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**EXPLORING WRITING PRACTICES IN TWO FOUNDATION PHASE RURAL
MULTIGRADE CLASSES**

by

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the degree of Master in Education**

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at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology**

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Supervisor: Associate Professor Janet Condy

DECLARATION

I, Bernita Blease, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not in its entirety, or part, been submitted at any university for a degree or academic examination towards any qualification. The sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references. Furthermore, it represents my own opinions.

Signed:

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ABSTRACT

Writing in rural multigrade Foundation Phase schools is a largely neglected area for research and teacher development. Even those teaching multigrade classes are not sure how to approach it. There are almost no regulations or guidelines in PIRLS or government documents and reports. Nevertheless multigrade rural schooling is prevalent throughout South Africa. This gap between widespread practice and lack of theoretical acknowledgement or knowledge prompted this study. For the purposes of this study two rural multigrade Foundation Phase classes were selected in the Northern District of the Western Cape.

This study answers one main question: What writing practices are being implemented in these two rural Foundation Phase multigrade classes? Two sub-questions are: How do the two Foundation Phase teachers teach writing skills to rural multigrade learners? What challenges do these two Foundation Phase teachers experience when teaching writing?

Lack of research in this area required considerable time to consolidate an appropriate research methodology. To establish a scientific structure for this research certain theoretical approaches were adopted. Socio-cultural theories of learning, particularly focusing on Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological model, Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and social constructivism were used. Piaget's developmental contributions add to this research project. Cambourne's principles and strategies were invaluable in understanding constructivism in a language classroom. Because this was a pioneering research project it took over four years to complete analysis of data from the schools and link it to the theoretical framework.

A qualitative interpretative case study research design was specifically formulated to provide an objective understanding of the research questions. The data were analysed qualitatively. Four themes emerged from sub-question one and include: the pedagogy of teaching writing in a multigrade class, the importance of creating a writing ethos in the classroom, elements of writing and supporting learners in the writing process. The following six themes were identified in answering sub-question two: teacher challenges, poor socio-economic backgrounds, writing support from the WCED, creating a writing ethos including discipline, parental literacy and learner challenges.

In conclusion, this research indicates that multigrade education is, far from being a recalcitrant problem or cause for apology, useful as a template for curriculum development in many other areas of education. Multigrade education provides a realistic and flexible tool for meeting urgent educational problems.

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DEDICATION

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LIST OF ACRONYMS/ABBREVIATIONS

AS's	Assessment Standards
CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
CLE	Concentrated Language Encounter
CPUT	Cape Peninsula University of Technology
DoE	Department of Education
EMDC	Education Management Development Centre
ILST	Individual Learning Support Team
LA	Learning Area
LITNUM	Literacy and Numeracy Policy Statement
LO's	Learning Outcomes
LoLT	Language of Learning and Teaching
LTSM	Learning and Teaching Support Material
NCS	National Curriculum Statement
NDoE	National Department of Education
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
OBE	Outcomes-Based Education
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading and Literacy Study
READ	Rural Education and Development
RIVER	Rishi Valley Institute for Educational Resources
RNCS	Revised National Curriculum Statement
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WCED	Western Cape Education Department
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

CHAPTER 1

ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the origin, context and purpose of this study. The central research question and sub-questions are introduced. Terms are clarified and the significance of the study is presented. Finally, the limitations and assumptions of the study are discussed. Present tense has been used when referring to research sources. When references have been made to the interpretative case study, past tense has been used.

Research shows that South Africa needs its own indigenous solutions to indigenous problems that arise from curriculum development. Importing an alien system such as Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) (Macintosh, 2003) fails to account for, let alone address the complexity of our country and its culture. A one-size-fits-all curriculum cannot address the issues that rural multigrade teachers and learners face. This is the first study of its nature and could play an important role in solving our own problems in a flexible way that suits us.

The National Curriculum Statement (NCS) (DoE, 2001c:3) states that the curriculum seeks to create a critical and active citizen, a lifelong learner who is confident, independent, literate, multi-skilled and compassionate in society. Teachers are encouraged to inspire children with values based on respect, democracy, equality, human dignity and social justice. Teachers and learners, however, in rural multigrade classes face challenges that hinder their ability to reach literacy goals as required by the NCS. As a result of many changes to the South African curriculum, the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) was developed and implemented in 2002 (Hoadly, 2010:142). The RNCS posed yet another change to the curriculum.

Hamston and Resnick (2009:7) describe writing as a powerful way for people to develop an understanding of themselves and their world. Writing is both a craft and an art. It requires people to have something to say and to say it well with words that capture fine distinctions of meaning. It is a concentrated act of making feelings, perceptions, and thinking visible, permanent and important. Hamston and Resnick (2009:7) believe that writing even helps writers to clarify their thinking.

1.2 ORIGIN AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2006 measures trends in children's reading literacy achievement in 41 countries worldwide. It determines that literacy levels in South Africa are comparatively low (Howie, Venter, van Staden, Zimmerman, Long, du Toit, Scherman & Archer, 2008:51). 62% of the sample used in this case study are rural learners who have four years of schooling.

Multigrade education is a way of life for most rural communities and constitutes a shift from teacher support to group support, peer support and ultimately towards individual self-directed learning (Mulryan-Kyne, 2007:507). Far from being an impediment to learning, multigrade teaching may be a benefit to the country. This ideology is in line with the development of writing itself. More significantly, Little (2005:6) finds that friendship patterns, self-esteem, cognitive and social development are more favourable in multigrade schools. Multigrade classrooms are consequently ideal as teachers guide children and children guide their peers towards their own independent learning and writing.

According to a paper presented at the Multigrade conference in Paarl (2010), Joubert and Jordaan state that the pedagogy of multigrade teaching has not yet been recognised by the National Department of Education (NDoE). Teacher training programmes and curriculum support programmes have not been developed to support multigrade teachers. Lack of such programmes hinders the ability of multigrade teachers to teach and train learners to develop functional, practical writing skills. Similarly in Iran, Aghazadeh (2010) states that the curriculum used in the rural multigrade classrooms is the same as urban monograde classrooms. This implies that multigrade teachers in Iran comply with the curriculum as set out by their government. He further mentions that the Iranian education system has been developing some solutions in order to address the following problems in their curriculum development: structural, planning, training and development. In South Africa, many curriculum changes have occurred. These alterations have not yet addressed the complexity of multigrade teaching.

Multigrade teachers, who neither understand their role as facilitators of learning nor possess the necessary knowledge of writing, are likely to fail in preparing their children to write successfully. It may ultimately affect the way in which the teacher organises and manages writing groups in a multigrade setting. The development of teacher programmes, learning materials, resources and learner activities is urgently required. Berry and Little (2007:72) have conducted a study in multigrade inner city schools in London and identified that an area specific curriculum is even needed in an urban setting. Owing to the many ranges within a

curriculum, organisation and implementation of lessons and materials prove difficult for multigrade teachers (Berry & Little, 2007:72). Without these elements in place, accurate and practical assessment will have no influence in developing writing skills in a multigrade setting. Aghazadeh (2010) argues that the following classroom practices should also be addressed: teaching and learning time, curriculum content, student achievement assessment, teaching and learning material, classroom management, co-education and discipline-orientated curricula.

Teacher-writing pedagogy and methodology go hand-in-hand with curriculum development. Gains and Graham (2011:77) justly state that most literacy teachers have had no practice in expressive writing; therefore it is not unexpected that this activity rarely, or most likely, never features in public school early literacy classrooms. They also argue that educators, exposed to widespread and expressive writing themselves, will be more equipped in generating these writing activities from their learners.

This study focuses on developing skills that portray writing as a means of communication to gain or share understanding by using print, to contribute ideas, apply knowledge and skills as well as record important information. This entails the exploration, investigation and analysis of current writing practices in two Foundation Phase rural multigrade classes.

The research topic of this study includes the following three concepts: 'rural', 'multigrade' and 'writing practices'. It is difficult to locate current published literature, which combines all three of these concepts. In the past few years, however, there have been a few local conferences, attended by international researchers, on multigrade education in Cape Town. It has been possible therefore to draw on papers presented at these conferences that focused on 'rural' and 'multigrade' education. These two concepts have been researched by international and local authors such as: Berry and Little, 2007; Aghazadeh, 2010; Cornish, 2010; Joubert, 2010; Padmanabha Rao and Rama, 2010; Tsolakidis 2010; as well as Vithanapathirana, 2010. There are many more books and articles, however, published in the field of general 'writing practices' in urban monograde settings. Some references include: Cambourne, 1988; Dednam, 2008; Gains and Graham, 2011; Gibson, 2008; Hamston and Resnick, 2009; Parsons and Colabucci, 2008 as well as Wall, 2008. Many other international and local authors are referred to in this research project.

1.3 IMPORTANCE OF THE PROBLEM

Creating writing communities is a way of empowering rural children, teachers and the community at large to assist in improving literacy rates in rural areas. Educating rural children

to write well encourages learners to communicate in a more advanced and critical way. The ability to write with confidence gives rural children equal opportunities to basic and further education. It enables them to share their thoughts, life experiences, knowledge and understanding in a variety of areas and styles with their families, peers and communities.

Hamston and Resnick (2009:131-132) highlight that writing can support reading; reading can support writing, and ultimately reading and writing support learning. This implies that although writing is a complex skill, it cannot be separated completely from reading. It is also important to bear in mind that no child develops the same writing skills or styles at the same time. Therefore differentiated writing lessons, activities and assessments need to be organised and planned (Tomlinson, 2005:8) to suit the needs of all learners in rural multigrade settings.

Multigrade education not only features in South Africa. It is a world-wide phenomenon. It has been a way of life for most rural and farm schools for decades. Tsolakidis (2010) states that multigrade schools have been and will continue to remain a reality all over the world. Multigrade teaching is described as a classroom situation in schools in which a single teacher has to take responsibility for teaching learners across more than one curriculum grade within a timetabled period (Little, 2001:477). In a South African context multigrade education is appropriately defined by Joubert (2010) as:

Multigrade teaching is the situation, where one teacher teaches simultaneously all the learning areas or some of the learning areas to learners who are in two or more grades or in different grades in a combination of different phases. Multigrade teaching occurs in rural areas, with limited facilities, and mostly on farms.

Although multigrade education is a worldwide phenomenon, Mulryan-Kyne (2007) states that there is a lack of, or ineffective, teacher training, to cope with the demand of multigrade teaching. There is no recognition of multigrade education in the policy documents of the South African National Department of Education (NDoE), the NCS or the White Paper 6. Although these policy documents do not highlight the specific needs of rural multigrade education, they all make reference to learner rights and educational values.

To further highlight the gravity of the problem, Table 1.1 indicates the poor literacy results, especially the lack of writing skills in the Western Cape. The Western Cape Education Department's (WCED) 2011 Systemic Results for Grades 3 (Cornelissen, 2011), 6 and 9 indicated the following:

Table 1.1: WCED 2011 Systemic Results for Grades 3

GRADE 3 PROVINCIAL RESULTS				
AREAS TESTED	No. of Learners	Pass %	Average %	Learners Passed
		2011	2011	
Reading and Viewing	75 714	26.0	38.1	19 686
Writing	75 714	31.7	31.7	24 001
Thinking & Reasoning	75 714	44.4	42.7	33 617
Language Struct & Use	75 714	42.6	45.5	32 254
PROVINCE	75 714	30.4	38.7	23 017

Although the WCED has implemented a Literacy and Numeracy (LITNUM) Strategy for 2006-2016 (2006), these results indicate that writing still remains a nation-wide area of weakness in our school systems. With two years left to improve these results based on the LITNUM Strategy, Bloch (2009:58) states that:

Schooling in South Africa is a national disaster. The vast majority of our schools are simply not producing the outcomes that are their chief objective. What is more, international tests suggest that South African schools are among the world's worst performers in maths and literacy. Worse still is the tragedy that our schools are reinforcing the social and economic marginalisation of the poor and vulnerable.

Countries such as Columbia, India, Netherlands, Greece and Australia have also been faced with discrepancies in their learners' achievement levels and have therefore developed programmes, curricula, resources and strategies to address their educational issues in a multigrade setting.

Joubert (2010), Taylor (2008:6) and Bloch (2009:55) all maintain that multigrade rural children still do not receive equal access to quality education. Johnston (2010:20) states that we live in a multi-cultural society with laws that promise equal rights to all: the right to be as free as possible of biases based on ethnic group, gender, nationality, religion, socio-economic condition, sexual orientation, or disability. Chetty (2010) reiterates that by highlighting multigrade teaching it can be used effectively to both foster independent, individualised learning and ensure that marginalized learners regain their voice.

Furthermore, curriculum, learning material, resources and teacher training should include more modules on teaching writing to rural multigrade learners (Joubert, 2010).

1.4 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

This research study was conducted in two rural multigrade classrooms. The two schools willing to participate are referred to throughout this study as School A and School B. The

physical and research context are briefly explained below. The Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) is Afrikaans at both schools.

School A is found at the edge of the rural community and is surrounded by sand and some tar. No grass was present on the playground. While the grounds were neatly kept, the school building was recently painted on the outside. The school organogram is comprised as follows: Grade R 52 learners, Grade 1 55 learners, Grade 2 20 learners, Grade 3 19 learners, Grade 4 42 learners, Grade 5 49 learners and Grade 6 37 learners. At school A the principal had assistance with the teaching of his class to free him up for other tasks. There was a receptionist as well as a bursar. In the multigrade 2 and 3 classroom, the general maintenance of the classroom inside and outside was good. The classroom was spacious as it was originally two classrooms separated by a movable dividing wall. The teacher, however, complained about a lack of storage space as well as the lack of resources. There were bought and handmade posters on the walls but they did not reflect the learner's work. There were enough tables and chairs for all the learners. The Grade 2's sat in the first half of the classroom next to each other in three rows. The Grade 3's were in the second half of the classroom and sat individually in three rows. All the learners' suitcases were under their tables in the classroom. The learner's chairbags were on the back of their chairs.

School B is in the heart of the farmlands with spectacular views of the nearby farms. Although this school has some trees, some grass and some play equipment the majority of the playground and surrounding grounds of the school comprised mostly of sand. Class sizes at this school were as follows: Grade R 50 learners, Grade 1 52 learners, Grade 2 25 learners, Grade 3 20 learners, Grade 4 47 learners, Grade 5 43 learners and Grade 6 48 learners. The buildings were in good condition. A coat of paint would make the school look even better. The multigrade classroom was small with two rows of Grade 2's on the right hand side of the classroom and two rows of Grade 3's on the left hand side. In both grades the learners shared a table. The lack of space in the classroom made it difficult to move through the tables with ease. It was overcrowded with little space for the teacher's desk, storage space and carpet. The learner's suitcases were also in the classroom under their feet as their chairbags on the back of their chairs. There were bought resources and handmade posters by the teacher on the walls. There was one example of a wordbuilding activity, completed by both grades that were displayed on the walls.

In both schools the principals taught the Grade 6 classes. At School B, however the principal did not have a relief teacher, nor a receptionist or bursar. He had to perform his duties as a teacher, receptionist, bursar and administrator.

In Foundation Phase education, facilitation and lifelong learning, writing has been used for many purposes. It has become apparent that the importance of effective writing strategies and skills cannot be overlooked and need to be taught explicitly from a very young age. No child develops the same writing skills or styles at the same time (Dednam, 2008). Therefore when attempting to meet the individual needs of learners, differentiated writing lessons, activities and assessments need to be organised and planned; particularly in rural multigrade settings.

From interacting with multigrade teachers at national multigrade conferences, a common theme is that these teachers lack confidence in their understanding of teaching writing. If teachers lack content knowledge of writing, they will fail in preparing their children to write successfully. Lack of content knowledge may ultimately prejudice the way teachers organise and manage differentiated groups in a multigrade setting. Development of rural multigrade teacher programmes, learning materials, resources and learner activities in the field of writing is urgently required.

According to Cornish (2010) some of the problems related to multigrade teachers are that well-trained teachers are not trained for multigrade teaching. Rural schools have difficulty attracting staff because of their location. Teaching principals are expected to conduct three jobs: teacher, principal and administrator. Technical maintenance is usually problematic. Cornish further describes multigrade teaching as demanding and stressful especially for those who are also principals.

In order to solve some of these problems, Cornish (2010) suggests the following:

- A multigrade teacher should align the curriculum of the different grades;
- Integrate the curriculum;
- Teach in themes;
- Rotate the curriculum to avoid repetition;
- Design open-ended learning activities;
- Differentiate learning activities or expectation within a common topic;
- Use frequent and flexible grouping to group students across the grades depending Upon individual learning needs;
- Assess continually;
- Utilise peer tutoring; and
- Encourage independence of both learning and working.

These strategies depend on class size with less emphasis on theme-based teaching. It has been noted that learners in multigrade classes become independent workers but not necessarily independent learners (Cornish, 2010).

During this study, the issue of poverty became yet another obstacle that the researcher needed to take note of. The long-term effects of malnutrition, lack of nutrients, alcohol abuse and physical stunting directly affect the learners' ability to concentrate (Bloch 2009:77). Many of the learners could be identified, but never formally assessed, as experiencing learning difficulties. Poor socio-economic conditions at the two rural schools observed by the researcher means these schools can be identified as Quintile 1 schools. Both schools were no fee schools. At least one meal a day was provided to the learners.

1.5 THE APPROACH TO THE STUDY

In preparation for research in this case study, meetings were arranged with the Northern EMDC (Education Management Development Centre) director of this area. The director suggested three Foundation Phase schools, which are in close proximity to each other. Additionally, they fit the criteria of 'rural', 'multigrade' and performed poorly on the WCED Systemic Results of 2009. All three schools were contacted yet one school declined to be part of this research study.

Since the PIRLS 2006 study released their results, the WCED has proactively developed the Literacy and Numeracy (LITNUM) Strategy (2006) in order to improve poor literacy rates in Western Cape schools. Within the Literacy component of this policy, both reading and writing have been identified as areas requiring urgent development. Although reading and writing cannot be entirely separated, this research project emphasises writing practices. Because writing is such a complex skill, many characteristics have to be taken into account before expecting children to write effectively. Dednam (2008:127) states that elements such as handwriting and spelling are important but it is essay writing that is dependent on the development of language and reading skills.

1.6 PURPOSE AND GOAL OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the limited information about writing practices in a South African rural multigrade context. The goal is to give a detailed account of the methodology currently used and analysed, juxtaposing social constructivist methods in the way that learners learn to write effectively. Scott, Teale, Carry, Johnson and Morgan (2009:338) suggest that teachers should teach and not assign writing. Cambourne (2004:30),

states that teachers should teach explicitly by demonstrating the necessary writing skills to their learners. Learners can only learn to write independently if writing is demonstrated to them.

In attempting to contribute to the teaching of writing practices, research in this thesis is influenced by Bloch (2009:29) who believes that our failing schools can be fixed. He states that we have to fix it in order for South Africa to take its place alongside other nations in the world. He recommends that we continue to hold our heads high, be intellectually skilled, academically qualified and confident that our knowledge is global and cutting edge. But he states that change will not happen quickly because there are still so many immediate failings.

1.7 MY STANCE AND ROLE AS A RESEARCHER

Research has been conducted largely through observation. The severest challenge in this area is to take care not to be involved with the teaching process or the learners' development. It is difficult to ignore errors in the teaching and learning process. Research may not interfere with teachers' lessons. Although this is extremely difficult, the researcher should refrain from advising the teacher during the lesson, disciplining the learners or correcting learners when they make writing errors. WCED officials were made aware that the role of the researcher was purely that of an observer and that any data collected is for research purposes only and not work-performance based. It is important and ethical to avoid being in the position of playing intermediary between schools and the WCED.

1.8 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research question is:

- What writing practices are being implemented in the two rural Foundation Phase multigrade classes selected?

This identified problem led to the rigorous interrogation of the following two sub-questions:

- How do these two Foundation Phase teachers teach writing skills to rural multigrade learners?
- What challenges do these two Foundation Phase teachers experience when teaching writing in rural multigrade classes?

1.9 CLARIFICATION OF TERMS

The following six terms within this study will now be clarified: rural schools, multigrade schools, monograde schools, poverty, quintile and social constructivism.

1.9.1 Rural schools

Rural schools serve remote farming communities. They are usually identified as poor socio-economic areas where school enrolment figures are not perceived to justify the appointment of one teacher per grade (Mulryan-Kyne, 2007:501).

1.9.2 Multigrade schools

The word 'multi' means more than one, many, several, a lot or plenty. The word 'grade', means a specific level or standard in a particular situation. Little (2007:4) suggests that there are many definitions of multigrade. She highlights the most common terms found in her research. Multigrade has also been referred to as combination class, composite class, mixed or multi-age teaching, mixed-year or grade class, vertically-grouped, multi-vertical ability class teaching, family grouped class, un-graded class, non-graded class, mixed split-class teaching, multi-programming teaching, double grade teaching or multi-level class teaching, consecutive class and double class.

1.9.3 Monograde schools

Monograde schools refer to the teaching of one or a single grade following a set standard of outcomes and assessments. There may be children who are one year older or younger than their peers but are expected to achieve the same outcome as their peers in that grade.

Monograde teachers are responsible for learners from a single curriculum grade within the same time period. Monograde settings form the dominant and visible elements of all national systems of education worldwide (Little, 2007:4).

1.9.4 Poverty

In South Africa, poverty manifests itself in ill-health, unemployment, malnutrition, deprivation of privileges or backlogs in education. South Africans living in poverty are vulnerable, powerless and isolated (Prinsloo, 2005:28).

In order to relieve poverty, UNESCO (2012:vi) identifies six goals to improve the quality of learning for all:

- Access to, and improvement of, early childhood care and education;
- Access to and completion of free and compulsory primary education of good quality for all, especially girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities;
- Appropriate and life-skills programmes for all young people and adults;
- Improvements in levels of adult literacy;
- Elimination of gender disparities; and
- Improving all aspects of the quality of education.

Pretorius and Mampuru (2007:40) argue that poverty is widespread and that Africa has been experiencing economic problems over a long period of time adding to the weakness of the global economy. It is more difficult to educate poor children. They come to school hungry despite the feeding schemes in many South African schools. Lack of physical resources, learning materials and overcrowded classrooms further disrupt the development of literacy.

