervention programme corresponds with Bloom's Taxonomy as it also addresses the different cognitive levels that allow learners to reason on these levels. The parents constantly encouraged the implementation of cognitive levels of thinking according to Bloom's Taxonomy at home while engaging with their children. The researcher motivated the parents on a regular basis to interact with their children in a fun way (see Table 5.1 for suggestions). This was reflected in learners' abilities at school and in the CASS marks.

Table 5.1: Developing literacy levels in a fun way

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Talk to your child about the different kinds of cutlery. Mention the name. Let your child find the item. He/she can also spell/ write the words.	Ask your child what his/her day was like at school or let him/her tell you about an interesting story that he/she has read. They can also say whether or not they enjoyed the story and why.	Let your child say the name of the different pieces of crockery in your drying rack. You can also make him/her aware of the singular and plural forms, e.g. one cup, two cups, one knife, four knives.	Play a game with your child where you see who can find objects in or around your house or yard that are in the shape of circles, squares, etc., or that have a 2-D or 3-D shape.	Allow your child to write down the grocery list before doing your shopping. Let him/her tick off the items on the list as you do the shopping.	Play a memory game with the whole family, e.g. broken telephone. Any number of people can participate in this game. One person whispers a message into the person's ear next to him/her. That person must pass it on to the next person. The last person must say what was told to him or her. The first must say if that was the original message.

5.3   Recommendations

5.3.1   How parents can assist their children

There are many ways in which parents can be of assistance to their children. Parents can continue to build a good rapport with their child's teacher, seeking guidance and suggestions for learning. It is further recommended that parents establish a suitable routine with their child for completing homework, including a regular study time and location, and encourage their child to maintain the routine. Parents can make a point of discussing schoolwork, successes, concerns, and interests with their child. In addition to this, parents can encourage their children to 'exercise' their minds by doing crossword puzzles, brainteasers, and word searches. Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009:91) propose that teachers can inspire parents to implement literacy activities at home. These activities may include:

Reading activities → bedtime stories, comic strips, library books, big books, comprehension

Writing activities → shopping lists, keeping a diary, making posters, making bookmarks

Speaking activities → dialogues, reciting poems, conducting interviews
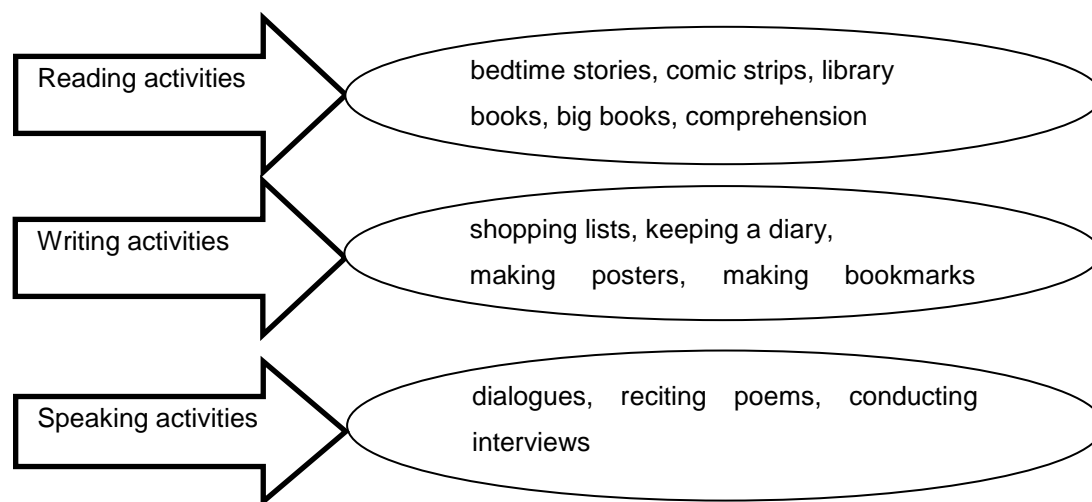
Figure 5.1: Suggested literacy activities at home

Moreover, parents can involve relatives and family friends to help support their child's learning activities.

5.3.2   How teachers can assist learners and their parents

It is recommended that the teacher enquire about the possibility of the mobile library service's covering the areas where the learners reside on a regular basis. This could encourage parents and their children to join a library, especially to assist learners with their assignments and projects. The teacher can arrange with the distributors of local newspapers to deliver a copy of the newspaper to the school so that each learner in the class can be provided with a copy. The teacher can then create exercises for the learners where the parents can assist them at home with activities such as reading a particular article or writing a review on an article.