1.9.5 Quintile

Quintile refers to the economic status of the school and its community as well as the families of the learners who attend. A Quintile 1 school is fully subsidized by the state, a non-fee paying school that serves a very poor socio-economic community (Pretorius & Currin, 2010:69). Wildeman (in Gower 2008:15) highlights that Quintile 2 is also classed as teaching the poorest. She further declares that in 2008, Quintile 1 and 2 schools received R775 and R711 per learner respectively, while Quintile 3 received R581. Wildeman (in Gower 2008:15) states: 'We need a decent level of funding of all schools.' Therefore, these schools are no-fee schools and they receive a feeding scheme for their learners. In most cases the food is only enough for one meal per day per child. The school is solely dependent on government for its finances.

Quintile 5 means that the school is less reliant on government for financial assistance, resource material and school fees. The parents supply many of these resources.

1.9.6 Social Constructivism

Social constructivism refers to the active participation of learning taking place between two learners of whom one may be more knowledgeable than the other within cultural contexts. In

this way learners learn through communication and mutual discovery (Woolfolk, Hughes & Walkup, 2008:411). Cambourne (2004:26) defines constructivism as a set of core assumptions about learners and the learning process. He sees them as three separate but overlapping propositions:

1. What is learnt cannot be separated from the context in which it is learnt;
2. The purposes or goals that the learner brings to the learning situation are central to what is learnt; and
3. Knowledge and meaning are socially constructed through the processes of negotiation, evaluation, and transformation.

The WCED (2006:7) in the LITNUM Strategy advocates using the theory of constructivism in a classroom situation. It identifies the following principles to be applied in a constructivist learning environment: knowledge develops; learning is the construction of knowledge; learners are persons actively engaged in constructing knowledge; teachers encourage knowledge construction and learning is a social and hence language-based activity.

1.10 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study is limited to two schools only. Although there are many rural multigrade schools in the Western Cape, they were deemed unsuitable for this study because the travelling distances to and from such were too great. The two schools selected were the closest to the city. The schools' language of instruction is Afrikaans: therefore interviews and video recordings had to be translated. The transcriptions were sent to the teachers to check that translations were accurate. This study is limited to teaching Grade 2 and 3 multigrade classes. Learners in these classes are between the ages of 7 and 10 years old.

The data collection was limited to the months of July to September 2010 and 2011. The WCED does not allow researchers or teaching students into schools during the fourth term. Owing to the unforeseen illness and consequent death of one of the multigrade teachers, a new teacher was allocated and further data gathered. Visits began in July to September in 2011 and more observations conducted.

The researcher of this study was not granted leave during the data collection period. The researcher was allowed to come late to the school where the researcher is employed normally for ten consecutive Mondays. The target schools could be visited from 8am until 10am only. This allowed time to collect data and return to school in time for the beginning of the fourth lesson of the school day. Since this study was conducted in rural schools,

resources and support systems in the classrooms and schools were very limited. Few learners have access to pencils and paper. All the learners received free lunch at both schools. Very few parents are literate and therefore unable to assist learners with their schoolwork. This study is limited to researching writing practices only. But the research was undertaken at all times with a full understanding of the reciprocal relation between reading and writing.

1.11 ORGANISATION OF THE THESIS

Chapter 1 is the introductory point of reference and formulation of the research problem. This chapter is a synopsis and states the origin of the problem. The importance, context, approach, purpose and goal of the study are discussed. Key terms are clarified and their significance, limitations and assumptions established. This chapter places the study in perspective and familiarises the reader with the nature of the study.

Chapter 2 focuses on the theoretical framework of constructivism, learning and development by theorists such as Cambourne, Vygotsky and Piaget. Bronfenbrenner's socio-biological model is included in this study to address the issues of poverty and poor socio-economic conditions found in the two schools.

The informal, flexible education curriculum experienced in rural multigrade classes reflects both the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) and Inclusive Education system found in South Africa. The complexity of this issue is discussed and debated. International studies are referred to in order to broaden our understanding of the complexity of writing practices, pedagogy and methodologies in Foundation Phase rural multigrade classes.

Chapter 3 outlines the case study approach used. Multi-methods of data collection, consisting of interviews, video-recorded observations and scheduled observation checklists were used as the instruments, design and implementation of the research process. The sample size consists of two independent case studies, using two Afrikaans Foundation Phase rural multigrade teachers teaching Grades 2 and 3 in and around the Western Cape.

Chapter 4 presents the research results. This chapter analytically discusses the findings of the research question and two sub-questions.

Chapter 5 discusses the results, draws conclusions and makes recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of Chapter 2 is to present the theoretical framework which determines the structure of this thesis.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theory underpinning this research project is constructivism. This research was conducted in two rural areas where poverty and illiteracy prevail so that social and cultural constructs had to be carefully considered. The term 'constructivism' is argued from three different perspectives: Piaget, Vygotsky, and Cambourne. Although they share different views on how writing knowledge is constructed, they all agree that constructivism is a cognitive process of learning and development. Hence a discussion of all three theorists adds essential depth and scientific objectivity to this study rather than depending on one theorist only. Bronfenbrenner's social ecological systems theory expands on the constructivist argument with regard to social and cultural issues on writing. These theorists are depicted in Figure 2.1 and their relation to the study is demonstrated in Figure 2.2.

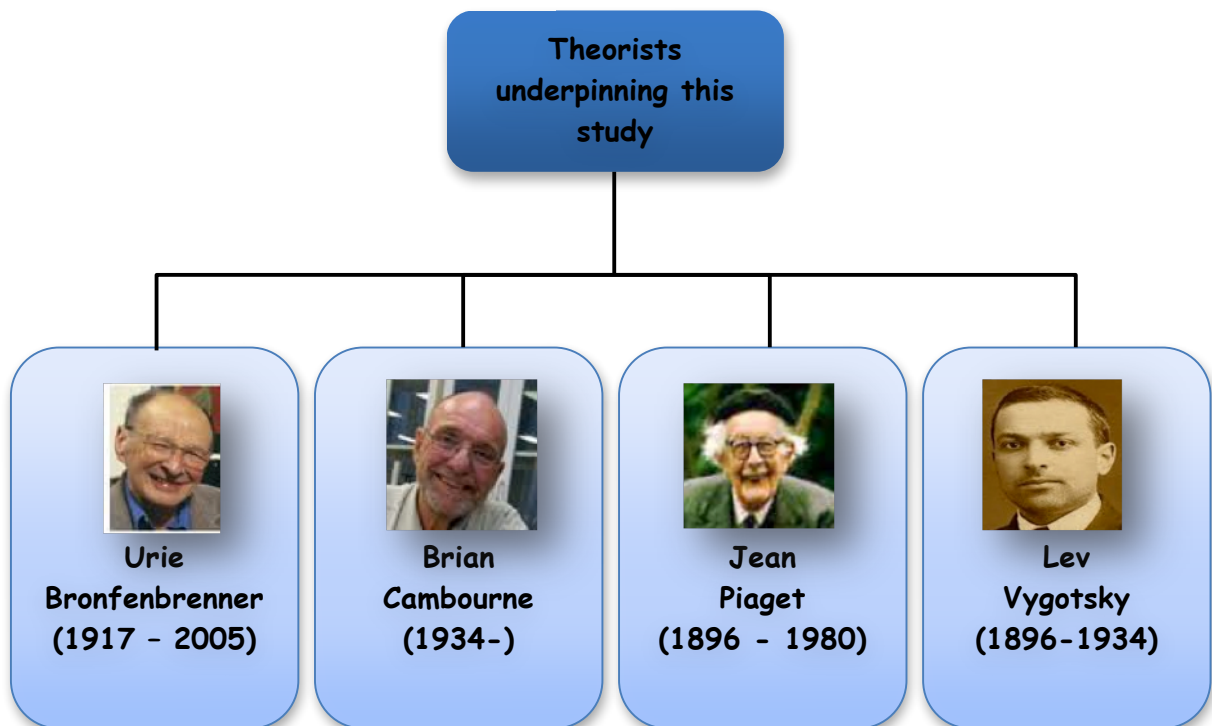


Figure 2.1: Theorists who form the theoretical framework of this study

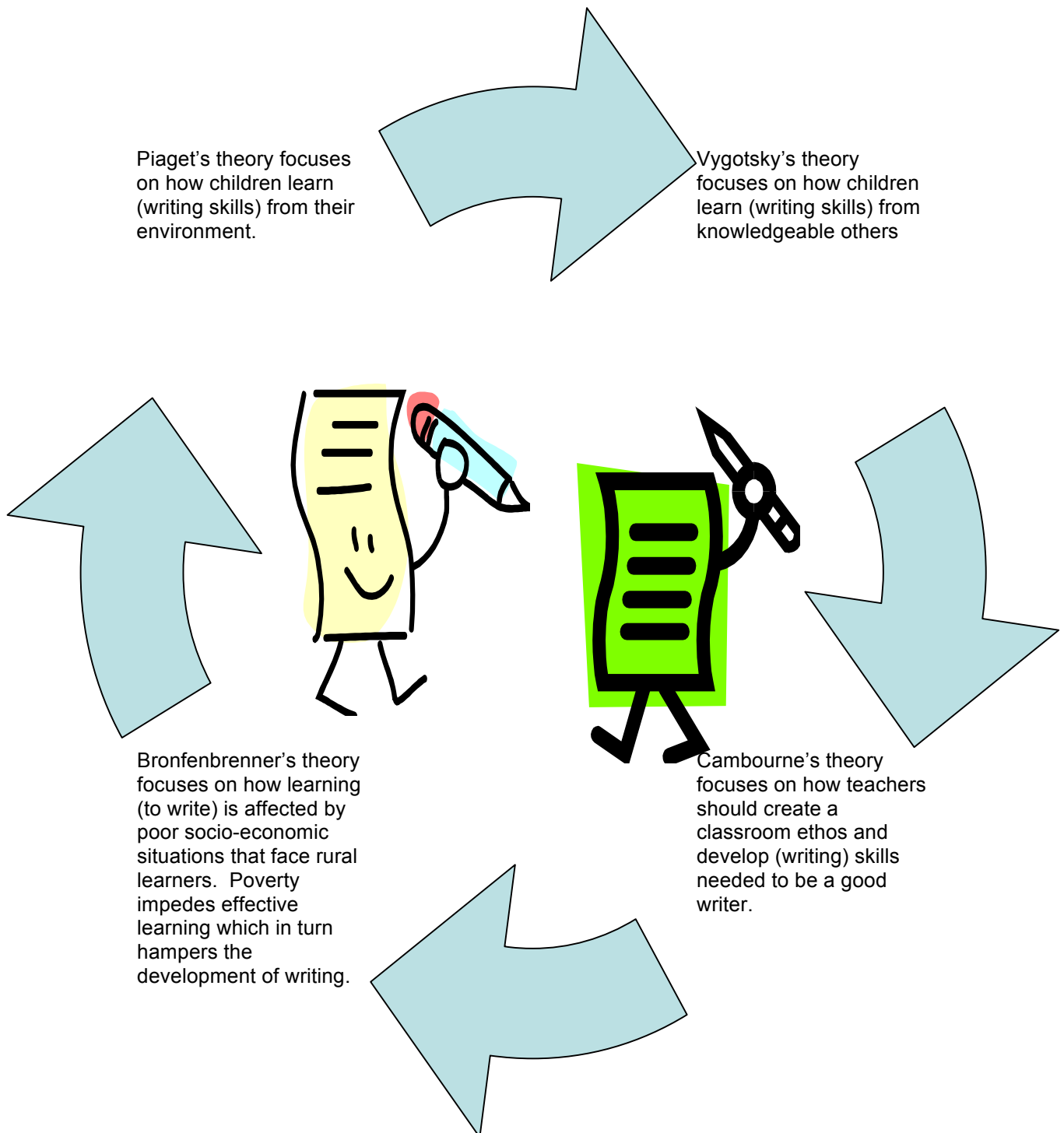


Figure 2.2: An overview of the relation between theorists and writing development

The next section examines the following theoretical positions:

- Constructivism and the writing environment;
- Independent constructivism versus social constructivism;
- The effects of society and the economy of writing knowledge construction;
- Instructional principles for writing as a means to incorporate social constructivism;
- Piaget's independent constructivist theory as a building block; and
- Creating a writing ethos in a classroom.

2.2.1 Constructivism and the writing environment

Cambourne (2004:26) defines constructivism as the ability to construct knowledge continuously. He states that learning to write should engage children in authentic, real and contextual writing activities that are inherently interesting and meaningful to the learner. Learning to write is not fixed: it is shaped, constructed and re-constructed in different social contexts and at different times (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2007:86). At the same time Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory is an example of a multidimensional model of human development (Swart & Pettipher, 2005:10), which effects social and writing development. There are layers of interacting systems resulting in change, growth and development such as physical, biological, psychological, social and cultural layers. The underlying changes, growth and development that take place within these interacting systems have critical effects on how children learn to construct knowledge and writing skills. This means that children who have negative writing experiences or lack exposure to stimulated writing find learning to write in a more formal setting more challenging than children who have experienced positive and stimulating writing development.

2.2.2 Independent constructivism versus social constructivism

Piaget (in Donald et al., 2007:51) believes that children learn to write and construct knowledge through four stages: (sensori-motor, pre-operational, concrete operational, and formal operational). Through these four stages children have the opportunity to 'play' with the writing resources available to them in order to construct meaning from their experiences. Although Cotton (1995:48-50) defines Piaget's four stages, this study focuses on the concrete operational stage (7 – 11years old) since this was the age of the sample in this study. During this stage, learners should be able to classify objects using several attributes, for example: colour, size, shape, position, numbers and letters to write legibly and with meaning. They should be able to think logically about objects and events in order to write experiences in logical and sequential order. Differences in writing need to be understood and this may be achieved by using practical examples. Cambourne (1988:102) suggests that practical writing examples or 'demonstrations' are important because teachers need not only to give writing demonstrations but also to draw learners' attention to them. Bronfenbrenner (Swart & Pettipher, 2005:11), however, argues that one cannot see developmental attributes such as intelligences, achievement and Piagetian-type stages as measures and understanding of an individual's life, time and society. He emphasises that a person's writing development is a product of a network of interactions – cultural, social, economic, political – and not merely psychological alone.

Vygotsky disagrees with Piaget's theory of development. Piaget (in Donald et al., 2007:85) states that children actively adapt to their environment from the inside out whereas Vygotsky says learners are active but scaffolded from the outside in. Vygotsky places greater emphasis on the social context in which children explore and learn. His observations about language lead him to believe that it is a vital social tool (in Lindon, 2010:32). Alongside language, play is highlighted as another important aspect in a child's development. Vygotsky warns against the dismissal of play as a means of learning. When marrying the two concepts of language and play as a social construct of knowledge, the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is explored to explain how learning to write could be supported. Vygotsky is interested in the way in which adults scaffold learners. He proposes that learners help each other within the ZPD through social interactions and play (in Lindon, 2010:32). Writing is a social action therefore these foundations to learning and social interactions are fundamental building blocks in developing writing skills.

The social interactions that play a role in the writing development of learners in a rural multigrade school cannot be compared to the role they play in the development of learners in the nearby urban school communities. The surrounding urban schools in both cases are excellent schools with high academic pass rates and they also offer a wide variety of social and sporting activities. This knowledge is particularly pertinent to understanding how multigrade rural learners construct their learning and develop writing skills. Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model provides insights into the importance of the context of rural schools to this study (Donald et al., 2007:41). He suggests that different levels of systems in the social context interact in the process of child development. In his model, Bronfenbrenner highlights four interacting dimensions such as personal factors (temperament of the child), process factors (forms of interaction that occur in the family), contexts (families, schools or local communities) and time (changes over time in the child or the environment), that are central to the development of each child (Miller, 2011:204-206). In short, children learn to write by example. If their families and the communities in which they live cannot provide a sound model of writing practice, the school environment and the teacher are then exclusively responsible for this function. Most rural children adopt the temperament of their families and communities who are in most cases unschooled and have poor literacy skills.

2.2.3 The effects of society and economy on writing knowledge construction

Within each of Piaget's four stages of development, different constructions of meaning predominate. We are continually organising and re-organising information and experience to create a better fit between the world as we experience and understand it (Donald et al., 2007:51). Writing is an example of such an experience.

Comparably, Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory (Miller, 2011:204-205) posits four different disciplines - the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem when understanding child development. These four interacting properties effect how learners learn to write within complexity such as the interacting systems surrounding them. In the level closest to the learner (microsystem) there are immediate face-to-face writing interactions with another person. The furthest level (macrosystem) impacts general cultural belief systems about writing. The child, family and school are embedded in the mesosystem (a system of microsystems). This effects how the child functions in the school environment while learning to write (Swart & Pettipher, 2005:6). Social factors such as poverty and discrimination, evident in this study, are important factors when considering their writing development (Swart & Phasha, 2008:216). Learners in this study are from poor rural backgrounds. How they experience schooling and writing experiences differs from privileged urban learners who are in the same stage of Piaget's development. For example, privileged learners may be exposed to print rich enviroments from as early as a toddler. In these cases many resources may be available such as reading books, paper to draw or write as well as pencils or pens. It is important to bear in mind that not all learners who attend urban schools are privileged. To link this to Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model, it is important to be aware of differing social environmental experiences and influences then match expectations accordingly.

2.2.4 Instructional principles for writing as a means to incorporate social constructivism

As a constructivist, Cambourne (1988:17) maintains that '...teachers are prisoners of a model of learning'. He explains that what teachers do when engaged in the act of teaching writing is motivated by what they believe about the processes that underlie learning. His constructivist approach to learning suggests that the teacher in Bronfenbrenner's 'mesosystem' is central to all learning, particularly learning to write. He suggests instructional principles for writing development as tools for gaining success within a constructivist classroom. Cambourne's (2004:30) principles will be discussed in detail in section 2.2.6 and include:

1. Creating a classroom ethos which supports and encourages deep engagement with multiple demonstrations of effective writing behaviour;
2. Employing writing activities and strategies that are a thoughtful combination of teaching and learning (explicitness, systematicity, mindfulness and contextualisation);

3. Utilising structures and processes that create continuous opportunities for the development of intellectual unrest when writing;
4. Developing each learner's metatextual awareness of the processes and understandings implicit in effective writing behaviour; and
5. Designing and using tasks that compel authentic use of the processes and understandings implicit in effective writing behaviour (Cambourne, 2004:30).

Embedded in his principles, Cambourne formulates Principles of Engagement to highlight that what learners bring to the learning situation is central to what is learnt when learning to write.

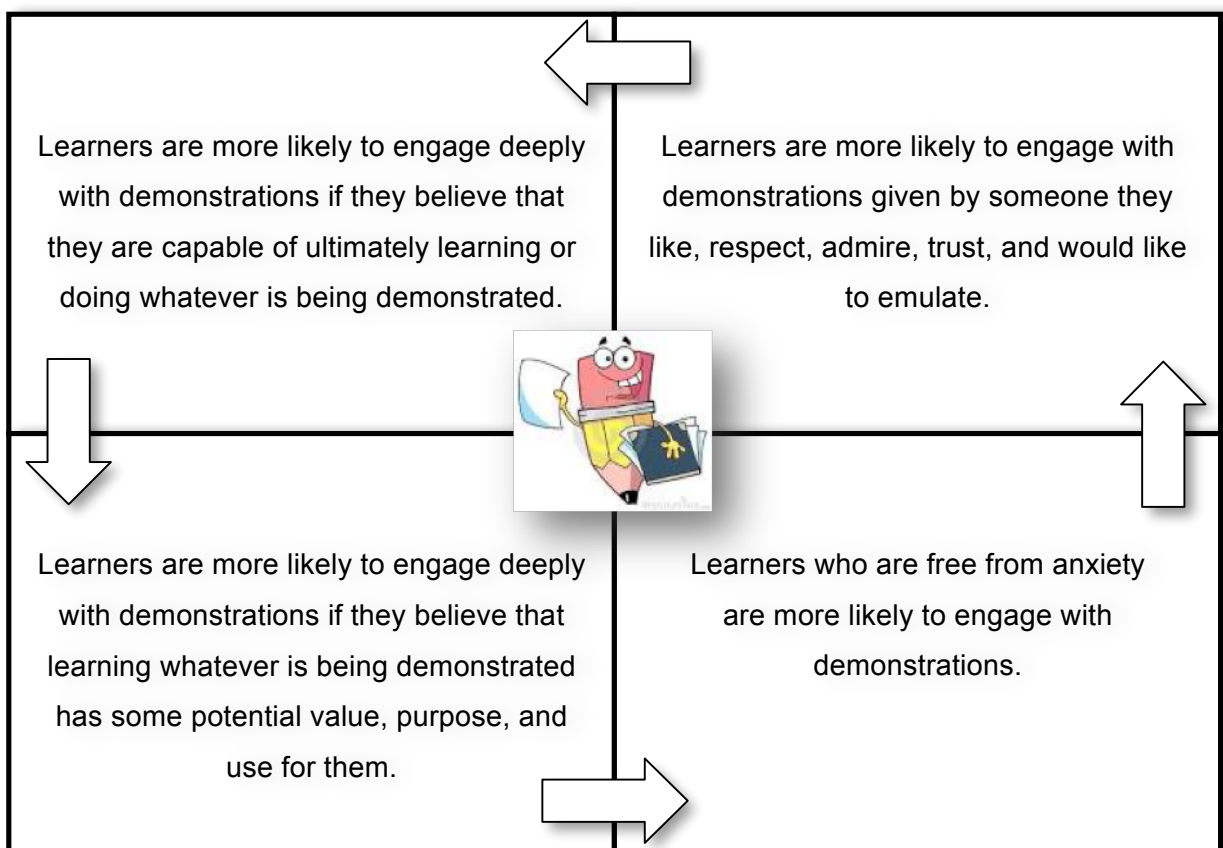


Figure 2.3: Cambourne's (2004:28) principles of engagement

By using Cambourne's (2004) instructional principles, this study juxtaposes his approach to teaching writing with Vygotsky's ZPD theory in which teachers scaffold writing processes with their learners. Piaget concurs with Cambourne and believes that in order to learn writing skills the child needs to experience such skills and internalise them. The teacher can scaffold learning by providing an environment that encourages writing exploration and discovery. Donald et al., (2007:87) describe Bruner's process of scaffolding, by which the mediator initially demonstrates key knowledge structures and strategies about writing for the child. As the child begins to master this understanding and internalise it actively, the teacher

gradually withdraws the amount of assistance provided. Scaffolding is thus originally directed 'from the outside in' but the child progressively begins constructing independently 'from the inside out'.

2.2.5 Piaget's independent constructivist theory as a building block

According to Piaget, for learners to gain and internalise new knowledge for writing, they construct new knowledge by taking their knowledge from a lower level to a higher level and re-organising it in this higher level (Miller 2011:86-87). For learners to do this they need to go through a process of assimilation, accommodation and equilibration.

Assimilation takes place when new information fits a child's existing schema, adds value to and expands a learner's schema (Donald et al., 2007:51-52). An example of this is when a learner writes words with '-at' such as 'cat, hat, mat'. When 'ch-' is introduced, he can write 'chat'. By adding a known sound with a newly learned sound a new word is created.

Accommodation, being the second process, involves receiving new information which challenges or clashes with the learner's schema. The learner readjusts or reshapes his schema in order to accommodate the new information (Donald et al., 2007:52). An example of this is when a child has learnt to write information that is factual but then hears a fairy-tale and is expected to write a creative story based on imagination. The learners re-shape their schema to write their creative story using more ideation.

Equilibration describes the continuous interaction between the two processes mentioned above. Piaget describes it as a process of organisation and dynamic balancing (Donald et al., 2007:52). An example of this is the learner's ability to solve problems such as making corrections. When learners see a word that the teacher has underlined because of a spelling mistake, they should be able to find the appropriate resources that will assist them in correcting the spelling. They may refer to a dictionary, wall charts in the classroom or their own past life experiences.

2.2.6 Creating a writing ethos in a classroom

The main theoretical framework for analysing the findings of this study is based on Cambourne's constructivist theory. Therefore this section discusses only Cambourne's theory of developing a constructivist-writing classroom. Although his theory focuses predominantly on 'reading', his work has been adapted to focus on writing skills since these

skills are so closely linked to teaching and learning. Figure 2.4 outlines Camborne's constructivist theoretical framework.

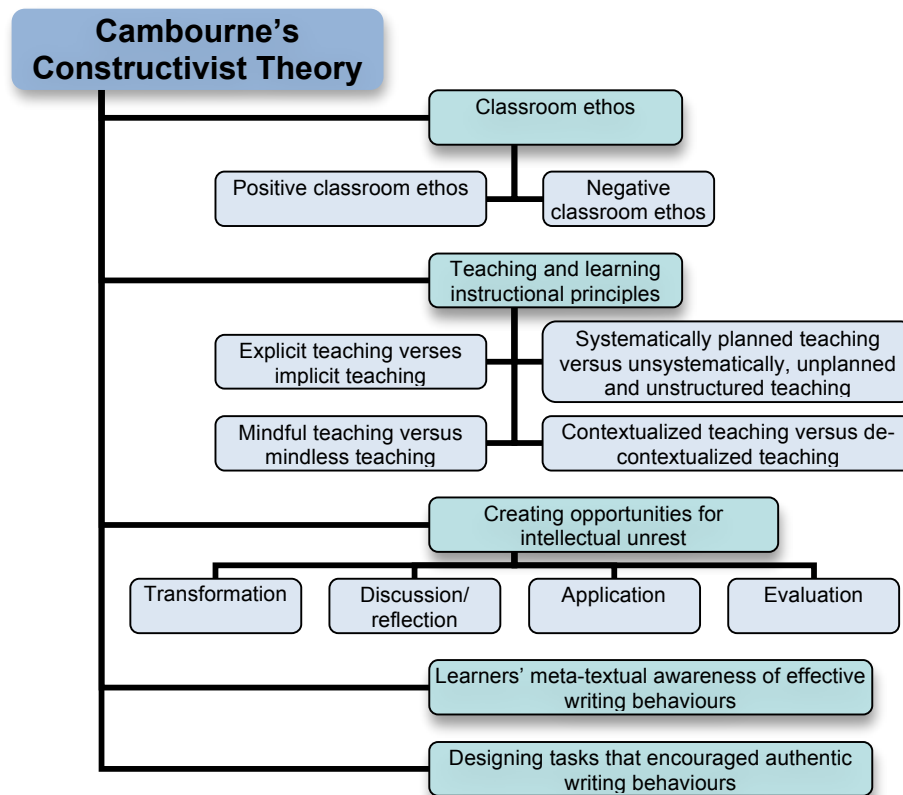


Figure 2.4: A representation of the constructivist theoretical framework adapted from Cambourne (2004)

Cambourne (2004:26) explains constructivism under three separate but overlapping propositions, namely context, engagement and social construction. First, he explains that what is learned cannot be separated from the context in which it is learned. He argues that the ends of instruction are determined by the means employed to teach them. The experiences and contexts in which learning is embedded are critical to learners' understanding of writing, and their ability to use it.

Second, he mentions that the purposes or goals that learners bring to the learning condition are essential to what is learned. Learners need to engage with, and be immersed in, writing demonstrations. Engagement depends on active participation involving risk-taking and can be linked to Piaget's theory of construction.

Third, writing knowledge and understanding that learners construct from observing demonstrations provided is reliant on the depth to which they engage with the writing demonstrations (Cambourne, 2004:27-28). Whitehead (2010:180) states that demonstrating

writing and discussing it with children is of great importance and can substitute time spent on fruitless correct copying and habitual writing exercises.

Finally, he states that writing knowledge and meaning are socially constructed through negotiation, evaluation, and transformation. This implies a relation to Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism and the use of the ZPD. Cambourne (2004:28) states that constructivism imposes meaning on the real world, and these meanings are socially constructed. The use of collaborative writing groups in a classroom is an effective form of developing individual understandings and knowledge about writing in a social context. The use of collaborative groups provides a medium for enriching, interweaving, and expanding writing knowledge and understanding. Transformation, discussion/reflection, application and evaluation are processes that co-occur during writing lessons. These processes are experienced during group discussions. Since they are interwoven, however, it is difficult to separate them as isolated processes. Whitehead (2010:180) describes writing in a group setting as a supportive writing community. She states that children typically take interest in each other's writing and can be encouraged to assist each other.

Cambourne (2004:25) explains five critical principles to invoke and guide writing in a constructivist classroom:

- Create a classroom ethos/culture that supports and encourages deep engagement with multiple demonstrations of effective writing behaviour;
- Employ teaching activities and strategies that are a judicious mix of the four dimensions of teaching and learning (explicitness, systematicity, mindfulness, and contextualization);
- Employ structures and processes that create continuous opportunities for the development of intellectual unrest;
- Develop each learner's metatextual awareness of the processes and understandings implicit in effective writing behaviour; and
- Design and use tasks that coerce authentic use of the processes and understandings implicit in effective writing behaviour.

These principles can be adapted to create a writing ethos in a constructivist multigrade classroom and are now discussed and argued with this study in mind. Cambourne (2004:47) states that a class ethos that supports and encourages deep engagement during writing can easily be created if expectations are communicated and provide opportunities to engage in reflective learning. In Wales, a curriculum was designed to incorporate deep engagement at all levels of learning. The Education Directorate of Wales, Estyn (2011:5) explains how they

envisage a curriculum that provides opportunities for deep engagement in the Foundation Phase:

The Foundation Phase curriculum is designed to provide a holistic practical and integrated curriculum with the child at the centre. Besides the areas of learning, the provision also includes communication, ICT, number and thinking skills that must complement each other and work together to support the development of children and their skills. In the Foundation Phase, there should be an appropriate balance between child-initiated activities and those that are practitioner-led. Research and inspection evidence show that play and active learning can be successful in motivating children to learn and achieve more but teachers must also plan specifically for literacy and numeracy skills-development too. The use of the outdoor environment for learning is an integral part of the Foundation Phase and play and active learning approaches. A play-based, experiential curriculum needs to be well planned and well organised. Activities must be purposeful if children are truly to gain skills and knowledge from these experiences and make good progress in their learning.

Deep engagement is based on Piaget's (1964) theory about how children learn, gain skills and knowledge through investigative play. When children are given the opportunity to be in an environment that supports play and active learning approaches to writing, learning from the inside out can be achieved. An effective learning environment provides activities and strategies that utilise deep engagement. Scharer and Pinnell (2008:11) emphasise that writers are engaged in writing and write best when they have the necessary resources available to them. Teachers need to provide materials that have a supportive value to writers.

In order to employ writing activities and strategies Table 2.1 is a representation of Cambourne's four dimensions of teaching and learning typically found in a constructivist classroom.

Table 2.1: Four dimensions of teaching and learning

Proposed dimension	Opposed dimension
Explicit	Implicit
Systematic	Unsystematic
Mindful	Mindless
Contextualised	Decontextualised

From Cambourne (2004:32)

The explicit dimension is preferred because it refers to the practice of deliberately demonstrating and developing conscious awareness of visible writing processes, understandings, knowledge and skills. Implicit teaching refers to the practice of deliberately leaving learners to discover and work out things for themselves (Cambourne, 2004:32). Teaching systematically implies that teachers plan formally, logically, think ahead and

develop future lessons, activities, resources and assessments that are needed and will be used. Unplanned instruction indicates little evidence of planning and is therefore unsystematic (Cambourne, 2004:33). Mindful learning can be equated to metacognitive awareness: the state of being consciously aware of what is going on and other possibilities given the context. According to Cambourne (2004:34) mindful learning is aligned with the discourse employed by teachers as opposed to 'mindless' teaching and learning.

Teachers should make use of children's interests when planning writing activities (Estyn 2011:13). They should provide numerous superior opportunities for children to be independent in their learning including writing skills. Estyn (2011:13) further implies that teachers should provide a well-balanced teacher-learner and learner-teacher activity basis through comprehensive and thorough planning of writing activities. The desired writing curriculum plan should include comprehensible intentions for children's learning and should make sense to learners. The way in which the teacher interprets and presents the writing curriculum to her learners should be done in a contextual manner.

According to Cambourne (2004:37) contextualised learning makes sense to learners: it is uncomplicated and more likely to result in robust, transferable, useful and mindful learning. In contrast, decontextualised learning does not make sense to learners and leads to automatic, rigid, rote memorizing. True learning is connected to the learner's environment. It is linked to what learners know about writing and their own personal experiences.

Cambourne (2004:35-36) reiterates that a constructivist classroom employs structures and processes that create continuous opportunities for the development of intellectual unrest. This process is also referred to as puzzlement (Cambourne, 2004), cognitive conflict (Vygotsky, 1978; Piaget, 1964), and disequilibrium (Piaget, 1964). These processes are essential stages that learners must experience in order to engage deeply in writing demonstrations. In order to develop the skill of intellectual unrest, teachers need to provide continuous opportunities by which intellectual unrest is created and resolved. In order to achieve intellectual unrest, the following strategies need to be incorporated: transformation, discussion/reflection, application and evaluation. During transformation, learners are able to transform knowledge and skills about writing modelled by others into writing knowledge and skills that are uniquely theirs. Once transformation has taken place, learners can begin to take responsibility for their own learning and writing development. Discussions and reflections are language processes that serve specific purposes – to explore, transact and clarify meanings. They are the first steps in the writing process. Discussions are oral and social (Vygotsky, 1978) in nature whereas reflections are typically a discussion with oneself (Piaget, 1964). In order to enhance transformation, discussions and reflections need to be

present in the learning experience. Application is a structure that teachers use to stimulate learners to apply writing skills and knowledge learnt during writing lessons. It is interdependent with discussion, reflection and transformation. Finally, evaluation is a learner-response tool. Learners constantly evaluate their own performance as they gauge, discuss/reflect, transform and apply writing skills they have learnt.

Constructivists develop learners' metatextual awareness of the processes and understandings implicit in effective writing behaviour. They use explicit methods of teaching and learning. This is evident when learners are able to display conscious levels of understanding of how texts function. As mentioned throughout the discussion, constructivist teachers develop metatextual awareness in many ways (Cambourne, 2004:38). Metatextual awareness can be developed in a writing class by providing a rich environment, demonstrating a variety of writing skills and providing countless opportunities for learners to experiment, explore and practise writing skills. The constructivist can achieve this by designing and providing tasks that coerce authentic use of processes and understandings implicit in effective writing behaviour (Cambourne, 2004:38). He explains that in order to design authentic tasks, activities used to promote writing should resemble kinds of writing activities that occur inside and outside the school setting. The more the writing activity requires learners to engage in the kind of reading-writing-literacy behaviours that proficient adults use to address their needs, the more authentic the activity will be.

From Cambourne's argument, it is clear that constructivist teachers have a fundamental role to play in the process of teaching and learning writing. Opportunities for individual and social learning are fundamental. Multigrade teachers also execute their roles where education constitutes a shift from teacher support, to group support, to peer support and ultimately towards individual self-directed learning (Mulryan-Kyne, 2007:507). This implies that there is a balance between individual constructivism (Piaget, 1964) and social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978). More significantly, Little (2005:6) finds that friendship patterns, self-concept, self-esteem, cognitive and social development are more favourable in multigrade schools. Multigrade classrooms are therefore ideal in a constructivist's regime. Teachers guide children and children guide their peers towards their own independent learning and writing. Since there is limited research in the area of writing practices in rural multigrade schools, the majority of research found, discussed and argued, pertains to monograde teaching of writing practices in urban schools. Thus it is important to highlight the need for good writing practices amongst rural multigrade teachers. With focused training, multigrade teachers are better informed and able to support the development of the children they teach. More importantly, policies and skills should be adjusted to suit the multigrade setting.

In summary, the theoretical framework has been discussed for how learners acquire new processes and skills of writing to improve their existing writing abilities. The way learners learn to write and develop their writing skills is dependent on how teachers present the writing skills during their lessons as well as the writing classroom environment that they develop.

2.3 LITERATURE REVIEW

Writing is a skill that can easily be taken for granted. For most rural multigrade teachers and learners, it is a process and opportunity to learn to become independent writers. These learners need to gain these skills in order to break free from the stigma and stranglehold of poverty and illiteracy. UNESCO (2004:13) defines writing and literacy as the:

ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society.

Although complex, writing remains the most common form of communication and requires knowledgeable others to help develop these skills. According to Potgieter (2010:4), however, while multigrade schools account for 30% of all primary schools in South Africa, in most cases it is found that teachers are neither qualified nor able to provide quality education to learners. This includes teaching these learners to write adequately and independently. The NEEDU Report (2013:24) states that writing has the power to leave an enduring blueprint. Because of its power, writing shapes the way we think, reason, and learn. The degree to which information is manipulated through writing dictates how well the information is integrated, learned, and retained.

The NEEDU Report (2013:23) indicates that children in Foundation Phase should be writing four times a week including one extended piece of writing. Their criterion for writing per grade is highlighted as the following: Grade 1 – writing sentences, Grade 2 – paragraphs and Grade 3 – extended passages. In order for teachers to teach writing effectively, they need to have pedagogical and content knowledge. This report highlights three aspects of teacher knowledge namely: knowledge of school subject, knowledge of the official curriculum and knowledge of how to teach the subject (NEEDU Report, 2013:44). Emerging Voices (2005:103) conducted a survey and found that teachers' inadequate training affects their ability to meet the high expectations of the writing curriculum. Furthermore it concludes that inadequate resources and support hampered them in their work and ability to teach. Teachers cannot teach effectively without the necessary resources. Children can neither

learn to write without being taught the necessary skills nor can they learn to write without pencils, books or paper.

In order to answer the main research question and two sub-questions as stated in Chapter 1, the following two main concepts and their sub-headings are debated and argued in the next section:

- **Socio-economic issues of rural multigrade schools**
 - Government and social injustice;
 - Parental illiteracy;
 - Hope for the future;
 - Alternative interventions for improving writing in rural multigrade classrooms;
and
 - The importance and need for multigrade education.

- **Writing within the NCS curriculum**
 - Curriculum: the connection and relation between speaking, reading and writing;
 - Elements of writing;
 - Assessment of writing and writing support;
 - Purpose of writing;
 - Pedagogy of writing;
 - Challenges of writing; and
 - Teachers' support in writing classrooms.

2.3.1 Socio-economic issues of rural multigrade schools

Freire (1970) suggests that literacy should give people the tools of emancipation from their oppressors. His theory adds value to this study: he fought against the oppression of others and the way in which people are segregated in society. Unjust education was abolished together with apartheid in 1994. Freire refers to the term 'critical literacy' to explain that literacy gives a voice to the oppressed. Anderson and Irvine (in Shor & Pari, 1999:1) describe critical literacy as 'learning to read and write as part of the process of becoming conscious of one's experience as historically constructed within specific power relations'. Shor (1999:1) states that in order to understand critical literacy, we need to understand that:

We are what we say and do. The ways we speak and are spoken to help shape us into the people we become... we build ourselves in a world that is building us... critical literacy begins with words that question a world not yet finished or humane... in an effort to discover alternative paths for social and self-development.

As teachers, our intention should be to teach children explicitly in order for them to be critical thinkers. We need to give them, and demonstrate to them, the tools to question and to write what they think and feel. Children need to be given the opportunity to develop. They need a variety of stimuli and resources to aid their development.

2.3.1.1 Government and social injustice

To facilitate and improve the social and independent development of all South Africans in a non-discriminating society, the South African Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy was drafted. This document states that democratic South Africa was initiated because of a vision for people who struggled to lift themselves out of the cruelty of apartheid (2001a:i). It is hoped that the new South Africa moulds people from diverse origins, cultural practices and languages into one democratic character that absorbs, accommodates and mediates conflicts and adversarial interests without oppression and injustice. Although the past was filled with many struggles, the new South African life has its own challenges: crime, HIV/AIDS, unemployment, globalisation and breakdown of national unity. Without the essential role education plays, these challenges cannot be met. Bronfenbrenner's (in Swart & Pettifher 2005:13) socio-economic bioecological model reflects this statement in that the education system can only be as good as the socio-economic and political issues within the macrosystem – the new South Africa. This macrosystem directly influences the exosystem in which schools, social services, parents and neighbours exist. This study was situated at two rural schools, which exist within the exosystem. This research has to take into account how the Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy (DoE, 2001a:1) influences these school environments. In both discussions on the Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy and Bronfenbrenner, the child is central. Therefore all the factors mentioned above continue to affect how a learner in a rural school learns to write.

The Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy (DoE, 2001a:ii) and the White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001b:5) both sketch inspiring democratic values in youthful South Africans in the learning environment to help eradicate oppression and social injustices. From both these documents, social justice, equity and equality are three of the most important values that rural multigrade teachers, learners and families should strive to realize in full. Du Preez and Roux (2010:16) concur with the Manifesto and state that human rights should be characterised as values to be cherished globally as well as locally. Among the educational strategies which serve as the cornerstones for upholding the Constitution, Values and Education, Asmal (2001:4) states that role-modelling, promoting commitment as well as competence among educators assist in ensuring that every South African is able to read, write, count and think. White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001b:5) continues to advocate an inclusive

education system which has access to the curriculum, equity and includes community responsiveness' and cost-effectiveness in teaching and resource development.

In order to educate our children under the difficult circumstances explained above, Taylor (2008:1) states that despite the insults and discrimination of public opinion, teachers are dedicated and work hard. In the case of multigrade teachers who need to plan and prepare for more than one grade per lesson they too experience difficulties as described by Beukes (2006:41-42). She explains the challenges of multigrade teachers in Namibia as being: no clear guidance for the combination of grades, inconsistent learner attendance, teachers lacking classroom management skills, mother-tongue influences, grouping and time management. Vithanapathirana (2010) finds that in Sri Lanka other challenges of multigrade teaching include: high teacher absenteeism, the number of teachers deployed being less than the numbers of teachers teaching, low learner enrolment and finally parents choosing to send their learners to accessible, more popular schools which leads to the decline of learners attending rural multigrade schools.

Tsoloakidis (2010) states that socio-economic development can be defined as economic development followed by specific social improvements. These include a reduction in poverty, unemployment and inequality, better education and health care and an improvement in moral values. In South Africa, despite government's efforts to relieve adversity, poverty is still rife and poor education still fails to lift people out of it (Joubert, 2010). Equality is essential in ensuring that all South African children have access to quality education where children can learn in an environment free from bias and discrimination (Asmal, 2001:3). Most rural children adopt the temperament of their families and communities, who are in most cases unschooled and have very poor literacy skills. Downey, von Hippel and Hughes (2008:255) specify that students at rural schools are more likely to be poor and are ranked in the bottom quintile for learning.

Macfarlane (2007) affirms that since 2006, provincial departments have to place schools in one of five nationally determined poverty categories, called Quintiles. Schools that fall into the lower quintile ranges are usually found in low socio-economic or rural areas. At these schools, learners are exempt from paying school fees. The poorest 20% of schools are categorized as Quintile 1 (both schools in this research project were Quintile 1 schools) and the most affluent schools are categorized as Quintile 5. The more privileged the school's Quintile rank, the more competent it is to raise substantial fee income independently. Macfarlane (2007) states that this is legislated and is intended to help poor pupils and parents. In this way it is implied that children are still given an opportunity to equal, high quality and fair education.

2.3.1.2 Parental illiteracy

In the current research project it is found that parents struggle to read and demonstrate writing to their children. St. Clair and Sandlin (2004:45) state that 'illiteracy' is still a powerful challenge in adult literacy. According to St Clair and Sandlin (2004:46) to be illiterate not only implies that one struggles to read and write. It implies that you appear to be a bad parent, not worthy and unproductive. Taylor (2008:2) argues that exponential growth in the numbers of people receiving schooling up to at least Grade 7 warrants that the problem of adult illiteracy is eradicated at source. He further argues that seven years of good schooling is needed to rectify and establish fundamental reading and writing skills. We assume that because of poor quality education within the school system, our learners are not achieving the required level of literacy. He believes, however, that adult literacy has improved from below 50% among those in their sixties to more than 90% among those in their twenties (Taylor, 2010:3). This indicates that literacy levels in South Africa are changing and improvements are noticeable.

Although Taylor's statement does not reflect improvements in rural multigrade education, his statement replicates signs of hope for a better future for more South Africans as stated in the Manifesto of Values, Education and Democracy (DoE, 2001a). Padmanabha Rao and Rama (2010) explain that community participation in India is one way in which adult literacy and involvement in rural multigrade schools succeeded in India. The Rishi Valley Institute for Educational Resources (RIVER) of the Krishnamurti Foundation in India claims victory in creating opportunities for community participation. RIVER actively engages and involves the community in creating an environment conducive to continuous learning. Multigrade schools in India are declared inclusive because they have formed a 'mothers' committee'. Within this committee, health issues are discussed, workshops are presented, potential teacher trainees and children at risk of dropping out of school are identified.

2.3.1.3 Alternative interventions for improving writing in rural multigrade classrooms

Rural Education and Development (READ) is an international Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) that creates centres for literacy and social empowerment in rural areas (Neuman, Khan & Dondolo, 2008:513). Introducing writing practices in their programme supports and sustains reading and improves literacy rates. Reading improves through practice. Therefore, if children have adequate practice in writing, it could be argued that their writing should improve. Reading and writing are reciprocally linked and should be used to support each other.