5.3.3   Application of Bloom's Taxonomy at home

It is recommended that teachers equip parents with the necessary tools to interpret and apply Bloom's Taxonomy in their interactions with their children at home. Parents were constantly motivated to maintain the different levels of questioning to develop critical-thinking abilities such as comparing, interpreting meaning, or organising information (Garland, 2011:5).

5.3.4   Using the diversity of the class population as a resource

It is recommended that educators use diversity as a resource within the classroom, especially given the fact that learners possess many talents. These strengths can be used as

a motivation to encourage interaction between the diverse language, cultural and racial population groups to create better relationships.

5.3.5 School visits by parents to view learners' work

School visits to view learners' work are recommended to motivate and encourage parents to become more involved in their children's schooling, and to encourage learners to progress in school. Parent and educator meetings should therefore be encouraged. Hornby and Lafeala (2011:40) emphasise that "schools which are welcoming to parents, and make it clear that they value parental involvement, develop more effective parental involvement than schools that do not appear inviting to parents". It is therefore recommended that parents and educators meet on a regular basis for parents to be acquainted with what is needed in their child's educational setting.

5.3.6 Home visits by teachers

It is recommended that teachers visit the homes of learners. This could cement good relationships between home and school. In this study, learners and the community appreciated the teacher's efforts to meet with them in their home environment to offer assistance.

5.3.7 Parent support groups

Parental support groups could be formed to assist or advise parents, especially where parents find it difficult to assist their children with schoolwork due to various reasons like low educational levels of parents and language diversity. It is highly recommended that these support groups are representative of all racial groups in multi-cultural schools. Parents of multi-cultural communities may need further assistance with parenting tasks. Carrasquillo and Clement (1993:216) suggest that by assisting parents or other interested members of the community to understand the school curriculum and by providing literacy training in the school, parents can tutor their children in their native language. The skills can then become transferable and positive results can be achieved in diverse linguistic and cultural settings.

5.3.8 Information sharing via written communication

A regular schedule of useful notices, phone calls, newsletters and other forms of communication can be implemented. The school can provide clear information on all school policies, programmes, reforms and transitions in the form of written communication.

Teachers can also use a variety of school notes as a tool of communication between school and home.

Further recommendations focus on providing the academic link between educators and all stakeholders, especially in areas relating to parental support. Parents can be issued with circulars to answer questions they might have about homework. Questions such as: What is the purpose of homework? Does homework do more harm than good? How can the parents assist their children? In what way does homework frame formative assessments?

These are all key areas that can illuminate the role and position of the parent, and provide a space for educators to intervene if such a need is mentioned by parents. However, it is important for the educator, when communicating to parents in writing, to be sensitive to family culture and their literacy levels. Educators must limit the amount of written information to prevent parents from feeling overburdened with words and paper.

5.4   How to improve parental efficacy

Parents could help their children to structure their time, space and materials for homework. Homework can be structured within the flow of family life, which will ensure parental and other family members' availability as required. However, it is suggested that parents scrutinise, manage, and supervise the homework schedule by providing general oversight of the homework process.

Parents ought to respond to the learners' homework performance by reinforcing and rewarding their children's homework efforts, as well as checking for completion and correctness. Sands et al. (2000: 79) support these views: "Families provide the primary care for their children." They contend that parents should be able to recognise and offer emotional support for the child's performance, abilities and efforts, and may also re-view, check, assist and co-correct the homework.

It is further suggested that parents assist, help, tutor, and "work with" their children as a way of encouraging and assisting them in an indirect and structured way. Parents might use a more informal method by responding to questions, to facilitate learning as a way to engage in the learning process. Parents, as partners in their children's education, can break learning tasks into isolated, convenient components and they can monitor, recognise and "teach to" the learner's developmental levels.

Walker et al. (2004:2) maintain that parents are supposed to model or demonstrate appropriate learning processes and strategies and utilise these as a way to discuss problem-solving strategies with their children, to assist them in understanding key concepts, and to check for understanding of work.

Therefore, parents need to enhance the self-regulation skills of the learner through various strategies, such as taking responsibility for homework processes and outcomes. Parents can also assist learners to organise personal thinking about assignments. This way the learner is encouraged to enhance his/her self-monitoring skills, and to focus his or her attention on the actual task at hand. In addition, parents can teach and encourage the child to regulate emotional responses to homework (Walker et.al. 2004: 3-4).