Concentrated Language Encounter (CLE) is an eclectic method of teaching language and literacy skills: in this model both reading and writing are explored and interlinked. Condy and Forrester (2000:1) suggest this method as an intervention in schools where literacy rates are low. This is particularly relevant to our South African context as the resources are available in three of the eleven official languages (English, Afrikaans and Xhosa). It is cost effective and the content is also pertinent to all children, rural or urban. In an unpublished report on CLE, Donald (2004:25) hints that in order to sustain the success of this programme, continued training and teacher support is required. This is an easy model to follow and multigrade teachers can be trained and supported in this method. It is adaptable for use in communities and relevant to rural settings.

2.3.1.4 The importance and need for multigrade education

In order to further support community-based participation, training is required. The specific training and support of multigrade teachers in rural areas is a constant need. Vithanapathirana (2010) states that there is an adequate stockpile of teachers to serve all the schools in the whole of Sri Lanka. The difficulty, however, is that severe teacher shortages in remote rural and multigrade schools occur due to problems in deployment. For this reason the need for multigrade teaching is crucial. Small schools in Sri Lanka that have been serving rural towns for years are threatened with closure. Parents and communities do not receive this well. Closure of these schools has serious ramifications for the learners. There are no statistics to sustain the prevalence of multigrade teaching because education authorities perceive multigrade teaching situations as temporary (Vithanapathirana 2010).

Such denial played a large part in the imminent closure of eighteen Western Cape schools, in May 2012. This announcement raised concern within the communities affected by this decision. By 21 December 2012 the court ruled in favour of seventeen schools to remain open while one school voluntarily agreed to closure. Grant (2012:21) states reasons for proposed closure of these schools included low enrolment numbers, multigrade classes or a decline in learner numbers. Although these reasons may be viewed as validation for closing these schools, the reality is that multigrade schools exist and are needed. They serve a purpose in the lives of the learners who attend them. Tsolakidis (2010) argues that multigrade schools deserve more attention and should continue to be a focal point in research. He states that their contribution to education and social development of the host society cannot be denied. He further declares that despite their small size, their marginal role in education has immense potential both to meet the educational/pedagogical, social and cultural needs of their learners and to promote the region's social, economic and cultural development. He therefore argues the necessity of multigrade teaching.

Vithanapathirana (2010) reiterates that multigrade schools and teachers are important to the surrounding communities. The following four innovations for multigrade teaching should be considered:

- Adapting the monograde curriculum for multigrade teaching;
- In-service training strategies for multigrade teaching;
- Approaching multigrade teaching through student self-learning material (work cards); and
- Distance training modules for multigrade teaching.

Although these innovations have raised teacher morale and learner achievement outcomes, there are many challenges that hinder the implementing of such innovations. These challenges include: dominant monograde curriculum policy, exclusion of multigrade pedagogy in teacher education policy and lack of political will.

Lack of political will is the largest obstacle to multigrade teaching in Sri-Lanka. It prevents officials from recognizing multigrade teaching. Tsolakidis (2010) argues that the present situation with respect to multigrade teaching worldwide including South Africa is uncertain because of the presence of the challenges mentioned earlier. He does, however, emphasise that these schools continue to exist and provide education in problematic areas where there are no orthodox educational solutions.

In the next section, curriculum issues relating to writing are discussed. Attention is paid to what the RNCS (2002) offers (since this was the curriculum in use when the data were collected and analysed) as well as specific issues related to writing skills development.

2.3.2 Writing within the RNCS curriculum

In this section seven critical issues of writing in a classroom are discussed. The paragraph begins by foregrounding the RNCS curriculum (2002) where writing techniques are set out as guidelines to teachers. The writing curriculum is discussed and argued from a multigrade perspective. How writing links speaking and reading is also dealt with. Furthermore, the elements of writing are debated with reference to international authors. The assessment of writing and writing support is examined. Finally, the purpose of writing is examined.

2.3.2.1 Curriculum: the connection and relation between speaking, reading and writing

An overview of the RNCS (2002:2) highlights eight Learning Area (LA) Statements for Grades R-9: 1) Languages, 2) Mathematics, 3) Natural Sciences, 4) Social Sciences, 5) Arts and Culture, 6) Life Orientation, 7) Economic and Management Science, and 8) Technology, each consisting of Assessment Standards (AS) to be achieved by the learners. Within the Language Learning Area six Learning Outcomes (LO's) are listed according to a clear line of progression regarding language development, where skills are ranked in the following order: 1) Listening, 2) Speaking, 3) Reading and Viewing, 4) Writing, 5) Thinking and Reasoning and 6) Language Structures. In this study, the curriculum discussion mostly focuses on learning area 1) Languages and LO 4) Writing.

The language curriculum has been set out, in accordance with the way Vygotsky (1986) and Cambourne (2000) view learning language. Vygotsky believes that language cannot be learnt in isolation and that it is a social skill (Donald et al., 2007:60). Cambourne (1988:41) highlights that we use speaking, reading and writing for different purposes, which entails different skills. Furthermore, while writing is a complex skill and structured differently, it cannot be completely separated from reading. Cambourne (1988) argues that learning to speak is a natural action because it is universal, whereas reading and writing do not happen naturally. He also states that although reading is demonstrated more than writing, it does not mean that it is acquired naturally. He maintains that written language is not merely spoken language, which has been written down. Dednam (2008:122) agrees and adds that speaking is learnt incidentally while reading is taught purposefully. She maintains that writing, although complex, is used concurrently with reading. Dednam (2008) believes that most learners are able to use formal written language adequately after mastering reading. Furthermore, Whitehead (2010:201) explicitly states that children learn a great deal about writing from reading.

This study focuses on writing as a representation of communication to gain understanding by using print, to share ideas, apply knowledge and skills as well as record important information. Writing, so that others can understand, is an empowering tool regardless of the format used. The RNCS Policy Framework document (DoE, 2003a:6) states that all teachers should contribute to the transformation of education in South Africa and should be qualified, competent, dedicated and caring. The NDoE expects teachers to be mediators of learning, interpreters and designers of learning programmes and materials, leaders, administrators, managers, scholars, researchers, life-long learners, community members, citizens, pastors, assessors, and subject specialists.

Taylor (2008) highlights that South Africa fails to make experts of their teachers because of such unrealistic expectations. We expect them to be masters of too many learning areas. If we expect teachers to teach writing, it should be demonstrated to them so that they can scaffold it to their children. In order to demonstrate writing skills, writing needs to be understood and taught systematically.

The RNCS suggests writing as a fourth LO within the curriculum and lists the writing skills in LO4 as indicated in the table as Appendix 1. The RNCS (2002) outlines the Assessment Standards (AS) required for writing through Grades R-3.

The RNCS writing curriculum for Grades R – 3 is based on developmental theories. Not only does the curriculum develop and build on skills from previous years but there are more complex writing skills within each grade. Embedded in the curriculum are opportunities for learners to work in groups as well as independently. This learning developmental theory is reflected in Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social interaction and constructivism. He maintains that learning to write should be demonstrated by a 'more knowledgeable other'. This person should scaffold the writing processes and allow for discussion amongst the learners themselves about the writing task. Sharing ideas about a writing topic enhances deep engagement. Contrary to Vygotsky's theory, Piaget states that learners learn from the inside out where they are expected to use their own knowledge and understanding of the writing process. This leads to independent writing.

At the time of collecting data for this research project the RNCS document was the curriculum in practice. However, in 2012 the new Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (2011a) document was made compulsory for teachers of Grades R to 3. It explicitly sets out the developmental learning of writing from focused handwriting, to group writing, to shared writing and finally to independent writing (see Appendix 2). This document makes the learning development of writing more explicit than the RNCS (2002) writing curriculum.

The RNCS (2002) curriculum makes provision for monograde educators. Although adjustments can be made to suit the individual multigrade teacher, it leaves the teacher with a great deal of extra planning and lesson preparation. While the RNCS (2002) offers content such as outlining writing skills and elements to be taught and acquired, it also provides teachers with practical examples of how to teach these skills and elements. In 2008, additional documents such as the Foundations for Learning Assessment Framework (DoE, 2008b) were provided to teachers to assist them with their practical pedagogical knowledge. This document provides milestones for Mathematics and Literacy (including writing) as well

as examples of rubrics for assessment tasks. An example of writing milestones per grade per term is provided as Appendix 3.

Johnston (2010:11) believes that children come to school having learnt their mother-tongue language and mastered most of its language structures (grammar and vocabulary). It is therefore not necessary to teach children as if they have little or no language competence. In South Africa, the Education for Rural People (Neuman, Khan & Dondolo, 2008:513) was launched to lessen the burden and combat the overwhelming phenomena of poverty and illiteracy. The curriculum is a crucial strategy in overcoming poverty. The way it is presented to learners and the way these learners learn the basic and fundamental skills assists in decreasing the illiteracy rate in South Africa. This can be used in an attempt to lessen the burden of poverty.

Development of writing in a rural multigrade class is an equally important aspect and contributes to the social and language development of South Africa. According to Joubert (2008:3) the curriculum has to be relevant to rural people's needs. He suggests that it is important that the content of education is closely related to local conditions. He believes that in this way learners are able to apply knowledge and skills learnt. Based on this statement, it is evident that rural multigrade children come to school with little or no understanding of language and its structures.

Multigrade classrooms should become the main role player in the acquisition of written communication as opposed to assistance expected from home and community. Joubert (2008) believes that linking schools with relevant communities leads to improvement in quality and relevance of education. He states that rural people with a basic education are better able to manage change, be more productive and adopt new technology. But he warns that there is no quick fix in improving the quality of education for rural people. He challenges local, national and international stakeholders to make long-term commitments with concerted efforts to improve the current issues. Empowering rural people is a critical first step towards eradicating poverty.

According to Scott, Teale, Carry, Johnson and Morgan (2009:341), the challenge is change. This is significant in a multigrade context. When developing a curriculum that better suits the needs of teachers and learners in multigrade rural settings, the following should be considered: needs of rural learners, theoretical framework for literacy teaching, literacy instructional practices, evaluating outcomes and change. They suggest that this will improve teacher morale and literacy rates in South Africa.

2.3.2.2 Elements of writing

Writing is a complex skill reliant on many processes and facets. Dednam (2008:127) states that there are three elements of writing, namely the essay (cognitive component, linguistic and stylistic components), spelling (ability to construct the order of letters in words according to prescribed rules) and handwriting (eye-hand coordination, knowledge of the writing direction from left to right, visual discrimination of letters and words and intact brain functioning). She argues that essays need to be written according to the conventions of a specific language and rules of its structures. In handwriting the form of the letters is prescriptive but the letter font, size and line formation are not (Dednam, 2008:127). Although she states that handwriting and spelling are important, she emphasises that essay writing is dependent on the development of language and reading skills. In order for a message to be conveyed clearly to a reader, written language, including the prescribed letter formation, spelling and language structures must be correct (Dednam, 2008:127).

In the 1960's handwriting was abolished in the Zambian curriculum. It was later proved that poor handwriting skills had a significant impact on the child's learning, especially in child-centred pedagogy. Furthermore, teachers' legible writing was found to be an important factor in interpretation of knowledge (Kayombo, 2010). Kayombo (2010) argues that illegible handwriting demonstrated by teachers causes learners to copy work incorrectly. This problem leads to learners acquiring incorrect facts, which mar their learning and understanding. He highlights the need for handwriting manuals especially in the Foundation Phase. Whitehead (2010:183) describes handwriting as a skill that should be nurtured throughout early schooling years. She also highlights that while a personal handwriting style should communicate efficiently and pleasantly, it is not a priority in the process of thinking and writing.

When learning spelling, Estyn (2011:12) suggests that through a systematic approach, teachers should build phonic knowledge, understanding and skills that children need at the correct level. Teaching phonics adequately improves the standard of literacy. Knowing, understanding and demonstrating correct spelling during the writing process assists the reader to read what has been written with understanding and clarity. Phonics is the method used to teach spelling, language rules and regularities. Spelling is the system used where letters and symbols are combined to represent spoken language (Oxford Dictionary, 2013).

Writing so that others can understand is an empowering tool and a way of clarifying one's thoughts. Essay writing is a more complex skill that takes place concurrently with reading and spoken language. It is regarded as the highest form of communication. Most learners

are able to use written language adequately after they have mastered reading (Dednam, 2008:122). All types of writing are good preparation for the writing that students are expected to achieve in school and in life. Hamston and Resnick (2009:7) believe that writing is as valuable as reading; increasingly important for success in school and beyond where communicating effectively in writing is essential. Hamston and Resnick (2009:7, 8 & 56) argue that children should write for pleasure and become effective writers, not only because they are expected to write. Writers develop several processes with practice, rather than a single fixed process for writing.

Three language dimensions (form, content and function) are involved while speaking, reading and writing. During the first grades at school, while learners are still learning to read and write, they are more aware of using dimensions of form and function (Dednam, 2008:123). In written language the writer makes an appeal to the reader's sense of vision and visual perceptual skills. Readers interpret the written text in their thoughts and convert them into the ideas and messages embedded in words and sentences (Dednam 2008:148). The following four features are pertinent to written language. The writer's message can be interpreted by the reader in his absence. The interpretation of the message is possible a long time after it has been put into words. Non-verbal language such as signs, intonation and facial expressions are not involved when the message is interpreted. Finally, in order to interpret the message, the reader must be familiar with the language system used by the writer.

2.3.2.3 Assessment of writing and writing support

Teachers, as pointed out by Johnston (2010:11), are the most important agent of assessing learners' writing. They make evaluative comments in order to improve learners' writing skills. Dednam (2008:144) believes that motivated teachers intervene in all learning areas of writing instead of waiting for a writing specialist to support learners in overcoming their problems. Johnston (2010:4) further declares that failure to teach and help all learners acquire the necessary writing skills and strategies for this ever-growing age of technology will not serve them or society well. Dispositions and social practices deny children full access to economic, social and political participation in the new global society (Bronfenbrenner in Swart & Pettipher, 2005).

Dednam (2008:131) further suggests that the main forms of assessment for learners who experience language problems should be undertaken by means of:

- Observation;
- Interviews with the parents, teachers and the learners;
- As well as portfolio assessment; and
- Error analysis to determine the general and specific manifestations of language problems.

Gibson (2008:333) states that assessing guided writing instruction should be ongoing and insightful. Paratore and McCormack (2005:86) and Gibson (2008:334) suggest that notes made during and immediately after the lesson help teachers know which aspects of instruction have or haven't been appropriated by students. First, written assessments can also provide an indication as to whether learners are able to apply the writing skills they have learnt. Second, analytic assessment of written pieces focuses on the strategies taught: it highlights areas for improvement and which strategies need to be re-taught to learners. Based on the results of the observations and written assessments, teachers are able to plan future lessons in order to correct shortfalls in the learners' writing development. An example of writing milestones per grade per Assessment Task is also provided as Appendix 4.

2.3.2.4 Purpose of writing

According to Jimenez and Smith (2008), the first forms of writing originated in Africa and Asia. From the many definitions available, it appears that writing was depicted by symbols, pictures, markings and squiggles which conveyed a message to the observer who then made sense of it. It is believed that the reasons for these paintings, drawings and markings were to tell stories of battles, events and describe various animals that were seen. This became a way of remembering as well as recording. Heffernan (2004:vii) states that we should not simply record life events but use writing critically to get something done in the world - then it is seen as a social action (Heffernan, 2004:5-6). Young children experiment with squiggles, forms and writing materials. According to Vygotsky (in Wells Rowe, 2008) it is only when parents, peers and teachers form social contracts with their children, that they truly understand the purpose and use of writing.

In contradiction, Gains and Graham (2011:85) suggest that lower primary school teachers do not see a purpose for creative writing with their children. They propose, however, that action research would support implementation and reflection on altered writing pedagogy. In this way teachers may be assisted to engage reflectively with education innovation. This could help teachers understand the impact on children's confidence and competence as writers and makers of meaning. To achieve this, teachers need on-going support and mentoring.

2.3.2.5 Pedagogy of writing

In the following section the pedagogy of writing by illustrating various methodologies is explained. These methodologies, as in the RNCS document, are similarly linked to, and have been improved in the new CAPS document (2011a). They describe techniques that include shared writing and group writing as well as individual process-based creative writing.

All types of writing are good preparation for the writing that learners are expected to undertake in school and in life. Writing is as valuable as reading. Use of these skills to accomplish important objectives characterises educated people and is important for success in school and beyond where communicating effectively in writing is essential (Hamston & Resnick, 2009:7). According to Parsons and Colabucci (2008:47) writers want to be known. They need to remember, seek to communicate, want to expose injustices, are inspired by a teacher or have a writer's consciousness. Writing is a form of expression. It helps children cope with life experiences, serves to document their lives, builds relationships and validates their identity (Parsons & Colabucci, 2008:48). They describe young writers as realistic, multidimensional characters with rich writing histories and practices. Writing unites them because writing influences life as much as life influences writing.

A study conducted by Wohlwend (2008:332) enlightens us on the importance play has in the development of writing, as well as the importance of creating a richly literate environment. She states that when literacy and play combine, they support and strengthen one another, proliferating ways for children to 'do school'. Combining literacy skills and play increases access to learning language for diverse learners. Evers, Lang and Smith (2009:461) suggest that it is crucial to provide varied opportunities for conversations, reading and writing. Such skills should be linked and integrated in the process of language development. Teachers should offer their learners varied opportunities to express themselves on paper (Parsons & Colabucci, 2008:44). Reading and writing, according to Clay (2001), simultaneously increase the proficiency of each other while oral language serves to build reading and writing processes. Writers are engaged in the process of making meaning through their writing, but depend upon their individual socio-economic and cognitive development (Piaget, 1972; Vygotsky, 1978 in Swart & Pettipher 2010:6).

Teaching writing in a multigrade class can be seen in the light of the following aspects:

- Teacher directed
 - Instructional writing; and
 - Writing lessons based on observations, rubrics, tests, assessments.

- Group directed
 - Writing workshops
 - Addresses specific needs of ability groups; and
 - Writing – punctuation, verbs, adjectives, sentence construction, beginning, middle and end.
- Peer directed
 - Writing partners
 - Pairing learners with strengths and challenges.
- Self directed
 - Individual writing
 - Ability to use the environment, resources and knowledge to write independently including editing; and
 - Creative writing as well as writing for other purposes.

These aspects will now be discussed in relation to international findings.

Teachers should teach and not assign writing (Scott et al., 2009:338). Children cannot be expected to write an essay without demonstration, stimulation or motivation. The aim is for learners to become self-directed and independent writers. They must be able to write in such a way that is not only comprehensible and defined but engages the reader in a desirable way. In order to achieve this, learners should be taught to re-think their writing. Davis and McGrail (2009:522) suggest that by actively comparing and adjusting their writing according to readers' reaction, learners develop meta-cognitive skills of monitoring, diagnosing, revising and editing. These skills are essential in improving the quality of writing (Dednam, 2008:122-123).

Writing workshops are described by Evers, Lang and Smith (2009:464) as a process by which learners gather ideas about proposed topics. Whole-class instruction is extended from perusing texts to demonstrating writing samples by the teacher. Shared writing is practised as a class. Specific mini-lessons are taught. Each lesson focuses on specific writing skills and strategies. During independent writing, scaffolding instructions allow learners to practise these skills and strategies. Heffernan (2004:11) argues that writing workshops need to be adjusted to exclude the development of bias or inferiority complexes. She therefore recommends that, instead of a writer sharing a whole piece of writing, at the end of each session, in a circle, each learner gets the opportunity to share one special piece from their writing.

Whitehead (2010:180) explains that, similar to writing workshops, writing conferences are significant in early development of writing. These conferences take place in groups of learners, with or without a teacher. During the process, a few rough drafts are developed before the final product is published. These conferences aid children in becoming independent writers where processes of transcription and composition are explored.

Hsu (2009:153) introduces writing partners as an adapted model of writing workshops. This is a useful practice, particularly in a multigrade class. Children are paired in order to increase opportunities for student interaction. Student conferencing, critiquing each other's writing and recommending improvements are useful examples. Vygotsky (1986:188) reiterates that 'what the child can do in cooperation today, he can do alone tomorrow'. This allows the teacher to serve the role of a facilitator and facilitate pairs of learners as opposed to being the only source of support. This in turn saves time, encourages and moves learners towards independent self-directed learning. Hsu (2009:155) comments that mixed gender pairs work adequately but also considers strengths, challenges, organizational habits, personality and learning support needs.

Guided writing lessons provide opportunities for the teacher to observe and teach more intensively. The teacher may make use of an instructional framework that includes: engagement in a linguistically and informational rich activity, discussion of strategic behaviour, immediate teacher guidance while each student writes his or her own short but complete text, and sharing of texts. Guided writing lessons therefore help students to bridge gaps between whole-class writing instruction and their own active engagement in successful, independent writing. Gibson (2008:333) states that through this process, learners write drafts in an attempt to improve their writing. They learn to plan, revise, edit and publish. Learning these skills depends on how well the learner can engage with them (Piaget, 1972). As a result, optimum progress can be accomplished at the learner's ZPD. Vygotsky (1978) refers to this area between adult or peer-supported guided practice and successful independent practice (Vygotsky, 1978) as the instructional model.

The narrative genre (story) includes setting, characters, initiating event, subsequent events, and final event, including resolution (Naughton, 2008:65). Other types of genres (Buss & Karnowski, 2002:2) include:

- Recount - share a personal experience;
- Procedural - instruct and to explain;
- Informational - share information;
- Instructional strategies for reading and responding to text such as books; and

- Persuasive - present an opinion or an argument.

Selecting genres will depend on learners' prior knowledge of the curriculum. How they are taught depends on the skills and strategies the teacher and learners have learnt and are learning. Naughton (2008:65) uses her narrative genre strategy in order to encourage children to write and help them order their thoughts.

Wilson (2008:485) describes four phases of 'write-talks' as a means of developing a love of writing inside and outside of the classroom. First, students are asked to identify and discuss adults they admire. Wilson (2008:485) emphasises the importance of teaching children to write as 'real writers' do. He insists that teachers should be real writers themselves. Real writers write for real purposes and can be anybody. Second, adults may be invited to the classroom during 'write-talks' in order to share various reasons and purposes they use to write in their place of work. Third, students are encouraged to generate a list of questions to ask the adults during or after the 'write-talk'. During this phase learners will learn that the process of writing varies depending on the circumstances but is still essential to everyone (Wilson, 2008:485-486).

2.3.2.6 Challenges of writing

The process of creating an error-free piece of writing entails the guidance of the teacher to assist learners to write a story, paragraph or newspaper article. The aim is to use this interactive session to teach grammar, spelling and punctuation by affording each child the opportunity to write a word. Discussions are valuable and influence the lesson. Interactive writing was developed by Wall (2008:149) to model the writing process and form the basis of independent writing in the Foundation Phase. Informational reading and writing is a process that involves gathering facts. They foster comprehension, engage learners in critical thinking and provide curriculum demands at many grade levels. Yet reading and writing present challenges and issues for teachers and students alike (Bass & Woo, 2008:571).

While we expect learners to write creatively, marking written pieces has proved too arduous for some teachers. During a discussion with urban school educators, Scott et al. (2009:339) quote the following:

I believe that all children have ideas, all children have words, and all children have a voice that can be developed effectively through writing. But ... often when children share their ideas in writing, the teacher reads the first draft and judges it to be inadequate-episodic, lacking in focus, elaboration, sentence fluency, and voice. Sometimes the writing does not even make sense.

It is a premature action by any teacher to dismiss any child's writing because it does not make sense at first glance. Scott et al. (2009) state that effective instruction and high-quality professional development is needed to provide effective literacy instruction to urban teachers.

Evers, Lang and Smith (2009:461) argue that the use of technology increases, motivates and empowers learners because it plays an important role in the writing process. Sylvester and Greenidge (2009) suggest the use of digital technology to aid struggling writers. This method of writing aims to motivate learners and stimulate their creativity. This may be beneficial for learners who have problems with fine-motor movement resulting in poor handwriting, spelling, an inability to use their imagination and a lack of creativity. Tsolakidis (2010) argues that although technology has its place in the world, teachers in rural multigrade settings are frequently unable to use this form of communication as it is often inaccessible to them.

There are many obstacles to writing clearly and logically. More specifically, according to Dednam (2008:130), learners struggle to write essays because of cognitive, linguistic and stylistic problems. She states that children make spelling errors because of difficulties with letter-sound relations. Children write phonetically and ignore spelling rules. Incorrect letter formation and addition of unnecessary lines and curls exacerbate writing problems. Poor word and letter spacing, uneven slant of the letter, poor line quality, uneven letter size, and incorrect placement of the letters make it hard for readers to understand what the writer is trying to communicate. The NCS (DoE, 2001c) and CAPS (DoE, 2010) documents make provision for time spent on the correct formation of letters during handwriting lessons. Table 2.2 highlights the contributing factors and challenges presented by children, which affect the writing process:

Table 2.2: Contributing factors and challenges affecting the writing process

Emotional factors	Physical factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of desire to try the writing process • emotional factors (anxiety, insecurity and lack of motivation) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • poor visual acuity • perception and motor skills • uncertainty in hand domination • physical factors • gender differences • poor nutrition • health problems and • deprivation
Social factors	Cognitive factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hostility, aggression and passive distancing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • neurological dysfunctions • perceptual problems • intellectual impairment
Language factors	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the absence of verbal language • language backlog • qualitative language which differs from the language norm • interrupted language development • communication problems (speech problems, articulation problems and pronunciation problems) • problems with sentence structures • variations in the language system 	

Adapted from Dednam (2008:130)

Learners who experience problems in spoken language and reading often experience problems in written language (Dednam, 2008:136). It is difficult to establish in which aspect of written language the problem principally lies: handwriting, spelling or essay.

2.3.2.7 Teachers' support in writing classrooms

Dednam (2008:130) states that support in written language should be given within the whole or holistic language approach where all three aspects (essay, spelling and handwriting) of written language are simultaneously involved. Emphasis should be on that aspect which the learner finds difficult. Reading and written language are two advanced forms of spoken language and therefore most learners who experience problems in spoken language also experience problems in reading and written language. These problems hinder the learners' progress at school and limit their career opportunities. Writing can support reading; reading can support writing. Ultimately reading and writing support learning (Hamston & Resnick, 2009:131-132). Dednam (2008:144) believes that motivated teachers intervene in all learning

areas instead of waiting for a specially trained teacher to support the learners in overcoming their problems in speciality-arranged situations.

According to Scott et al. (2009:341), the challenge is change. In order to accommodate learners in rural multigrade settings, change is required. In order for change to be successful, elevated demands for teachers should be met (Johnston, 2010:13) especially for rural multigrade teachers teaching writing skills. These demands mean teachers have to: obtain considerable expertise, systematic routines, high quality of instruction, knowledge of writing skills, strategies, content knowledge, assessment techniques, knowledge of remediation and the ability to know learners and their needs. Teaching skills needed for writing should not be taught in isolation. Teachers should familiarise themselves with the curriculum and identify areas where they can integrate skills. This is useful to rural multigrade teachers. The LITNUM Strategy (2006) acknowledges that teachers are under-motivated and struggle to teach in diverse conditions. Afternoon sessions were not deemed efficient in correcting fundamental teaching styles and traditional patterns. Teacher development models are therefore divided into two sections. The first addresses training and support based on a needs analysis. Second it aims at addressing the qualifications of teachers through fully-certificated training courses. These courses are delivered by specialists to address educational gaps such as teaching in multigrade situations.

2.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In Chapter 2 the following are discussed: writing needs of rural learners, principles/theoretical framework for literacy and writing pedagogy, literacy and writing instructional practices as well as evaluating writing. Included in this chapter are the characteristics of writing, writing skills and whole classroom practices that may have facilitated the writing processes in the two Foundation Phase rural multigrade schools. It is also important to bear in mind that no child develops the same writing skills or styles at the same time. Therefore, differentiated writing lessons, activities and assessments need to be organised and planned to suit the needs of all learners in multigrade rural settings. Finally this chapter concludes with a discussion on the challenges of writing and the importance of teacher support.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 3 introduces and explains the research approach. Methodology and design, data analysis, trustworthiness and ethical considerations are discussed. A chapter summary completes this chapter.

3.2 THE RESEARCH APPROACH

This chapter introduces and discusses the research approach used in this case study. The research was a qualitative study embedded in an interpretive case study. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2008:21) describe an interpretive paradigm as characterised by concern for the individual and the need to understand the subjective world of human experience. Interpretive approaches focus on action, behaviour-with-meaning, intentional behaviour and are future orientated.

3.2.1 Case Study

An example from Cohen et al. (2008:85) was used as a framework to guide this qualitative case study. Information relevant to this study has been adapted to explain the intentions of the study. The tabulation set out in Table 3.1 explains how the researcher understood the example in relation to this interpretive case study.

Table 3.1: Tabulated details of a case study

Model	Purpose	Foci	Key terms	Characteristics
Case study	<p>To portray, analyse and interpret the uniqueness of two real individuals and situations through accessible accounts of writing.</p> <p>To grasp the complexity and situatedness of writing behaviour.</p> <p>To contribute to action and intervention.</p> <p>To present and represent reality – to give a sense of ‘being there’.</p>	<p>Individuals and local situations</p> <p>Unique instances</p> <p>Two independent cases</p> <p>Bounded phenomena and systems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • individual • group • roles • organisations • community 	<p>Individuality, uniqueness</p> <p>In-depth analysis and portrayal</p> <p>Interpretive analysis</p> <p>Subjective</p> <p>Descriptive</p> <p>Analytical</p> <p>Understanding</p> <p>Specific situations</p> <p>Sincerity</p> <p>Complexity</p> <p>Particularity</p>	<p>In-depth, detailed data from wide data source</p> <p>Participant and non-participant observation</p> <p>Non-interventionist</p> <p>Empathic</p> <p>Holistic treatment of phenomena</p> <p>What can be learned from the particular case?</p>

This case study has portrayed, analysed and interpreted the uniqueness of real individuals and situations through accessible accounts. It has presented and represented reality and given a sense of ‘being there’ as rural multigrade teachers teaching writing in complex situations. This case study gives rise and contributes to action and intervention in studies to follow. The bounded system in this study consisted of two individuals who shared the same phenomena of teaching writing skills in rural multigrade settings. Cohen et al. (2008:85) substantiate such research is a unique case study. In this research an in-depth and interpretive analysis was conducted in a descriptive manner in order to understand the specific situations in each case.

From an observational point of view, much has been learnt about teaching writing in a rural multigrade scenario. An in-depth discussion about the findings is discussed in Chapter 4 and recommendations are made in Chapter 5.

3.2.2 The interpretivist case study

Coe (2012:10) states that the interpretivist case study is where a phenomenon, or our perception of a phenomenon, is used as a starting point. Furthermore, it attempts to represent phenomena as analysed data. It aims to represent, describe and understand particular views of the educational world. In this case, the aim was to understand how rural multigrade teachers taught and developed writing skills in their classes.

According to Coe (2012:10-11) there are six characteristics of research. The first characteristic is that an interpretivist case study is **critical**: where it actively seeks to question its own claims, assumptions, methods, and those of others. In this study the researcher critically sought to question the teaching of writing methods used by two rural multigrade teachers. Second, this type of research is **systematic**, which means it is a deliberate, planned, intentional activity. The researcher deliberately chose the schools and topic researched. It was also important to systematically collect and analyse the data. Third, it is **transparent**: its aims, methods, assumptions, arguments, data and claims are stated explicitly and clearly. This study clearly sets out evidence and analyses the data in Chapter 4. Transcriptions from the interviews were returned to the two teachers to check for accuracy and consistency. Fourth, case studies are **evidential** in that they appeal to evidence, not opinion, authority or common sense, as the basis of justification. The findings of this research were based on data collected from both interviews and video recordings. The analysis was made according to the data presented. Fifth, they are **theoretical**, meaning that these studies are guided by theory, but also seek to build and test theory. This study has been guided by the theory of constructivism as in Piaget, Vygotsky and Cambourne imbedded in a writing classroom. Finally they are **original** in that they aim to increase existing knowledge in some way, either through new discovery, confirmation of previous findings, new theory or enhanced understandings. This is a pioneer study which investigates how teachers teach writing in rural multigrade schools. Since there have been few studies of this nature, this study is unique.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research design and methodology are discussed as a qualitative study, within an interpretivist and epistemological frame.

In this qualitative case study, the researcher analysed her data interpretively (Henning, van Rensburg & Smit, 2007:20) and sought to comprehend how meaning in writing practices were created. A variety of data collection methods were used to highlight the deep

understandings of this case study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:26). The use of interviews, observations and document analysis (curriculum and learner books) assisted in gaining a deeper understanding of the 'real world' as experienced by the two rural multigrade teachers in this study. These data collection methods and tools were used as a means of achieving triangulation. Each method is discussed in more detail in Section 3.6.

Furthermore, the interpretive theory of knowledge in this qualitative case study was examined from an epistemological standpoint. Henning et al. (2007:15) define epistemology as the philosophy of knowledge, in this case writing knowledge. Using a specific methodology means that we come to know by inquiring in certain ways, that are related to the writing methodology used by the rural multigrade teachers. In this case study methodology is concerned with the specific ways and methods used in attempting to understand the world better and in this case, the way writing is taught.

Henning et al. (2007:15) highlight that epistemology (philosophy) and methodology (practice) are intimately related. This case study examined the philosophy of writing practices and teaching methods implemented by teachers. Epistemology, according to Curtis and Curtis (2011:11) is the theory of knowledge that informs how research is shaped in its broadest sense. They believe that there are three types of positions in epistemology, 1) positivism, 2) social realism and 3) social constructivism. Henning et al. (2007:23) and Curtis and Curtis (2011:11) both agree that the events in an epistemology case study are understood within social and economic contexts. Curtis and Curtis (2011:13) believe that individuals actively create the social world and all potential measures of that social world. In this study, the social and economic contexts had a substantial influence on the way that the two teachers taught writing to their multigrade learners. It also affected the way that these learners learnt to write.

This case study's position lies in both Curtis and Curtis's (2011:11) and Henning et al.'s (2007:23) concept of social realism (social and economic contexts) which is juxtaposed with social constructivism (the construction of knowledge with help from others). Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (discussed in Chapter 2 Sections 2.2.2 and 2.2.3) explains the effect of social realism. The environment in which a child learns to write is affected by many elements, such as poverty, illiteracy, illness, occupations of family members, etc. Bronfenbrenner's social-ecological model (in Prinsloo, 2005:50) is therefore oriented towards a social realist position. Writing is a social activity. The social constructivist position has been explored through the eyes of Vygotsky (1978; 1986) and Cambourne (1988; 2004). This research was aimed at gaining a better understanding of how writing skills were

demonstrated and taught to rural multigrade learners by their teachers (also known as 'knowleagable others').

3.4 SAMPLE

In this case study the sample consisted of two rural multigrade Foundation Phase teachers from two schools in the Western Cape. Their writing methodology and writing practices were observed, video-recorded. They were individually interviewed. Although Cambourne (1988:192) asserts that along with reading and writing, speaking is an observable component in language construction, this case study focused only on the writing practices of the two teachers. The learners per se were not part of the study but their responses and work provided further in-depth data to this qualitative study.

Purposive sampling was used to select these two teachers. Based on situational and contextual analysis (Henning et al., 2007:71), purposive sampling was selected in a non-random manner, based on member characteristics and specific criteria relevant to the research problem (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005:491). As a result of the poor literacy rates in rural multigrade schools, two Foundation Phase schools were deliberately selected from this area. The criterion for selecting these schools is explained in Chapter 1 section 1.5.

Teacher A taught an Afrikaans Grade 2/3 multigrade class, and was Afrikaans speaking. In 2010 this class was visited once and observed four times over four weeks, from mid-July to end of August and the visits were on alternate Mondays. The data collection began at 8.30am until 10am, for the four visits. This was the period that the teacher used to teach writing.

In 2010, in the second school, the teacher who was part of the sample, passed away during the early stages of the research. Therefore the principal and the WCED gave permission to the researcher to begin data collection from mid-July to end of August 2011 with another teacher. Teacher B became part of this research project in 2011. She also taught Afrikaans to Grade 2/3 multigrade class, and was Afrikaans speaking herself. One visit and four observations over four weeks were spent in this school every Tuesday from 8.30am until 10am.

Table 3.2 gives more details on Teacher A and Teacher B's educational and teaching background, including biographical information.

Table 3.2: Biographical information of Teacher A and Teacher B

	Teacher A	Teacher B
Gender	Female	Female
Race	Coloured	White
Age	50	23
Nationality	South African	South African
Home Language	Afrikaans	Afrikaans
Language of Instruction	Afrikaans	Afrikaans
Schooling experience	Grade 10	Grade 12
Qualifications	1979	2010
- Year of graduation	LPTC (Lower Primary Teacher Certificate).	BEd
- Type of qualification	Athlone Training College in Paarl	CPUT - Wellington Campus
Years of teaching mainstream experience	30 years	6 months
Years of teaching multigrade experience	6 months	6 months
Reasons for teaching this class	Management decision and she agreed to teach this class.	Her choice since she grew up on a farm and was accustomed to the way of life in a rural setting.
Class size - total:	39	45
Grade 2's	20	25
Grade 3's	19	20

3.5 LOCATION

The location was important since the research needed to be conducted at schools close to the researcher's home and place of work. Both schools were in the proximity of 25 and 30 kilometres from the researcher's home. They were both rural schools located just outside two remote rural towns. School A lay on the outskirts of a quaint rural town and School B was between 7 and 10 kilometers away from the nearest town.

An important criterion was that the schools had to be multigrade schools or have a multigrade Foundation Phase class. The Northern District Education Office was approached to help identify schools that met these requirements. Three schools were identified and met the requirements. The third school, however, did not wish to participate in this study. Therefore only two schools were used in this study. An additional criterion was identified by the WCED officials. These two schools were not obtaining good results in the systemic evaluation. Their literacy as well as numeracy levels were very low. Both schools were rural and had a multigrade class in Foundation Phase at the time of the study. The reason for this choice therefore depended heavily on convenience and low literacy levels.

3.6 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Henning et al. (2007:20) and McMillan & Schumacher (2006:26) both encourage the use of data from a variety of sources. Within the boundaries of this qualitative case study, a repertoire of observations, video recordings, in-depth individual face-to-face interviews, as well as document analysis were used as data collection methods.

In order to gain a deeper insight and perspective of the teaching styles of writing skills within two rural Foundation Phase multigrade classes, the data capturing methods, times and dates, are described below. Table 3.3 tabulates the data collection methods, and the dates of collection.

Table 3.3: Data collection methods and dates of collection from School A and B

	SCHOOL A Teacher A	SCHOOL B Teacher B
Interviews	2010: 7 August (45 minutes)	2010:
	2011:	2011: 26 August (55 minutes)
First meeting and introduction to the learners	2010: Monday: 19 July	2011: Tuesday: 19 July
Video recorded Observations	2010: Four Mondays: 26 July 8.30am – 10am 2 August 8.30am – 10am 6 September 8.30am – 10am 20 September 8.30am – 10am	2010:
	2011:	2011: Four Tuesdays: 26 July 8.30am – 10am 2 August 8.30am – 10am 16 August 8.30am – 10am 23 August 8.30am – 10am

All observations, video recordings, in-depth interviews and documents were analysed along with the expectations of the RNCS (2002). Now the data collection methods are discussed in more detail.

3.6.1 OBSERVATIONS AND VIDEO RECORDINGS

In this study the researcher video-recorded and documented true findings (Walsh, 2001:68) of the learners working and writing individually or in groups and the teachers teaching of writing skills (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012:446). Angrosino (2012:165) defines observations as the use of our five senses to orient ourselves to the social environment where systematic techniques were used for collecting and analysing information about teachers writing methodology. In this study, although the researcher's five senses were constantly stimulated, two senses, namely sight and hearing predominated. Although senses of touch and smell were stimulated, they did not carry any weight and sense of taste was not applicable in this study.

The aim of this study was to observe and investigate writing practices used by two rural multigrade teachers. Factors such as the environment, tasks, interactions and resources were considered and played a significant role in the understanding of both teachers' and learners' circumstances. Their writing practices were compared to the RNCS (2002) (the curriculum used at the time). In this way practices could be measured against the curriculum RNCS (2002). The correlation between the observations and the interviews provided an understanding of how the teachers interpreted the curriculum in use at the time.

Merriam (2009:120-121) highlights five elements to be observed. She lists them as: physical setting, participants, activities and interactions, conversations, and subtle factors including informal and unplanned activities, symbolic and connective meanings of words, non-verbal communication such as dress and physical space, unobtrusive measures such as physical clues 'what did not happen', as well as your own behaviour. In this study, physical settings did not pose a problem to Teacher A. She did not, however, utilise the space in a proactive manner in developing writing skills. It was observed that Teacher B had very little space in her classroom since it was crowded with learners, desks and the learners' workbooks. Because there were no sheltered areas, learners had their suitcases inside the classroom as well.

Teacher A and Teacher B provided very different settings and experiences. Teacher A was a disciplinarian who lacked the confidence and academic stimulation to explore different writing skills. Very little evidence of planned activities was present and a lot of unproductive time was observed as a result. Teacher B was a confident teacher who shared a wealth of knowledge and methodology on writing practices. Her thoroughness and informal assessment methods communicated a positive attitude towards writing development.

Initially, the teacher introduced the researcher to the class and informed them about the impending research. To allow learners to get used to the researcher, the first observation was not recorded (Fraenkel et al., 2012:448). From then on, the video recorder was set up in such a position that it captured the whole class as well as the teacher's teaching style (Davies, 2007:30).

An observation schedule (Henning, et al., 2007:89 & McMillan and Schumacher, 2006:207) as in Appendix 5 was designed by the researcher to look for and note specific behaviours and focus on the teacher's methodology. While the video recordings took place, the observation schedule guided the observations.

3.6.1.1 Advantages of using video recorded observations in this study

Recording behaviour of people with a video recorder permitted the researcher to repeatedly view the behaviour of individuals and the class as a group at a later, more relaxed and convenient time (Fraenkel et al., 2012:449). Constantly looking back at each recording to identify patterns in writing behaviour was useful. The camera was placed in a central position allowing a birds-eye view of the classroom, teacher and children. In this way notes could be made of what was observed in isolated situations (Creswell, 2012:217). Since the researcher was aware that much may have been missed while completing the observation list, recordings could be re-examined more reliably and consistently later (Silverman, 2011:5). These could either highlight or corroborate what had been observed with the naked eye. Referring back to the videos regularly provided an opportunity for the researcher to exclude issues of possible bias.

3.6.1.2 Disadvantages of using video recorded observations in this study

Walsh (2001:68) states that analysing data taken from observations is time consuming. The transcribing and analysis of the data took the researcher six months. The presence of the researcher possibly had a considerable impact on the behaviour of those being observed and the outcomes of a study (Fraenkel et al., 2012:448). Learners were intrigued by the video camera, which to an extent distracted them from participating in an unguarded capacity during the first two observed lessons.

3.6.2 INTERVIEWS

In this study, two in-depth interviews were conducted (1 per teacher) to gain more meaningful insights and understandings of each teacher's knowledge and experiences of

teaching writing in a rural multigrade class (Mears, 2012:171). Each interview took place after school hours in their classrooms. As there was no intervention period, the researcher did not require a second interview. Mears (2012:170) describes and defines interviewing as more than questions and answers. The researcher found that the in-depth interviews were purposeful interactions. It was possible to discern what each participant knew about teaching writing in a Foundation Phase rural multigrade class. It was also possible to discover and record what they experienced and what (and how) they thought and felt (Mears, 2012:175) about teaching writing. Henning et al., (2007:74) adds that the results of the interviews can have significance or meaning for future research about writing practices in these settings.

Research questions such as 'what' and 'how' were used in the interview schedule to clarify the context in which writing skills were taught (Mears, 2012:171). This interview schedule is contained in Appendix 6. The needs and best practices of the two rural multigrade teachers were highlighted during the interviews and observations (Henning et al., 2007:52). Their responses provide an insight into their teaching methodology, knowledge about writing and how they interpreted the writing curriculum in their class teaching.

To reduce any perceived negative consequences that may have prevented both teachers from sharing their thoughts candidly, they were assured that they would remain anonymous. Pseudonyms were used throughout the study. Both in-depth interviews were conducted in Afrikaans as it was the home and teaching language of both teachers. This was considered so they could communicate freely.

3.6.2.1 Advantages of using in-depth interviews in this study

The researcher felt that the in-depth interviews were easy to manage since attention was paid to one person at a time. More time was spent pursuing interesting areas without interruptions (Fraenkel et al., 2012:398). This form of data collection encouraged spontaneity and freedom of speech (Davies, 2007:102). The participants could express their views and thoughts honestly and were open to discuss personal issues relating to teaching writing to their learners. These one-on-one interviews provided the opportunity for rapport-building between the researcher and the teachers. Rapport was established with both participants on a personal level and bonds were developed. The interviews provided an opportunity to gather richer data (Curtis & Curtis, 2011:32). They were insightful and fortified the study (Mears, 2012:175) in areas where related issues were identified during the observations. Insights into the real teaching of writing by these teachers were revealed. Open-ended questions allowed for more individualised responses as both participants were engaged in the process as they responded to the questions. The use of interviews encouraged an open

discussion about relevant issues as well as issues (poverty and socio-economic) that may not have been considered to have an impact on this study.