5.5   Problems experienced

The researcher encountered some restrictions while the study was in progress. These challenges included language barriers, low literacy levels of parents, working conditions of parents, transport problems, the location of the school, cultural differences, poor socio-economic conditions, and family problems.

5.5.1   The language barrier

There is great diversity in terms of home language at the research site that stems from the diversity in cultural heritage. Sands et al. (2000:82) note, "The heritage of a family influences the behaviours, expectations, interactions and communication styles of family members."

The language of instruction at the research site is Afrikaans, which initially made it difficult for the parents from other cultures who did not understand Afrikaans to assist their children with homework. Some parents, whose mother tongue was not the same as the language of instruction, lacked confidence in assisting their children. They also felt that they could not communicate effectively with teachers.

The mother tongue of the researcher in this study is Afrikaans, with English as a second language. The researcher therefore was unable to communicate in any of the other official languages. However, Afrikaans and English were not the languages spoken at home by some of the learners and their parents.

There are different cultures because of the diversity of the school population. This in itself caused difficulties while the research study was conducted. In this programme, respect for

different cultural groups was also promoted. All stakeholders were encouraged to maintain a positive regard towards one another. Effective communication was paramount.

Culture plays a role in determining who individuals are, how they interact with one another on daily basis, and how they manage their lives (Sands et al., 2000:82). The Grade 4 class comprised different race groups and a variety of cultures, which implies that they have extremely diverse backgrounds.

5.5.2   The low literacy levels of some of the parents

Parents with low literacy levels found it extremely difficult to assist their children to address their educational needs. In such cases, parents would call upon a family representative to attend the homework sessions.

These low literacy levels could be caused by parents leaving school at a young age, owing to various conditions common to sub-economic societies. Fairclough (2001:19) supports this statement: "Linguistic phenomena are social in the sense that whatever people speak or listen or write or read, they do so in ways which are determined socially and have social effects."

5.5.3   Working conditions of parents

Most of the parents work as farm labourers on neighbouring wine farms and often work long and extended hours, especially over weekends, which made it difficult for them to attend these workshops. Other parents work as gardeners or domestic workers in the area.

5.5.4   Transport problems

The majority of the parents do not have their own transport, and are dependent on public transport. This caused problems for many parents.

The school is a commuter school, which means that the majority of learners do not stay within walking distance of the school. This made it extremely difficult for most participants to attend the intervention programme information sessions held at the research site. It was for this purpose that an alternative venue had to be chosen to accommodate the participants.

5.5.5   Family problems

Problems were compounded by overcrowded homes, financial constraints, different family types, language of instruction, low work status and low levels of education. In such circumstances, learners found it difficult to concentrate on their work if they had distractions like family quarrels at home.

5.6   Recommendations for further study: The focus group

It is recommended that teachers pursue the example set in the English literacy programme by implementing similar programmes in other learning areas. By bringing together smaller groups of parents, parent support groups could be formed to assist one another in different learning areas based on learner needs.

What is commendable of a focus group is the interaction between the researcher and the participants. The researcher selected a group of nine participants whom she thought were best equipped to discuss what was experienced during the intervention programme. It was evident that the participants shared certain characteristics that were relevant to this study, such as the importance of doing homework and eagerness to assist their children with homework. Through the focus group interview, the parents were allowed to express their views on the importance of homework and the vital part parents can play in it. In this way the researcher obtained responses from non-verbal cues such as facial expressions or body language. Consequently, this could be used to collect information to assemble qualitative data. Subsequently, parents indicated that they were willing to help their children, but that they found the standard of the work demanding. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010:363), focus group interviews create a social environment in which groups are stimulated by one another's perceptions and values. This method, according to them, also increases the quality and richness of the data.

5.7   Conclusion

Despite various challenges faced within the schooling system, this chapter highlighted key areas to serve as key recommendations, especially in structuring support mechanisms to parents to assist them in supporting their children's academic endeavours. This study further emphasised the positive effect the intervention programme had on the home and school, parents and children, and on learners and teachers. This study opened channels of communication and intervention between parents and children and allowed the parents to assist their children in a structured way. The strategies of such an intervention programme

were specifically planned to create an opportunity for future collaboration between home and school. This resulted in a heightened awareness of societal needs, as well as benefitting learners' academic achievements.

The strategies of the intervention programme were specifically planned to create an opportunity for further collaboration between home and school, and in that way build bridges not only between home and school, but also within the school community as such, as well as in societal cultural groups. This resulted in a win-win experience for all participants and stakeholders.