3.6.2.2 Disadvantages of using in-depth interviews in this study

Both interviews demanded considerable time and energy from the researcher as well as respondents (Mears, 2012:173). They involved co-ordinating the researcher's busy schedule with the busy calendars of both teachers. Arranging a suitable time for interviews was challenging. The researcher worked full-time, had to consider the participants' time and make arrangements in order to fit in with their schedules. Total time required for data collection was longer than in any of the other three methods. The interviewing and transcribing process was time consuming. Hours and days were spent transcribing the data. There was a vast amount of data to process and the element of unpredictability absorbed much more time than intended when analysing the data from the interviews (Mears, 2012:173).

Sensitive information revealed during interviews needed to be handled with discretion. At times it was challenging to keep the participants on track with the interviews. The participants started to answer a question but often got distracted by a particular thought (Curtis & Curtis, 2011:33). Other important discussion possibilities may have been lost as the researcher's focus was on asking specific questions.

3.6.3 DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

Analysing the content in the learner's books and activities provided in-depth information about the learners' writing knowledge and how they applied the writing skills taught by their teachers. It highlighted the writing challenges experienced by the learners and gaps in teaching methodology. Information gathered from the documents aided in answering the second sub-question and became a valuable source of information (Creswell, 2012:223).

Learners' books and activities (Creswell, 2012:223) were randomly selected during observations. Learners' books and writing activities were analysed both to correlate the teaching methods of the teacher and to assess the interpretation and understanding of writing knowledge and skills obtained by learners during the writing lessons.

The RNCS document (2002) as well as other WCED documents (LITNUM Strategy, 2006; Foundations for Learning, 2008; and the Quality Framework for Assessment, 2003c) provided further insight into the developmental milestones of writing in a Foundation Phase

classroom. Assessment standards were also used as a guide in order to answer the first sub-question of how two teachers in rural multigrade classes teach writing skills to their learners. Subsequently it also determined the answers to the second sub-question (Henning et al., 2007:99) because teaching gaps were identified.

3.6.3.1 Advantages of using document analysis in this study

Learners' workbooks and activities as well as Teacher B's planning portfolio and notes provided a good source of text data for this qualitative case study (Henning et al., 2007:99 & Creswell, 2012:223). As they were written in the language and words of the participants themselves, their thoughts and ideas were communicated as an interpretation of their own experiences and understandings of writing (Creswell, 2012:223). Teacher B's comments and planning suggested that thoughtful attention was present. They were also ready for analysis without the necessary transcription that is required with observations and interviews (Creswell, 2012:223).

3.6.3.2 Disadvantages of using document analysis in this study

Learners' books and activities were difficult to peruse while they were using them: some of them were shy and covered their work. Teacher A did not volunteer her planning portfolio. Copies of the learners' work were difficult to obtain since both teachers were limited to the number of copies they could make (Henning et al., 2007:99 & Creswell, 2012:223). During, and by the end of, the observations some of the learners had incomplete pieces of writing and in most cases the learners had not begun the writing process or application of the skills taught (Creswell, 2012:223).

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

Although interview data and video recordings were collected in Afrikaans, English translations were made. Both Afrikaans and English translations were returned to the teachers to check for accuracy of translation. This was done to ensure that it was reliable and that there was a correlation between each method of data collection (Creswell, 2012:212). Eight observation scheduled checklists, however, were recorded in English and therefore no translations were necessary.

Each interview and observation was exactly transcribed in order to understand how data was going to be collated, coded and categorised (Creswell, 2012:236). Both deductive and inductive analysis were conducted (Henning et al., 2007:127) to elicit meaning from the data

in a systematic, comprehensive and rigorous manner. Cambournes' teaching principles were used to deductively analyse some of the data. While further themes emerged from both the observations and interview transcripts (inductive analysis). All of the transcripts were read and examined repeatedly to obtain an overall impression of the writing practices of the two teachers. Writing practices were coded according to discreet units of meaning which were deemed relevant to the research question. The relevancies of these units of meaning were delineated. Redundant data was eliminated. The units of meaning were coded, obtained and grouped in a meaningful way. Finally superordinate themes were developed by identifying the relationship among the codes in the cluster (Henning et al., 2007:104, Cohen et al., 2008:471, Rapley, 2011:272). The researcher was able to match the final superordinate themes found in the analysis to the work of Cambourne. Final superordinate themes and sub-themes that emerged are discussed in more depth in Chapter 4.

3.8 TRUSTWORTHINESS

Although reliability and validity are debated from a quantitative standpoint, authors such as Cohen, et al. (2008), Dane (2011) and Creswell (2012) argue that qualitative research can be reliable and validated. To ensure that reliability and trustworthiness were present in this case study, results were collated, coded, correlated and analysed thoroughly. Throughout the research process the following four essential goals had to be achieved: reliability, validity, generalisability and triangulation. In the following section an attempt is made to validate the trustworthiness of this study by describing each of the concepts mentioned above and how they are related to this study.

3.8.1 Reliability

Reliability is the ability to maintain the precision of data collected (Davies, 2007:241) and to ensure that there is a correlation between the methods and tools used to collect the data. Cohen et al. (2000:121) strongly suggest that in order to achieve reliability in qualitative research, it is essential to limit any form of bias. The questions that formed the interview schedule were cross-checked and answers provided during the interviews were compared against the video recorded observations. Similarities between the teachers, learners and their circumstances as well as inconsistencies in the teachers' pedagogical and methodological knowledge and skills were noted. Tomas and Baas (1992 in Robson, 2011:369) argue that a small sample investigation of human subjectivity based on sorting of unknown reliable items, as in this case study, resulted from qualitative methodological studies.

Qualitative studies can be criticised for their lack of objective reliability: the possibility of generalisation may occur. Van Exel and de Graaf (2005 in Robson, 2011:370) conclude that the most important characteristic of reliability for qualitative studies is its tendency to be repeated. Any well-structured qualitative sample, including a wealth of existing opinions on the topic, discloses these perceptions. The findings of a qualitative methodological study may therefore possess some degree of prejudice about a topic, while the percentage of the actual sample remains objective (Robson, 2011:377-379). In this study, although the sample consisted of only two participants, the data collected provided noteworthy and reliable information about how these two rural teachers taught writing to their learners in a multigrade setting.

3.8.2 Validity

Validity is dependent on accurate data analysis (Davies, 2007:243) in social research (Henning et al., 2007:104). In this qualitative research study, validity was achieved by meticulously recording, continuously checking, comparing and interpreting all the results and findings. Transcribed interviews were sent to both teachers to be checked and clarified. Henning et al. (2007:148) argues that in order to ensure validity the researcher needs to check, question, theorise, discuss and share what has been researched.

The way in which evidence was captured during the collection of data as well as data analysis procedures ensured the status of clear, reliable evidence (Henning et al., 2007:146). If the design of the research makes sense to the discourse community to whom the research is disseminated then validity is achieved. Furthermore, the precision of every procedure and the indication of what the findings mean to and for the research community, as well as the communities of the participants on a strategic and practical level, influence the validity of the this research project comparably (Henning et al., 2007:146). Creswell (2009:235) explains that the uses of validity strategies in qualitative research are procedures used by qualitative researchers to convey accuracy and persuade the community of this accuracy.

3.8.3 Generalisability

According to Cohen et al. (2008:135) generalisability is also known as transferability. Owing to the unique nature of this small case study, it may be duplicated and transferred to other contexts: particularly to multigrade schools and classes here as well as in different countries. The writing practices and methodologies that worked in this study may be used as a guide for future and further curriculum development with rural multigrade teachers in the Foundation Phase.

3.8.4 Triangulation

In this study, reliability and validity were verified by the qualitative method approach. The relevant literature and expert knowledge on the topics and themes that emerged assisted in achieving triangulation (Henning et al., 2007:103). Convergence and corroboration of results were sought from different data collection methods and designs from the study with the same phenomenon in mind (Biesta, 2012:147).

Triangulation is a valuable and widely-used strategy involving the use of multiple sources to enhance the rigour of the research. Denszin (in Robson, 2011:158) distinguishes the following four types of triangulation:

- Data triangulation. The use of more than one method of data collection (for example observations, interviews, documents);
- Observer triangulation, using more than one observer in the study;
- Methodological triangulation. Combining quantitative and qualitative approaches; and
- Theory triangulation. Using multiple theories or perspectives.

In this study, a combination of data and theory triangulation was attained. Data triangulation was achieved by using four video observations per class, a scheduled observation checklist, two in-depth interviews, the NCS document and other policy documents, as well as the perusal of the learners' work. This research shows that use of multiple theories such as individual and social constructivism, instructional principles as well as Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory assisted in achieving theory triangulation. Attaining triangulation helped to counteract any threats to validity. It exposed possibilities of inconsistency and differences between the various sources. Consequently, in some areas the information given at interviews or analysis of documents was contradictory and was highlighted during the observations (Bloor in Robson, 2011:158). These contradictions will be discussed in Chapter 4 and further discussions in Chapter 5.

3.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical concerns arising from this study include the written consent from the WCED for permission to conduct the study in both schools. A copy of this letter as well as a letter requesting permission was submitted to each principal and teacher. Permission was also granted by the principals and teachers of the relevant schools. Both letters mentioned are included in the appendices as Appendix 7 and 8.

Data collection occurred in a stress-free environment where the self-esteem of the teachers and learners were nurtured. In order for Teacher A and Teacher B to be more comfortable all communication and correspondence was conducted in Afrikaans. It was important to iterate that participants would remain anonymous and where required pseudonyms were used, (Creswell, 2009:89) thus maintaining confidentiality (Henning et al., 2007:73). The names of the participating schools and teachers were not disclosed in this study. Instead they are referred to as School A and School B. The teachers were assured that the information gathered was purely for research purposes and not work performance based. The teachers have been referred to as Teacher A and Teacher B. When references were made to responses by children, they have been referred to as L1, L2, L3, etc.

3.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter introduces and discusses the research approach, the methodology and design, sample, location, data collection methods, data analysis, trustworthiness and ethical considerations. In Chapter 4 the presentation, analysis and discussion of data from this investigative research will follow.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF DATA

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the findings of this study are presented and discussed. The main research question was: What writing practices were implemented in two rural Foundation Phase multigrade classes? To answer this question two sub-questions were asked. The sub-questions were 'How do two Foundation Phase teachers teach writing skills to rural multigrade learners?' and 'What challenges do these Foundation Phase teachers experience when teaching writing in rural multigrade classes?'

To answer the first sub-question of this qualitative case study, the theoretical framework and literature debated in Chapter 2 was considered. To establish the structure and interpretation of these findings, data analysed from the interviews with the teachers as well as the observations is discussed. The learners' workbooks and references to various WCED policy documents are assessed to contribute a richer quality to the findings. Direct quotations from the interviews and observations are used both as evidence and to triangulate the discussion.

4.2 RESEARCH SUB-QUESTION 1:

How do two Foundation Phase teachers teach writing skills to rural multigrade learners?

Five themes were identified from the data: the pedagogy of teaching writing, the importance of creating a writing ethos in the classroom, elements of writing, writing genres and supporting learners in the writing process.

In the next section, Cambourne's (2004:33) instructional principles have been used as a guide to analyse and discuss the pedagogy of teaching writing demonstrated by both teachers. Each teacher is discussed separately under each theme. Discussion will concentrate first on Teacher A and then Teacher B.

4.2.1 The pedagogy of teaching writing

Four constructivist teaching and learning instructional principles from Cambourne (2004:33) are used matched the analysis to deductive analyse the data and they include: explicit, systematic, mindful and contextual teaching. In terms of these principles, evidence is

discussed from teaching and learning episodes undertaken by both Teacher A and Teacher B. These four principles have their diametric opposites and include: implicit, unsystematic, mindless and decontextual teaching and learning. Cambourne (2004:33) explains that, although each of these dimensions is on a continuum, they may be at extremes of the field. Table 4.1 indicates these principles with their opposites.

Table 4.1: Cambourne’s constructivist teaching and learning instructional principles

Explicit teaching and learning	↔	Implicit teaching and learning
Systematic teaching and learning	↔	Unsystematic teaching and learning
Mindful teaching and learning	↔	Mindless teaching and learning
Contextualized teaching and learning	↔	De-contextualized teaching and learning

4.2.1.1 Explicit teaching versus implicit teaching

Teacher A

Teacher A made use of explicit teaching when she verbalised discussions, repeated and highlighted specific skills that she wanted learners to pay attention to. One example of this moment was during ‘news-telling’ where learners were afforded the opportunity to share their experiences with their peers and teacher. This ‘news’ lesson was an introductory lesson to a written lesson in which learners wrote their personal experiences (DoE, 2002:19).

The example below provides a more detailed description of how Teacher A explicitly engaged her learners to discuss personal events. In this case she guided her learners by using questions to use more words to explain their experiences, which resulted in clarity of meaning. In this way it gave the learners, who were listening, a better understanding of the message that each learner was trying to share and subsequently write. In this example, ‘Steve’ is used as a pseudonym for the actual learner (Creswell, 2009:89):

- TA: ‘Steve’ is going to tell his news. Let’s listen to what he has to tell us.
 TA: (While ‘Steve’ is getting up). You must first listen to what he is going to say.
 L2: (Learner lacks self-confidence. He stands with his hands inter-locked looking at the ground. He rubs his hands together, very anxiously. He begins to speak in a very soft, timid and unclear voice).
 TA: Can you all hear him?
 Talk louder.
 L2: (Attempts to speak, but still no one can hear him)
 TA: What did you say?
 L2: It was my birthday. My family came to visit.
 TA: Did your friends come too?
 L2: No just family.

Evidence showed that although Teacher A explicitly assisted her learners in verbalising their experiences, she did not scaffold (Vygotsky, 1978 & 1986) her learners in how to begin their writing. She neither focused their attention on the content nor any of the other writing skills as described in Chapter 2. She offered no deep engagement (Cambourne, 2004 & Woolfolk et al., 2008) to the learners during their writing period. She did not explicitly write a word wall as a reference on the board. The learners' lack of written work by the end of the session indicated that the teacher's lack of engagement and explicit writing demonstrations prevented her learners from constructing a good piece of writing.

Teacher B

Although Teacher B expected her learners to produce their own written work, she was explicitly conscious of the writing skills they needed. During the interview she explained that time was spent developing and demonstrating various writing skills. The writing skills are discussed later under elements of writing. She marked her books after school, listed errors, and pointed them out the following day, as learning moments. The first twenty minutes of the next lesson were spent explaining and demonstrating these skills. At the start of every lesson that was observed she would begin by saying: 'Yesterday when I marked your books, I noticed... so today we are quickly going to look at how we do...'

The explicit method by which Teacher B taught writing skills to her learners was well received by her learners. During observations, when learners had to write news, the teacher demonstrated punctuation and sentence construction to her learners. After the demonstration, she gave the learners the opportunity to apply, transform and reflect on these skills. The Grade 3 learners were deeply engaged (Cambourne, 2004 & Woolfolk et al., 2008) in these activities. They began writing quickly and the majority of them completed their news writing within the allotted time. Grade 2 learners, however, struggled to begin or complete their writing tasks. It was noticed that Grade 3 learners who had completed their work, approached specific Grade 2 learners to assist them. Upon further investigation, research showed that Grade 3 learners were scaffolding and mentoring Grade 2 learners and encouraging them to write their news. It was evident that there was already an element of social constructivism in place in Teacher B's class.

4.2.1.2 Systematically planned teaching versus unsystematic, unplanned, unstructured teaching

Teacher A

Teacher A had over 30 years of teaching experience in Foundation Phase but was not comfortable sharing her planning books or files. She did not volunteer to have them perused for research. She explicitly stated that every week staff and grade teachers planned together but was unwilling to share her planning.

Unproductive time was observed for 28 minutes and 38 seconds before Teacher A began engaging the learners in any activity. She wanted to hear the students' weekend news but implicitly and incidentally introduced other concepts such as 'months of the year', 'days of the week' and the 'weather'. After discussing these concepts, she asked them to tell her their news. She had not prepared them, however, to focus on a particular aspect of what happened to them over the weekend and to talk about only that issue. The duration of this lesson, in which the teacher sat on a chair and learners sat on a mat, was 1 hour 19 minutes and 21 seconds. Learners had not yet begun to engage in a writing activity. This indicated that she had not systematically planned and taught her lessons.

Teacher B

Despite Teacher B's lack of teaching experience, she willingly showed the researcher her weekly and daily planning. A line of progression of the development of the writing skills (word-building, vocabulary, sentence construction and writing for different purposes) was easily identified. An example of this was presented in the learners' books where Teacher B used a word-building activity as the basis for a sentence construction lesson. Depending on how learners reacted on that day, she continued the following day either by re-teaching word-building and vocabulary skills or extending their known knowledge. Personal extension notes to herself were evident in her planning file and this was a clear indication of her systematic planning.

During the interview, Teacher B highlighted that she used the word-building activity to assist her learners develop a wider vocabulary. By increasing their vocabulary, she assisted her learners in constructing more complex sentences. Developing writing skills, word-building, vocabulary and sentence construction (DoE, 2002) was made possible by experimenting with words they had learnt the previous day. From the learners' books it was evident that the

continuation and consolidation of relevant writing skills were considered when the learners wrote for different purposes.

4.2.1.3 Mindful teaching versus mindless teaching

Teacher A

During an observation, Teacher A deliberately and mindfully addressed specific writing elements (Dednam, 2008:127). Teacher A achieved this by using previous tests and examination papers to practise writing skills required by the WCED. She used the examples to assist learners in developing their reading comprehension skills. She also took the opportunity to assist them in writing the answers in full sentences using correct punctuation. Therefore it could be identified as an integrated writing lesson based on comprehension. As a whole class, the learners received a copy of the reading text titled 'History of Mandela' which was three paragraphs long. They all read the passage together on the mat with the teacher. The teacher probed the learners' thinking by asking them questions about the passage. She asked the learners questions that were very obvious, 'What did the mom have to do?' Some questions the learners had to infer from the passage: 'Write the sentence that tells us that it was a hot day.' Other questions required learners to think beyond the passage and be critical, 'Do you think that the mom was happy that the sun was shining? Why?'

Then learners went back to their desks to complete this written activity on the page provided. There were five different writing activities that the learners were required to complete. They were: spelling of words, dictionary skills, tenses, punctuation and sentence construction. The learners had to find the correct spelling of words in the text. There were words that needed to be arranged in alphabetical order. Sentences needed to be changed from the past tense to the present tense. There were sentences that needed to be rewritten with correct punctuation. Finally they had to write a paragraph to describe Mandela.

Although the teacher guided this process, she did not prescribe the actual written answers. Each learner was given the opportunity to read from the passage and the questions in order to write answers in full sentences, on the board. She encouraged learners who found writing challenging to participate. By using this method of teaching, she was revising and extending vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, dictionary skills and sentence construction.

From this, evidence shows that Teacher A was mindfully and explicitly attempting to improve learners' reading and writing skills.

Teacher B

Teacher B introduced her lessons by mindfully and explicitly demonstrating writing skills that she had identified as lacking in the previous day's work. She consciously provided an activity that consolidated necessary writing skills. For example, she demonstrated what a good sentence should consist of before learners wrote their news. Below is a detailed account of how Teacher B taught her learners to construct sentences using capital letters, full-stops and adjectives. She also made her learners aware of spacing between words.

- TB: We are going to write our news today. Before we write it, can anyone provide me with an example of a good sentence?
- L25: I played
- TB: What do I start my sentence with?
- L16: A capital letter.
- TB: (Writes the statement on the board) I played
What do I end my sentence with?
- L36: A full stop.
- TB: How can I improve my sentence?
What can I add to my sentence that will tell me more about what I did?
- L41: I played yesterday.
- L6: I played on Sunday.
- TB: Good, we say when I played.
What did I play with?
Who did I play with?
- L12: Yesterday I played with my brothers.
- L26: Yesterday my brothers and I played with the dog.
- TB: Good, now we have when, who and what. What comes at the end of my sentence?
- L15: A full stop.
- TB: (Writes the sentence on the board).
Well done, now when you write your news, I want you to tell me everything.
Don't forget finger spaces between your words. I want 2 paragraphs with 10 sentences altogether from the Grade 3's and 1 paragraph with 5 sentences from the Grade 2's.
- L22: Can we write more sentences if we want to?
- TB: Yes, but read what you have written first.

In this excerpt, Teacher B demonstrated critical writing skills (sentence construction, use of correct grammar and editing skills) needed for her learners to be independent and develop a culture of using correct sentence structure. These skills are explained in the RNCS (DoE, 2002) and the Foundations for Learning and Assessment Framework Policy (2008: 20-27) document (Appendix 3). They provide a detailed, clear line of progression in the development of sentence structure. Dednam (2008:127) believes essay writing is the most difficult aspect of writing. But Cambourne (2004:35) argues that when the necessary writing

behaviours are mindfully demonstrated to learners, they will have a better grounding to write essays independently.

4.2.1.4 Contextualized teaching versus de-contextualized teaching

Teacher A

Teacher A presented a lesson in which she chose a poem about a street sweeper, sweeping leaves on a windy day. Learners related to this as some of their parents were 'gardeners', 'labourers' as well as 'nannies' on nearby farms. They knew about windy days. Since her learners could easily relate to this topic, it could be deduced that this lesson was a contextually relevant lesson. They could relate to how frustrating it was to work when the wind was so strong. Two examples provided by learners were: attempting to hang up washing when the wind kept blowing it down again and again; and the frustration of trying to keep a cap on in the wind.

During another observation, Teacher A read a passage for comprehension about a washing machine. After reading the story to the class she noticed silence. She asked the learners who had a washing machine. Nobody responded. Learners were not exposed to the use of washing machines. Teacher A continued by asking if any of the learners had seen a washing machine. Again nobody responded. She tried to explain that it was a machine that had a part inside that spun around in order to wash the clothes. She also told them that she would bring a picture to show them what a washing machine looked like. When she asked the learners how their parents did washing, they answered: 'In the bath (ten responses)...in a bucket (seventeen responses)...in a basin (twelve responses)...' These were the three most common answers and the learners were content with the information of their peers as they too shared the same experiences.

The researcher observed the teacher's facial expressions during this lesson and came to the conclusion that she was surprised that the learners had no knowledge of 'washing machines' before. This indicated to the researcher that this teaching moment was not intentional yet led to the text being decontextualized.

Teacher B

Teacher B asked her learners to pretend they were 'crayons'. They had to decide what colour they wanted to be and where they wanted to go. She also asked them to describe what they would do.

The results of the learners' work indicated that they understood the use of colours. The learners' interpretation of the concepts 'what' and 'where' was short yet clear. For example, one learner wanted to be a 'red crayon' in her teacher's pencil bag because she would feel safe there (see Appendix 9). Although it was a short sentence, it indicated that the learner felt safe with her teacher. It was also clear 'what' she wanted to be and 'where' she wanted to go.

4.2.2 The importance of creating a writing ethos in a classroom

In Chapter 2, Cambourne (2004) explained the importance of creating a positive writing ethos in a classroom. In the next section, the researcher discussed how the findings related to Cambourne's concepts of: creating opportunities for intellectual unrest, learners' meta-textual awareness of effective writing behaviours and designing tasks that encourage authentic writing behaviours. These themes will now be discussed individually.

4.2.2.1 Creating opportunities for intellectual unrest

In this section, evidence is provided of how Teacher A and Teacher B made opportunities available for their learners to be in a state of 'intellectual unrest, puzzlement, cognitive conflict and disequilibrium' (Cambourne, 2004:36). He adds that it is necessary for learners to experience these states for them to learn and own the new knowledge. He suggests that constructivist classrooms provide opportunities for learners to experience the process of 'transformation, discussion/reflection, application and evaluation'. Cambourne (2004:36-37) defines these skills as:

Transformation is transforming knowledge and skills that have been modelled that have become their own... Discussion is a social tool to communicate ideas with others. Reflection is a debate within oneself... Application is the ability for learners to apply skills that have been taught by the teacher and are interdependent with discussion, reflection and transformation... Evaluation is how learners respond to their work by constantly evaluating their performance by engaging, reflecting, transforming and applying what has been learnt.

The LITNUM Strategy (DoE, 2006:7) identifies that learners have a cognitive disposition which allows them to select and transform, to construct hypotheses and make choices.

It may be understood that the teacher gives the learners a difficult task to complete. For the learners to struggle through and eventually understand the task they need to go through these four processes. They need to transform the knowledge, reflect on the processes, apply the new knowledge and finally evaluate it. These issues are difficult to separate and

there are four steps within a process. In this section, in-depth examples will be given of how these four structures (transformation discussion/reflection, application and evaluation) and processes were observed in action, or not, by both Teacher A and Teacher B. Each teacher will be discussed individually under each sub-ordinate theme.

4.2.2.1.1 Transformation

Woolfolk, et al. (2008:385) define transformation as the ability to transform the direct skills of reading and writing in everyday situations. Piaget's (1964:8) idea of transformation can be linked to writing. An example of this is the learner's ability to understand writing skills and elements and the way they work in order to construct a story, using the elements that are known to them.

Teacher A

An example of how Teacher A attempted transformation was the demonstration of words she used as a resource to tell a story. Although the words were displayed on flashcards, she discussed possible examples of sentences but did not write the words on the board. During the independent writing activity half the learners copied the sentences discussed by the teacher. This was an indication that they could neither understand this information nor transform the knowledge themselves. When Teacher A discovered that the learners were experiencing 'intellectual unrest', she realised she needed to re-teach this concept because transformation had not been successful. She needed to re-explain that she wanted learners to write their own sentences and give their own interpretation of the story. Learners found this difficult and did not demonstrate an independent understanding of what Teacher A had expected. From this observation, research showed that learners in Teacher A's class could not transform their knowledge of writing skills to writing an independent story.

Teacher B

Teacher B demonstrated many writing skills to her learners. After each demonstration, learners were expected to transform their knowledge and demonstrate their interpretation of the skills in an independent writing activity. She mindfully and intellectually challenged learners to improve their writing skills.

There were two Grade 3 girls and boys who could transform the learnt knowledge into their writing piece. For example, while observing two Grade 3 girls during their writing process (Parsons & Colabucci, 2008:44; Wall, 2008:149), it was observed how they repeatedly read

their own writing (DoE, 2002). When approaching a girl she erased her last sentence to add in an adjective. Her sentence first read, 'Ek sal in 'n kas bly (I will live in a cupboard)'. Her second sentence read, 'Ek sal in 'n groot bruin kas bly (I will live in a big brown cupboard). This indicated that the learner transformed the knowledge of the lesson. The teacher had demonstrated how to construct a good sentence. The learners applied it in their own writing. The girl on the left kept reviewing the word 'Bloomfontuin' and she subsequently referred to her dictionary for the correct spelling which she changed to 'Bloemfontein'. These learners embraced being in a state of 'intellectual unrest' because they were in a safe and socially constructive environment.

It was noticed every week that these learners were able to work with the skills demonstrated by Teacher B. They were also able to be support systems for their peers. Their ability to explain the desired writing skills to their peers was an experience rarely seen or expected. One of the Grade 2 boys brought his work to a Grade 3 boy and asked him to read it for him. He read his work and told the boy that he 'must not forget what comes at the beginning of a sentence and what comes at the end of the sentence'. At first the Grade 2 boy did not realise he was referring to 'capital letters' and 'full-stops'. Then the Grade 3 boy pointed to his work, indicating the beginning and end of a sentence without saying the words. Eventually the Grade 2 boy said, 'O ja, hoof letters, punte' (Oh yes, capital letters, full-stops). The Grade 3 boy reiterated, 'hoofletters en punte' (capital letters and full-stops). The errors were then corrected.

4.2.2.1.2 Discussion/Reflection

The RNCS (DoE, 2002:18) requires Grade 2 and 3 learners to use pre-writing strategies to initiate writing. These strategies include: sharing ideas with classmates and teacher as well as an audience (family). Furthermore, it requires Grade 2 and 3 learners to 'publish' their own writing by sharing their work with others. It is recommended that this be done by reading their written work aloud and by displaying it in the classroom. By developing these skills Cambourne (2004, 36) believes the learners are 'discussing' and 'reflecting' on their written activity.

Teacher A

Teacher A was the primary resource to her learners. She seldom set cognitively challenging tasks. Her learners did not engage in meaningful discussions and reflections with her about various writing genres. Nor was it observed that she discussed any of their writing skills. Although Teacher A marked some of the learners' written work, there were no constructive

comments encouraging the use of different writing skills. There were only comments about using correct capital letters, spelling conventions and grammar structures. Learners were not encouraged to read their written tasks back to her and therefore she could not engage in discussions and reflections on the strengths and shortcomings of their work. Many learning opportunities were missed that may have incorporated corrective or 'remedial' discussions and reflections regarding their writing skills and techniques.

Although Teacher A banned learners from speaking during the class, it was observed that three learners (a Grade 3 girl and boy and a Grade 2 boy) were secretly, independently reflecting on their work. The movement of their fingers and lips indicated that they were reading their work back to each other. Their facial gestures, while reading their work, suggested that they were reflecting on what they had written and what they should write next. These gestures indicated a sense of cognitive conflict.

Teacher B

Teacher B always encouraged her learners to read their work back to her. She would point to a word that was spelt incorrectly and wait for the learner to respond. If the learner did not respond or identify the problem area in their writing, the teacher would tell them and request a correction. In this way Teacher B provided her learners with an opportunity for 'puzzlement' which resulted in the 'reflection', 'application' and 'evaluation' of their own work.

During one lesson, it was observed that some learners approached their peers and went to sit outside. The researcher followed them to see what they were going to do. Surprisingly the learners were reading their work to each other. They left the classroom in an attempt not to disturb the other learners. When asked why they were reading their work to their peers, they responded (in chorus): 'Our teacher needs to help the other learners'. One learner further mentioned, 'We can help each other, we know how'. It was interesting to see how confidently they helped and read to each other, even though they were not always aware of the necessary corrective measures. For instance, since their focus was on improving each other's spelling and punctuation skills they overlooked grammatical errors. The confidence that these learners offered while 'discussing' and 'reflecting' on their own or their peers' writing was unexpected in relation to their circumstances. They did not mind the presence of the researcher. In fact they welcomed the opportunity for an audience. The RNCS (DoE, 2002:20) states that learners should 'share their writing with an intended audience'.

4.2.2.1.3 Application

Woolfolk (2010:33) explains that 'equilibration' is the successful 'application' of a particular scheme to an event or situation. In Piagetian terms 'application' could be associated with the term 'equilibration' (Piaget). In this study, the term 'application', has been understood to mean the end result of the learners' written work, which shows evidence of acquired understanding of written skills.

Teacher A

During the observations in Teacher A's classroom, there was not a clear indication that learners were able to apply writing skills they had previously learnt.

The following extract from the interview demonstrates Teacher A's responses about the learners' ability to apply their understanding of the skills they had learnt.

- Researcher: Do your learners have good vocabulary?
TA: My learners are only now starting to improve slightly. They have been used to writing single simple sentences. As their vocabulary improves, their sentence writing skills also improve, I encourage the Grade 3's to write more not only Grade 1 sentences.
- Researcher: So they are able to use it in the correct context?
T A: They are able to use it correctly. But you can see the two that I was referring to. You can see they struggle. The others just go on.
- Researcher: How do you teach learners phonics (spelling), word-building, phonemic awareness in your class? I think you mentioned earlier about syllables. Is this different to vocabulary or is there a different way that you teach these skills when you want them to build words or spell them?
T A: It is more or less the same as when they read the word. I tell them to break it up into syllables and group them into the word families because you cannot keep telling them that what is, 'describe', 'worried'. I tell them to break it up on their own so that they can say the words. Look in a paragraph for words that end in 'ed' and words that end the same. Find them and write them. It is more or less based on the same function.
- Researcher: So they are now able to write more complex words?
T A: (nod)

Although Teacher A indicated that the learners' writing was at an appropriate level and that they were applying the skills learnt, examples of the learners' work indicated that there were in fact not many learners who demonstrated writing skills that matched their expected grade level. Teacher A was unaware of the necessity of 'intellectual unrest' that would encourage her learners to apply their new knowledge in their writing tasks.

Teacher B

Teacher B developed a writing competition to encourage 'intellectual unrest', where learners were expected to internalise and apply the newly demonstrated skills. After each independent writing activity, she chose a writing prince (a boy) and a writing princess (a girl). She explained that she sometimes chose more than one learner. She further explained that it did not necessarily mean the perfect piece of writing. The learners' work that she chose had to indicate that they had applied the skills they had learnt in previous lessons, or in the same lesson. For example, the correct use of punctuation, spelling of phonics words, grammar, tenses, extended sentences, nouns, adjectives as well as verbs. After the previous lesson the teacher showed me a book of one of the boys that she had been working with. I could see a clear improvement in his written presentation and application of his writing skills. The teacher explained that, 'He started feeling good about himself and he just started working better.' She further indicated that he started spelling July and August correctly. She added, 'I know it doesn't look like much but it is a start.'

Teacher B also explained that she tried to give each learner a turn to be a prince or a princess. She would find a reason to choose a learner. In the interview she reiterated this by saying, '...even if they spell a word correctly that they have struggled with, it means a lot to me but it means more to them to know that they have achieved something. In this way I publicly acknowledge learners who apply their writing skills in their written tasks.'

4.2.2.1.4 Evaluation

The RNCS (2002:19) requires that both Grade 2 and 3 learners attempt the skill of editing their own writing by adding or deleting words to clarify meaning, re-ordering sentences, checking and correcting spelling and punctuation. It is also recommended that learners revise their own writing after discussions with others about their work.

Teacher A

Teacher A did not offer verbal or written feedback to her learners about their written work. It was observed that some writing activities that learners had undertaken previously had been incomplete and not marked. Learners did not willingly ask Teacher A questions about how to improve their writing skills. She had not provided a culture or classroom ethos of developing 'intellectual unrest', where learners evaluated their own work or that of others.

During the interview, Teacher A explained how she evaluated her learners' writing skills. Her response was as follows: 'Every week they do assessments that have been prescribed. The rubrics get marked and we put the marks into mark sheets.' Her answer did not give a clear indication of the skills she assessed: she focused instead on the administrative aspect of capturing the marks. She was then asked if the results were used to guide her planning: to which she answered, 'Yes'. She did not, however, elaborate as to what or how she used the results to plan her future lessons. No planning book or any rubrics of written work were provided as evidence of her planning.

Teacher B

When Teacher B handed the learners' work back to them, they often tried to read her comments. If they could not read her comments, they would ask her or a peer to read the comments for them. For example, a little boy, whom the teacher had been assisting, looked at his work and tried to read the message that his teacher had written. He was excited to have received a message. He could not wait for his teacher so he asked individual learners around him. Because he could not wait for a response, he moved on quickly to the next learner. The last Grade 3 girl he approached stopped him from moving on and read the message. 'Dankie dat jy so hard probeer het.' (Thank you for trying so hard). His response reflected pure joy, his face lit up and he smiled with pride. His confidence had been boosted. It was noticed that for the duration of the lesson, he focused on what the teacher had said and put a lot of effort into his work. Her positive written comments provided a safe environment for 'discussion' and 'reflection' about their own written work which resulted in deep engagement with their work.

Another example of this constructivist classroom ethos in which 'intellectual unrest' was encouraged was while observing yet another learner. She read her message, 'Ek hou van die woorde wat jy gebruik het. Dankie dat jy so mooi probeer om reg te spel.' (I like the words you used. Thank you for trying to spell your words correctly). Immediately she smiled and showed her friends.

The RNCS (2002:3) states that assessments should provide indications of learner achievement in the most effective, efficient manner and ensure that learners integrate as well as apply writing skills. Assessments should help students to make judgments about their own performances, set goals for progress and provoke further learning.

4.2.2.2 Learners' meta-textual awareness of effective writing behaviours

According to Cambourne (2004:37), metatextual awareness is achieved when learners are consciously aware of, and can debate, express and explain how texts consist of a variety of writing skills. The RNCS (DoE, 2002:11) concurs with Cambourne and states that:

Learners will be able to write different kinds of factual and imaginative texts for a wider range of purposes... Learners learn that writing carries meaning, and they themselves are authors of that meaning. They develop their handwriting skills to be able to record their thoughts and ideas so that they and others can read them. They learn how to use writing conventions such as spelling and punctuation to make their writing understandable to others. They learn that writing is a process that includes pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, illustrating and publishing.

Teacher A

Although Teacher A was an experienced teacher, from the data, research showed that she was not able to demonstrate or facilitate metatextual awareness to her learners. She preferred a quiet class rather than encouraged her learners to debate about their written work with each other.

Teacher B

After analysing the video recordings many times it became clear that there was only one short teaching moment in which Teacher B explicitly demonstrated metatextual awareness with a learner. A learner came to Teacher B with a book and asked 'What was wrong with my sentence?' Teacher B invited her to re-read the sentence again. When the learner read it, she looked at the teacher with a puzzled expression and the teacher responded 'Look at it again and tell me what is missing.' The learner re-read the sentence once more and said 'Oh! It's a question! I must put a question mark and not a full stop'.

This short teaching moment was an example of how one learner felt comfortable going to Teacher B to ask for assistance in improving her sentence writing. Teacher B consciously scaffolded (Vygotsky:1978,1986) and guided the learner to look critically at her own writing. She allowed her to express what was missing from her own sentence. Teacher B focused the learner's attention on all the elements of writing – enabling her to be metatextually aware.

4.2.2.3 Designing tasks that encourage authentic writing behaviours

Cambourne (2004:38) states that writing activities should mirror the kinds of writing tasks that occur outside conventional school settings. These tasks should be as authentic, and as

original, as possible in that they are similar to everyday writing behaviour. Examples of this could include: shopping lists, letters to the newspaper, diary entries etc. The LITNUM Strategy (WCED, 2006:8) emphasises that teachers should encourage knowledge construction rather than knowledge replication by using authentic tasks in a meaningful context representing real-world settings and genuine problems.

Writing activities that were observed for both Teacher A and Teacher B during the morning classes included: news writing, creative writing, writing about a picture, sentence construction, handwriting and writing answers from comprehension passages. Neither teacher, however, designed tasks that were similar to everyday writing behaviour such as those mentioned in the previous paragraph.

From the data presented above, it can be concluded that Teacher B was open to creating a positive classroom ethos in which she motivated and explicitly supported deep engagement by 'using pro-learning, pro-reading and pro-writing discourse' (Cambourne, 2004:31). Teacher B communicated to the learners that they were able to become effective writers. She provided a congenial environment by explicitly demonstrating the processes and understandings of writing. Learners could take risks as members of the whole class as well as individually. From her marking, she role-modelled the importance of reflection and provided individual feedback, as well as general class feedback. She provided opportunities so that learners could transform the learning to make it uniquely their own (Cambourne, 2004:31). The LITNUM Strategy (DoE, 2006:7) suggests that learners are naturally curious and purposive: therefore they actively engage in constructing knowledge independently and co-operatively. Consequently, the most imperative intrinsic worth that learners can offer is their ability to share.

Cambourne's constructivist principles (2004) will be incorporated in the next section when discussing how each teacher taught the elements of writing in her class.

4.2.3 Elements of writing

For the purpose of a more rigorous discussion, the findings related to elements of writing (Dednam, 2008:127 & Wall, 2008:149) are discussed under the following sub-themes: spelling, punctuation, tenses, handwriting and sentence construction. Analysis and discussion of documents (RNCS and the learners work) have been used to validate and triangulate the findings. The Foundations for Learning and Assessment Framework (DoE, 2008) as stipulated in Appendix 3 provide a detailed requirement for writing per grade per term.

Evidence showed that Teacher A verbally discussed elements of writing with her learners on a few occasions. This indicated, to the researcher, that writing elements were more implicitly taught than explicitly demonstrated.

Teacher B explicitly demonstrated elements of writing to her learners during every observation. In a particular case, Teacher B integrated the elements of writing (handwriting, spelling, punctuation and sentence construction) into one writing lesson that flowed naturally. This indicated to the researcher that the lesson was systematically planned.

4.2.3.1 Spelling

Learning outcome 4 in the RNCS document (DoE, 2002:20) as in Appendix 1 states:

Grade 2 learners should be able to build vocabulary and start to spell words so that they can be read and understood by others.

Grade 3 learners should be able to build vocabulary and spell words independently.

Teacher A

The following conversation shows how Teacher A assisted a Grade 3 learner to spell a word. In this way the learner learnt to use the classroom as a resource as well as a tool to help him in future (Piaget, 1971). Teacher A gave the learner the skills to be an independent speller, which he was capable of achieving. She was therefore developing the construction of spelling knowledge. This example shows that the learner was trying to apply his learning to his own experience with the help of his teacher.

L1: Teacher, how do you spell August?
TA: Look on the board, we used it this morning.
L1: (Looks around the classroom)
TA: Find it?
L1: Oh yes, I see it, is it this one? (Pointing to August on the board)
TA: Yes.

In the interview Teacher A confirmed that ‘... there are learners that are really struggling with spelling and writing ... they are functioning on a lower level’. This became evident when the researcher randomly paged through two Grade 2 books (one girl and one boy) and two Grade 3 books (one girl and one boy). The Grade 3 girl’s book displayed few spelling errors. It was noted that the errors made were words that were phonetically spelt. This suggested that the learner relied on her knowledge of phonetics and spelling rules to write unfamiliar words as required by the RNCS document (DoE, 2002:21). The Grade 3 boy’s book had

many spelling errors: it was noted that these errors were not phonetically based. Both Grade 2 learners' books consisted of incorrect spelling of common words (DoE, 2002:20). There was no evidence of remediation to support these learners' weak spelling.

Teacher B

The researcher observed Teacher B as she taught the 'kn' sound (in Afrikaans). She called this a word-building activity where the learners built and wrote words consisting of that particular sound.

Teacher B explicitly taught this sound to her learners by writing the sound on the board. She then used green chalk and traced the sound over and over again. Each time learners repeated the sound she began writing words on the board that contained that sound. After writing each word, the children read the word. Once she had given them three words containing the sound, she then asked the children to list more words with the same sound. Each time a word was written on the board, the teacher wrote the sound she wanted emphasised in green. During the interview she highlighted that this word-building activity was the beginning of a sentence structure lesson that usually took place the next day. On perusing the learners' books each week these extensions were evident. The learners used the words from the previous day's lesson to construct sentences.

The following example is from another observation where the 'f' and 'F' were part of an integrated handwriting lesson. The researcher later learnt that this integrated handwriting and spelling lesson was an introduction to a sentence construction activity.

- TB: Think of words that start with 'f'.
L1: fiets (bicycle)
L2: Fredrick
L3: fantasties (fantastic)
L4: Februarie (February)
TB: (Wrote all the words on the board as the learners said them.)
TB: Now think of words that end with 'f'.
L5: skrif (writing)
L6: hof (court)
L7: sif (sieve)
TB: (Wrote all the words on the board as the learners said them.)
Now write the words in your book. Look for the words that should get capital letters and write them correctly. (The teacher walked around looking at what the learners were doing while they wrote their words.)

When randomly perusing selected books from Teacher B's learners, she noted that all spelling errors were highlighted. The Grade 3 learners wrote corrections for the words they

spelt incorrectly. The Grade 2s' corrections were corrected for them. In two of the learners' books, the same spelling errors of common words were noted. The teacher later explained that those learners had difficulties with spelling but emphasised that there had been an improvement since the beginning of the year.

The observation and evidence in the books confirmed that Teacher B made an effort to teach spelling to her learners as prescribed by the RNCS (DoE, 2002) as in Appendix 1. Evidence from the observations showed that Teacher B's learners made use of dictionaries to assist them with their spelling.

4.2.3.2 Punctuation

When analysing the RNCS document, (DoE, 2002:21) the following requirements regarding punctuation were highlighted:

Grade 2 learners should be able to write using basic punctuation (capital letters and full-stops).

Grade 3 learners should be able to write using punctuation appropriately (capital letters, full-stops, question marks, commas, apostrophes and exclamation marks).

Teacher A

During a lesson observed with Teacher A, a lesson on punctuation was a result of a poem that the class read together. The following extract from the observations shows how Teacher A went about teaching punctuation orally.

TA: Let's look at this poem again.
What is at the end of line two?
L1: An exclamation mark.
TA: When do we use an exclamation mark?
WC: (There is silence).
TA: Will I use an exclamation mark when I ask a question?
L23: No.
TA: Why not?
L36: Because you use a question mark at the end of a question.
TA: So when will I use an exclamation mark?
WC: (Again there is silence).
TA: Will I use a question mark or an exclamation mark at the end of the following sentence? I said no!
L20: An exclamation mark.
TA: Yes, but why?
WC: (again there is silence).
TA: I use an exclamation mark to show expression or emotion.
Why did the poet use an exclamation mark at the end of line 2?
L18: He is cross.
TA: Is the poet cross?
L18: No, I mean the person in the poem.
TA: Good.
Let's look at line 4.