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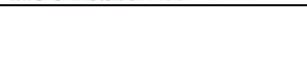
Appendix A: Permission letter WCED

Navrae Enquiries IMibuzo	**Dr RS Cornelissen**		**Wes-Kaap Onderwysdepartement**	
Telefoon Telephone IFoni	(021) 467-2286		**Western Cape Education Department**	
Faks Fax IFeksi	(021) 425-7445		**ISebe leMfundo leNtshona Koloni**	
Verwysing Reference ISalathiso	20090428-0008			

Mrs Christabel Rooi

Dear Mrs C. Rooi

RESEARCH PROPOSAL: EDUCATORS INTERVENTION TO INVOLVE PARENTS WITH ENGLISH LITERACY HOMEWORK OF PRIMARY SCHOOL LEARNERS.

Your application to conduct the above-mentioned research in schools in the Western Cape has been approved subject to the following conditions:

1. Principals, educators and learners are under no obligation to assist you in your investigation.
2. Principals, educators, learners and schools should not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation.
3. You make all the arrangements concerning your investigation.
4. Educators' programmes are not to be interrupted.
5. The Study is to be conducted from **30th April 2009 to 30th June 2010**.
6. No research can be conducted during the fourth term as schools are preparing and finalizing syllabi for examinations (October to December).
7. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey, please contact Dr R. Cornelissen at the contact numbers above quoting the reference number.
8. A photocopy of this letter is submitted to the principal where the intended research is to be conducted.
9. Your research will be limited to the list of schools as forwarded to the Western Cape Education Department.
10. A brief summary of the content, findings and recommendations is provided to the Director: Research Services.
11. The Department receives a copy of the completed report/dissertation/thesis addressed to:

> **The Director: Research Services**
> **Western Cape Education Department**
> **Private Bag X9114**
> **CAPE TOWN**
> **8000**

We wish you success in your research.

Kind regards.

Signed: Ronald S. Cornelissen
for: **HEAD: EDUCATION**
DATE: 29th **April 2009**

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Appendix B: Permission letter from research site

13 April 2009

To whom it may concern

I, [ ] principal of [ ], hereby give permission to Christabel Rooi to conduct her research at school. She may also use the data collected to be part of her research study.

Yours faithfully

Appendix C: Permission letter for the use of the homework programme

25/4/2009

To whom it may concern

I, Liesel van Niekerk, author of the Listening & Language Home Programme Level 2, herewith gives permission to Christabel Rooi to photocopy the Listening and Language Home Programme Level 2 for the purpose of academic research into the development of listening and language skills in children. This research will include the use of the programme with parents and learners at a primary school in Cape Town.

Yours Sincerely

L van Niekerk

Appendix D: Permission letter from community centre

14 April 2010

To whom it may concern

I, [____], a member of the [____], hereby give permission to Christabel Rooi to conduct sessions at our premises with the parents and guardians of a Grade 4 class of a primary school in the Western Cape as part of her research study on how to involve parents with literacy homework. I also give my consent that she may use the data collected during these sessions as part of her Master's Degree.

Your Sincerely

[____]

Appendix E: Informed consent form

Informed Consent Form

Title of research proposal: An educator's intervention to involve Grade 4 parents with English Literacy homework at a primary school.

My research questions are: 1. How can parents be supported to assist their children with English Literacy homework? 2. What strategies can be implemented to involve parents of Grade 4 learners with English Literacy homework?

I, Christabel Rooi, plan to do an Action Research Model at a primary school with the Grade 4 parents to inform the parents on how to assist their children with homework. These sessions will be held on a Saturday from February 2010 to June 2010.

I, _____ the parent/legal guardian/family representative
        (Name of parent/guardian)

of _____ hereby give my consent that
        (Name of learner)

the data collected by Christabel Rooi may be used by her as part of her Master's Degree.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix F: Questionnaire for parents

This questionnaire is to be completed by the Grade 4 parents at the research site. The information that will be gathered from the questionnaires will be mainly used for research purposes. Information collected will be kept confidential. The parents' contribution is therefore very important.

Guidelines

Please answer the following questions by ticking the box where applicable with a (x) that is true for you.

Please respond honestly and openly to these questions.

1).   Does your child get homework on a regular basis?

Daily

☐

Daily in all Learning Areas

☐

More than three (3) times per week in each Learning Area

☐

2). Do you assist your child with the homework?

Yes

☐

No

☐

☐

Sometimes

If yes, in what ways do you assist your child?

_____

If no, why not? Provide reasons.

_____

3). Do you understand the homework?

Yes

☐

No

☐

Sometimes

☐

4). What is the nature of the homework that your child gets at school?

☐   Activity sheets

☐   Projects

☐
Written Assignments

5). Do you sign the homework?

Yes

☐

No

☐

Sometimes

☐

6). Do you have a specific time when you sit with your child to assist him/her with the homework?

Yes

☐

No

☐

Sometimes

☐

Give a reason for your choice_____

7). Do you liaise with the educator if you are uncertain about certain aspects of the homework?

Yes

☐

No

☐

Sometimes

☐

Appendix G: Focus group interview questions

Focus group interview. The participants responded to the following questions. The information was kept confidential.

Question One

  Does your child get literacy homework on a regular basis?

_____

_____

Question Two

 Do you assist your child with the homework?

_____

_____

Question Three

 What is your home language?

_____

_____

Question four

Do you sign the homework?

_____

_____

Question five

Do you have a specific time when you assist your child with the homework?

_____

_____

Question six

How did you find the homework sessions that we had on a Saturday?

_____

_____

Question seven

How did your child respond to the sessions?

_____

_____

Appendix H: Contact numbers of respondents

Respondents	Contact Number
A.G.	██████████
T.J.	██████████
N.G.	██████████
G.J.	██████████
N.B.	██████████
S.A.	██████████
A.J.	██████████
N.M.	██████████
C.L.	██████████
M.S.	██████████
M.C.	██████████
H.R.	██████████
P.K.	██████████
A.P.	██████████
T.N.	██████████
M.G.	██████████
M.D.	██████████
M.N.	██████████
M.C.	██████████
S.J.	██████████
K.L.	██████████
A.W.	██████████
T.W.	██████████
A.M.	██████████
J.J.	██████████
S.F.	██████████
E.S.	██████████
N.J.	██████████
E.D.	██████████
M.I.	██████████
B.M.	██████████

	B.M.	████████
	F.T.	████████
	M.T.	████████
	L.M.	████████
	V.C.	██████
	Q.N.	██████
	E. L.	██████

Appendix I: The 28-week framework of the listening and language level 2 home programme (Van Niekerk, 2007)

Week 1	The School	Week 2	The Classroom
Week3	Late for school	Week 4	The City
Week 5	The Shopping Mall	Week6	The Shopping Mall (continued)
Week 7	Occupations	Week8	Transport
Week 9	The Supermarket	Week 10	Odd one out
Week11	Listening games (Supermarket) Let us bake!	Week12	The bicycle Revision Game (1)
Week13	The motor-car Road safety	Week14	The Service Station
Week15	The Zoo	Week16	The farm
Week17	Animals - games	Week18	The Railway Station
Week 19	The Weather Seasons Days of the week	Week20	Revision games (2) Good manners
Week 21	The Park	Week22	Safety in and around the house Emergency services
Week 23	The Library	Week24	The Post Office
Week 25	The Dentist	Week26	The Doctor
Week 27	The Airport	Week28	Revision Game (3)

Appendix J:Examples of English activities done in class that integrated with Maths

Travel

Reading timetables

Benji and his mother were very lucky to get a lift from their home to Matatiele on the farmer's tractor and trailer.

When they arrived at the bus station, Benji's mother read the bus timetable to see when the bus was due to leave for Kokstad.

TICKETS

BUS TIMETABLE

MATATIELE TO KOKSTAD

Monday	11.00 a.m.
Tuesday	10.00 a.m.
Wednesday	11.00 a.m.
Thursday	10.00 a.m.

KOKSTAD TO MATATIELE

Monday	3.00 p.m.
Tuesday	1.00 p.m.
Wednesday	3.00 p.m.
Thursday	1.00 p.m.

1. Work in groups. Read the timetable and answer these questions.
   a) On which days could Benji take a bus to visit his grandfather in Kokstad?
   b) On which days were there no buses for Benji to catch?
   c) If Benji went to visit his grandfather on Monday, what time would the bus leave Matatiele?
   d) If he missed the bus on Monday, when was the next bus he could catch?
   e) If Benji went to visit his grandfather on Wednesday afternoon, when could he catch a bus back?
   f) How many times a week did a bus go from Kokstad to Matatiele?
   g) If Benji wanted to have lunch with his grandfather on Tuesday, would he be able to catch the bus home the same day?

Travel

Understanding the story

1. Work in pairs and read the story about Benji's journey again. Look for words that you do not understand. Read the sentences with the difficult words in them again.

2. Benji and his mother had to use many ways to travel to his grandfather's house. Match a word from column 1 with words from column 2 to make sentences about Benji's journey. Make sure that the sentences are in the correct order. Begin like this: **First Benji and his mother started walking to the bus station.**

First	a farmer gave them a lift on a tractor and trailer.
Then	they took a taxi to his grandfather.
After that	they caught a bus.
Finally	Benji and his mother started walking to the bus station.

3. Draw a flow chart in your exercise book, like the one below. Write your sentences from Activity 2 in the empty boxes. The first one has been done for you.

First Benji and his mother started walking to the bus station

↓

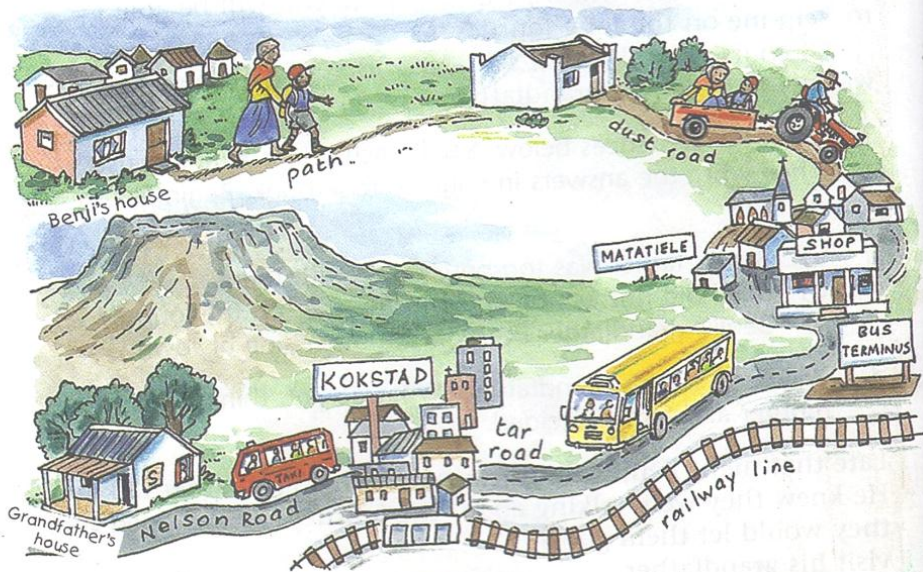| Then |
| --- |

↓

After that

↓

Finally

Appendix L: An activity sheet on different types of transport

Travel

4. This is a picture of the way Benji and his mother went to visit his grandfather. With a partner, find the following:

   a) a tractor   b) a bus   c) a taxi

5. Look carefully at the map. Find Benji's home and his grandfather's home. Work with a partner to answer these questions.

   a) Use your finger to follow the path from Benji's house to his grandfather's house. What buildings and towns do you pass on the way?
   b) Do you think Benji could walk to his grandfather's house? Why do you think so?
   c) What is the name of the village nearest to Benji's house?
   d) What is the name of the town close to Benji's grandfather's home?
   e) Look carefully at the map. Where is the mountain?
   f) Do trains travel on the same kind of roads as cars and lorries? Why is this?

Appendix M: The number of parents, caregivers and family representatives who attended the homework sessions

Session one: 27 February 2010				
Parents	Grand parents	Guardians	Family representatives	Total
4	0	0	1	5

Session two: 13 March 2010				
Parents	Grand parents	Guardians	Family representatives	Total
2	0	0	2	4

Session three: 24 April 2010				
Parents	Grand parents	Guardians	Family representatives	Total
3	0	0	1	4

Session four: 8 May 2010				
Parents	Grand parents	Guardians	Family representatives	Total
7	1	1	5	14

Session five: 29 May 2010				
Parents	Grand parents	Guardians	Family representatives	Total
3	0	1	2	6

Session six: 19 June 2010				
Parents	Grand parents	Guardians	Family representatives	Total
2	0	0	1	3

Appendix N: Editor's letter

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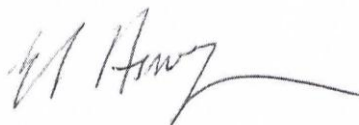*Cell: 082 883 5763*
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ACADEMIC WRITING

Linguistic proofreading and editing of:

Research proposals
Conference and journal papers
Theses, dissertations, technical reports

Bibliographies
Bibliographic citation
Literature searching

The MEd thesis by Ms CB Rooi
has been proofread and edited, and the candidate has been advised to make
the recommended changes.

ES van Aswegen
13 March 2014