- What is at the end of line 4?
L13: A full stop because it's the end of a sentence.

This lesson was taught verbally. Teacher A did not explicitly demonstrate punctuation on the board, nor did she give the learners an authentic activity that would suggest deep engagement with these writing skills. Learners' books did not present previous opportunities to engage with these skills. The researcher concluded that in this case it may have been the first time that a lesson including question marks and exclamation marks was taught. A lack of deep engagement would negatively affect the way learners use exclamation marks and punctuation in the future. Implicit teaching was identified as the preferred method of teaching punctuation in this lesson.

Teacher B

Teacher B's lesson was part of an integrated writing lesson that entailed punctuation and sentence construction. In this study the information has been separated. Findings about sentence construction appear under the appropriate theme.

The sample lesson below shows how Teacher B assisted learners to develop their writing skills further. This was done by explicitly demonstrating use of writing conventions, namely: finger spaces, capital letters and question marks.

- TB: (Writes the following on the board)
iridembycycletoschool
Who can read this to me?
- L3: There is no response
- TB: (reads the sentence pointing to the words as she reads them)
What is wrong with this sentence?
- L8: There are no spaces between the words.
- TB: When we write a sentence there must be finger spaces between the words (demonstrating this with her finger on the board). What should my sentence start with?
- L9: Capital letter
- TB: What does it end with?
- L5: Full stop
- TB: Does a sentence always end with a full stop?
- L4: No, a question mark
- TB: When do we use a question mark?
- L4: When we ask a question.

Teacher B's enthusiastic approach to this lesson indicated that she had a real love for teaching writing skills. The teacher gave learners an opportunity to explore these writing

conventions in their books. This suggested that Teacher B provided her learners with an opportunity for deep engagement.

4.2.3.3 Tenses

Grade 2's and Grade 3's, according to the RNCS document (DoE, 2002), should be able to apply knowledge of grammar. During the observations, one of the grammatical elements observed was knowledge of tenses.

Teacher A

Teacher A did not demonstrate a writing lesson that included tenses. It may be deduced that the teacher interpreted tenses to be related to writing practices.

Teacher B

During the interview, Teacher B confirmed that after each set of marking, she summarised common mistakes made by the learners. She used that as the focus point for the next writing lesson. In this way she re-taught specific learning difficulties by addressing the whole class. One of the most common mistakes that she identified was the use of tenses. The following example shows her detailed verbal and written demonstration about the correct use of tenses.

The teacher introduces tenses (werkwoordetye) and wrote the following on the board:

- TB: We have past, present, future
I ride my bicycle.
- TB: I want you to give me the same sentence using past tense. Start with Yesterday...
- L1: Yesterday, I rode to school on my bicycle.
- TB: Good, (writes the sentence on the board)
Now, give it to me in the present tense. Start with Today...
- L2: Today I am riding my bicycle to school.
- TB: Who can give me the last one, future tense? Start with tomorrow...
- L3: Tomorrow I will ride my bicycle to school.
- TB: Which word has 'ge-' but not past tense?
- L1: I have enough (genoeg) cooldrink
- L2: number/amount (getal)

When perusing the learners' books, it confirmed that correct use of tenses was a perplexing area for the learners. Learners were given the opportunity to apply this knowledge where

they had to give one account of their news in each tense: past, present and future.

From observations and by looking through learners' books, it was evident that the majority of Grade 3 learners could apply this knowledge. Many Grade 2 learners struggled with this activity and required more of the teacher's attention.

4.2.3.4 Handwriting

The Foundations for Learning and Assessment Framework (2008b) as stipulated in Appendix 3. The RNCS (2002) stated that by the end of the third term:

Grade 2 learners should be able to:	Use handwriting tools effectively e.g. pencil, rubber, ruler; Forms upper and lower case letters correctly; and Copies written text from the board and writing strips correctly, paying attention to correct letter formation.
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Grade 3 learners should be able to:	Use handwriting tools effectively e.g. pencil, rubber, ruler; Copies text from the board, writing strips, work cards, etc. correctly, paying attention to correct letter formation; and Writes with increasing speed.
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Teacher A

During the observations, no handwriting lessons from Teacher A were seen. When the researcher posed the question: 'How do you teach handwriting to your learners?' her response was that she 'sometimes gave her children a piece of writing from a magazine and told them to rewrite (transfer) it'. She also said that she 'wrote on the board and the learners had to copy her'. Examination of learners' books showed a few writing activities that appeared to be copied from the board. Transferring of texts could not be established. The researcher concluded that Teacher A taught handwriting implicitly.

The general impression of the learners' handwriting in Teacher A's class was that the majority of learners (Grade 2 and 3) had a very neat, clear handwriting. Letters were evenly spaced and comprised of the same size. Only thirteen out of thirty-seven learners (8 Grade 2's and 5 Grade 3's) presented handwriting of an untidy and illegible nature. These learners' handwriting suggested further interventions needed to take place. Woolfolk (2010:130) highlights that learners with learning challenges often present unreadable written work.

Teacher B

Observations showed that Teacher B explicitly demonstrated handwriting to her multigrade class. The teacher and learners discussed the handwriting lesson. Learners copied the handwriting from the board while the teacher walked around checking on them. While she walked around, she reminded them to sit up straight. The teacher also instructed the Grade 2 learners to copy the handwriting in print while the Grade 3 learners were instructed to transfer the handwriting from the board to cursive. The example below shows how Teacher B taught a handwriting lesson (which included punctuation, sentence construction and extension).

TB: Let's do handwriting.
We are going to practise fF today.
Remember that the little f starts at 2 o'clock and comes down, then left to right. The capital F starts at the top and comes straight down left to right and left to right.
(Teacher B wrote the following on the board and instructed the learners to copy it. Grade 2's must copy it as it is in print but Grade 3's, I want you to change it to cursive please.)
26 July Handwriting

Ccccccccccccccccccccc

fF f F
fF fF

WC: The learners copy the date, pattern and letters.

The fact that Teacher B demonstrated and walked around indicated that she was concerned about the learners' ability to write legibly. She wanted their writing to be understood. This indicates that Teacher B explicitly taught handwriting.

4.2.3.5 Sentence construction

Constructing good, readable sentences depends on learners' development of spoken language; their ability to write thoughts logically, use correct punctuation, grammar and spelling (Dednam, 2008:128).

Teacher A

During observations with Teacher A, a lesson on sentence construction was not demonstrated. Evidence from the learners' books revealed that the Grade 2 and Grade 3

learners were writing simple sentences. Learners numbered their sentences with numerals. There was no indication that paragraphs were formed or encouraged.

Teacher B

The sentence construction lesson below is an extension from the handwriting lesson from Teacher B as described earlier. The Afrikaans dialogue has been provided, so as to not lose the context or meaning of the lesson. English translations have been included in brackets to clarify the meaning of the Afrikaans words.

- TB: Who can give us a sentence with these words?
L8: Ek ry skool toe met my fiets. (I ride to school on my bicycle)
TB: Sy ry met 'n fiets (She rides on a bicycle.)
Wie ry met 'n fiets? (Who rides a bicycle?)
L9: Sy (She)
TB: Sy wat? (She what?)
L10: Sy ry met 'n fiets (She rides a bicycle)
TB: Fredrick ry met 'n fiets (Fredrick rides a bicycle)
Waarmee moet Fredrick begin? (What must Fredrick start with?)
WC: Hoofletter (Capital letter)
TB: Hoekom? (Why?)
L11: Dit is sy naam. (It is his name.)
TB: Wat kom aan die einde van my sin? (What comes at the end of my sentence?)
L12: punt (full stop)
TB: Wat beteken dit? (What does it mean?)
WC: Stop. (Stop.)
TB: Nog 'n sin asseblief. (Another sentence please.)
L13: Daniel se van is Fredricks. (Daniel's surname is Fredricks.)
TB: Okay, sy naam is Daniel Fredricks. Wat doen hy? (Okay, his name is Daniel Fredricks. What is he doing?)
L14: Hy skop. (He kicks.)
TB: Hy skop wat? Ons is nie klaar nie. (What does he kick? We are not done yet.)
L15: Daniel Fredricks skop die bal. (Daniel Fredricks kicks the ball.)
TB: (Writes the sentence on the board).

From this evidence it may be concluded that Teacher B explicitly taught and demonstrated how her learners could construct complex sentences. In her demonstration, she included punctuation, subject, noun, and adverb. The researcher concluded that this lesson assisted her learners to extend their sentences from the use of simple sentences to using more complex sentences which are appropriate to their grade level. Evidence from the learners' books revealed that the Grade 2's had been introduced to writing paragraphs but were not yet successful at separating their stories into paragraphs. The researcher observed in a few workbooks that the Grade 3 learners had received lessons on the construction of paragraphs

in their written work. There was, however, evidence of written work (such as in Appendix 9) where the majority of learners reverted to numbering their sentences instead of using appropriate paragraphing.

4.2.4 Writing genres

The RNCS (2002) as presented in Appendix 1 suggests that learners write for different purposes. Some examples for Grade 2 writing include:

lists (to do list), expressive texts (thank-you cards and letters), simple informational texts (recipes), simple recounts of personal experiences and events (news), simple stories, poems and songs.

Some examples for Grade 3 writing include:

selected text form to suit the purpose and audience (diary entry to record feelings), a selection of short texts for different purposes (one/two paragraph stories, book reviews, recipes, letters, dialogues and instructions). In both Grades, learners should also be able to write a title that reflects the content.

Teacher A

Evidence revealed that Teacher A demonstrated the following writing genres: news and simple stories (one based on a poem and the other from a story told by the teacher). Both grades were expected to write the same texts in each case since there were no differentiated lesson structures. In the news genre that the Grade 2's and 3's wrote, there was evidence that only a few learners were able to write on the topic of their weekend news. The majority of the Grade 2's never completed these stories. Learners' work indicated that the majority of Grade 2 and 3 learners struggled to structure their stories in paragraphs such as beginning, middle and end. This suggested that Teacher A did not adequately scaffold the genre of a simple story.

Teacher B

The following genres were observed during the research in Teacher B's classroom: news and creative writing. There were examples of letter writing, lists and diary entries in their books. Teacher B demonstrated evidence of different examples of genre writing being used for different purposes (DoE, 2002). There was evidence of structural use of different genres: paragraphs were introduced but not always successfully completed. Evidence showed that Teacher B's writing practices were in line with the curriculum used at the time. It also implied that her ability to interpret the RNCS was beneficial to her learners' writing development.

4.2.5 Supporting learners in the writing process

The use of 'knowledgeable others' (Vygotsky, 1978) in scaffolding writing development (Cambourne, 2004) as well as providing an environment (Piaget, 1972) that is print rich aids in supporting learners in the writing process. Dednam (2008:127) states that each learner's writing process is different, therefore they need to be guided in a way that will advance their own processes and needs.

Teacher A

A common theme that emerged from the document analysis, interviews and observations was that Teacher A found it hard to support her learners during the writing process. She did not believe that she possessed the skills to assist her learners, but she was particularly keen to improve her knowledge and skills to support them. Teacher A provided a print-rich environment for her learners. There were few occasions where children approached her for assistance. From these examples, Teacher A could be viewed as the 'knowledgeable other'.

Teacher B

Teacher B also provided a print-rich environment. During observations, she often made reference to wall charts as a resource and tool for the learners to use. Teacher B comfortably assisted and supported her learners in their writing development. From this the researcher concluded that Teacher B had a sound knowledge of remediation, although she never mentioned that she had acquired a remedial qualification. By allowing her learners to be peer tutors, she incorporated Vygotsky's ZPD (1978) and encouraged social constructivism.

4.2.6 Summary

When analysing the data on how the two teachers created a classroom ethos supportive of writing, the most significant findings were the differences between Teacher A and Teacher B's execution of writing pedagogy and methodology.

In the following section, the most noteworthy findings from each teacher are highlighted.

Teacher A

The most prevalent finding was the writing ethos that Teacher A created. Teacher A was a strict disciplinarian and was the primary resource for her learners when writing. She created an environment in which her learners were not encouraged to construct knowledge from others (Vygotsky, 1978) and were encouraged to write independently (Piaget, 1972). There were many examples, however, of where she did not know how to engage with learners and support them with their writing. This uncertainty restricted their level of engagement (Cambourne, 2004) with their writing tasks. Although Teacher A demonstrated some lessons, which included writing skills and elements, these lessons were mostly taught implicitly (Cambourne, 2004).

Teacher B

Significantly, Teacher B taught writing within a social constructivist paradigm (Vygotsky, 1978, Cambourne, 2004). Many writing lessons were evidence of this. She created an environment in which her learners were free to assist others with the construction of their writing tasks (Vygotsky, 1978, Cambourne, 2004). She encouraged the sharing of writing experiences amongst her learners and discussions about the processes and understandings to improve their writing. During the writing process, she also engaged deeply with them and provided a classroom with many resources: it was a print-rich environment (Piaget, 1964). Her lessons consisted of integrated writing skills where she explicitly demonstrated writing skills to her learners. From the evidence provided, Teacher B worked as closely as she could with the RNCS document (DoE, 2002).

4.3 RESEARCH SUB-QUESTION 2:

What challenges do these Foundation Phase teachers experience when teaching writing in rural multigrade classes?

To answer research sub-question 2, the following sub-themes became evident in the analysis of all the data: teacher challenges, poor socio-economic backgrounds, writing support from the WCED, creating a writing ethos including discipline, parental literacy, and learner challenges.

4.3.1 Teacher challenges

After inductively analysing all the data, five superordinate themes within the theme of 'teacher challenges' were identified. From interviews and video recordings, these themes have been prioritised as obstacles to both Teacher A and Teacher B. They were: reading problems, differentiated teaching and learning, lack of resources, the language of learning and teaching (LoLT), and finally transport. Each theme is now discussed in more detail, with evidence.

4.3.1.1 Reading problems

Reading problems were identified as stumbling-blocks for both Teacher A and Teacher B. Although the focus of this research is on the writing practices of the two teachers, it was interesting to identify that the most significant challenge that emerged from this data was the fact that learners struggled to read.

In separate interviews, Teacher A and Teacher B responded to the same question posed by the researcher:

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| Researcher: | What do you think, besides the parental illiteracy rate, is one of the factors for your learners not progressing in their writing skills as you would have hoped for? |
| TA: | They can't read. |
| TB: | I can see it in their reading. They struggle to read simple stories. They don't understand what they read. |

These responses highlight the reciprocal relation between reading and writing (Hamston & Resnick, 2009:131). It was interesting to note that in both cases, teachers highlighted the lack of reading skills as the reason for poor writing skills. Pedagogy and methodology of writing did not appear to be a concern from them.

4.3.1.2 Differentiated teaching

The NCS document (DoE, 2001c) and Foundations for Learning Framework (DoE, 2008b) state that differentiated teaching is essential for the development of skills at the appropriate level for learners. Differentiated learning addresses gaps in writing development. Group teaching can also be used to bridge these gaps. Group teaching during writing is essential for the development of social construction (LITNUM, 2006). While Teacher A had a spacious classroom, she did not use differentiated or group teaching. She did not teach writing to the Grade 2 and 3 groups separately. She often commented on her need to know more about

how to teach writing in mixed ability groups. She spoke of differentiated teaching as in this statement:

- TA: It would be nice if someone could come and demonstrate how to teach our children to write. I want to know different ways of teaching my children to write.
- Researcher: Do you mean something other than the curriculum?
- TA: They can come and demonstrate the curriculum as well.

Her comments were of interest because she acknowledged that she lacked differentiated writing skills but could not identify exactly what it was that she wanted the WCED officials to demonstrate. In her response, she reverted to wanting the RNCS to be demonstrated as a unit. This indicated that she did not interpret or internalise the RNCS. Tomlinson (2005:14) clarified that differentiated instruction is not easy in a multigrade class.

In contrast, Teacher B had a wealth of writing knowledge and demonstrated many ideas and ways to teach her learners different writing skills using a variety of pedagogical and methodological strategies. She did not always demonstrate differentiated teaching activities. In spite of her wide writing knowledge, she was faced with limited classroom space to perform certain activities such as differentiated teaching. Writing issues that needed to be addressed were approached as a whole class activity rather than individual or group lessons. This could be viewed as time-wasting although repeated information did benefit learners. For example, while she was giving her lesson on tenses to the Grade 2's, some of the Grade 3 girls were interested in the lesson. The researcher noticed one particular Grade 3 girl who seemed to benefit from this exercise. The nodding of her head and the silent repetition of what the teacher had said indicated that this was a learning experience for her. Another girl took out a scrunched-up piece of paper from her chair bag and started writing. When the researcher investigated this action, she discovered that the girl was writing down the tenses from the board. When her teacher walked around the classroom to check the Grade 3's work, the learner scrunched the piece of paper into her pocket and pretended to be focused on her work. The playground was small and close to the roadside and other classes. Therefore it was not always possible to send learners out for group work without supervision because there were too many learners to work on their own.

Writing workshops using differentiated teaching techniques were not employed by either Teacher A or B. Other differentiated teaching techniques and writing methods, as discussed in Section 2.3.4.5, concepts such as 'writing workshops', and 'narrative genre story', were not observed either. Both teachers demonstrated limited knowledge of using a variety of differentiated teaching tools during writing. This formed a gap in their teaching practices. Within differentiated teaching, teachers should be teaching to the different levels of the

learners. In this study both teachers experienced difficulties in finding the appropriate level of teaching to match the required policies from the WCED. Since both teachers had Grade 2 and 3 learners in one class, they should have taught writing skills separately to each grade in order to cover the expectations of the curriculum. From the video recordings it was evident that Teacher A always taught the Grade 2 and 3 classes using the same pedagogical and methodological strategies. She did not explicitly state how many sentences or paragraphs needed to be written by each grade as is specified in the RNCS document (DoE, 2002).

When observing learners' workbooks there was a clear indication that learners were not writing according to the expected grade levels. For example, in both teachers' classes, Grade 2 learners had often not produced any work in the time that research was conducted. It was noted that those children continued to have many incomplete writing activities in their workbooks. Many of the Grade 3 learners had very simplistic sentences (with many grammatical and spelling errors) and no evidence of paragraphs as stipulated in the RNCS document (Appendix 1).

From the video recordings, however, it was observed that Teacher B had two instances where she separated expectations from Grade 2 and Grade 3 learners. In the first example, during news writing, Teacher B reminded the Grade 2 learners that she wanted them to write five sentences while Grade 3 learners had to write a short paragraph. The second incident was during the creative writing class. The Grade 2 learners were expected to write ten sentences while Grade 3 learners were to write three paragraphs (a beginning, middle and an end). Teacher B understood that the outcomes for Grade 2 and 3 needed to be separate according to the curriculum expectations of writing development (RNCS, 2002).

Time constraints also hampered differential teaching because both teachers had to teach two curricula in the time that was given to teach only one grade. During an interview, Teacher B explained that her learners were not on the same level as the average Grade 2 and 3 learners. She said '...they lag behind in important skills development...', hence her reasons for mindfully preparing and designing tasks and assessments to suit the needs of her learners. She later said, '...I do it so that these learners can also accomplish a sense of achievement and develop a more positive self-esteem...'

Further on in the same interview she elaborated on an uncomfortable experience that she had had with the WCED officials when they visited her. Although she felt that she had consciously planned her differentiated assessment tasks to address the needs of her learners, the WCED officials wanted her to meet the prescribed benchmarks (Appendices 3 and 4) published by NDoE and stated that she was not on grade level. The prescribed

benchmarks were much more advanced than her learners. This presented a challenge for her to use group work to address the needs of all her learners. Apart from the 47 children she had in her class, most of them were struggling academically (reading, writing and numeracy). Evidence showed that Teacher B tried to accommodate these learners as best she could under the circumstances.

Teacher B interpreted that the Qualifications and Assessment Policy Framework (DoE, 2003d:23) stated that assessments should be 'learner-paced and fair'. Hence she prioritised time spent on developing learner-paced graded activities. She was penalised, however, for using her own discretion. She was blamed for the learners being at too low a level for the Education Officials from the WCED. No further support was provided to remedy this challenge.

4.3.1.3 Resources

Another challenge facing both schools was the lack of resources, such as books (reading and writing books), stationery, games and sports equipment. Teacher A wanted someone to demonstrate how to make different work cards but mentioned the lack of time to make these resources. This is evident in the following conversation from an interview:

Researcher: Do you make use of work cards when you teach?
TA: No because I don't have any, I want to make some but I want to see some examples. But then I must get someone to make them for me because I don't get time to make any extra resources.

Teacher B's challenge with resources revolved around the availability of stationery to her learners. During the videoing she expressed frustration about the constant loss of stationery and lack of textbooks:

TB: ... everyday is a battle; you have to spend the first half an hour of your morning arranging stationery, because the children lose it. Yesterday they had a pencil but today they can't find it.
TB: The department sent us workbooks but I can't use them because there is not enough for the whole class.

This was observed in research sessions. It was evident that missing pencils upset some of the learners who really looked after their stationery. They would put them in their chair bags the day before and come to school the next day only to find that someone else had removed them. In some cases this was true but the video recordings revealed that learners in general had a lack of respect for their belongings and those of their peers. They would simply take things without asking and leave a variety of stationery on the floor or in their chair bags. This behaviour corroborates the comment offered by Teacher B earlier. It suggests that these

learners had to fight for survival and fight to find a voice. Woolfolk et al., (2008:103) explains this from Bronfenbrenner's view. When the home lives of children are chaotic and unpredictable, a firm caring structure is needed in school.

In both schools, however, stationery (pencils, colouring pencils, crayons, erasers and sharpeners) was in short supply and constantly getting lost. Both teachers used their own sharpeners to sharpen the learners' pencils because there were no sharpeners. This meant that learners could not sit down and begin their writing tasks. It was observed that there was a total loss of 41 minutes and 23 seconds for writing activities over the four visits in Teacher A's class. This time was spent sharpening and finding pencils for learners who did not have any. In Teacher B's class, a total of 32 minutes and 14 seconds were used to sharpen and find pencils before writing could begin. According to Woolfolk, et al. (2008:528) very little teaching may be observed during the day because of the number of activities that occur.

At both schools learners were denied the opportunity of playing educational games. Teacher B explained that she had started to play games but the learners got out of control and she had to stop them. Many of the resources were lost and it appeared that learners did not know how to look after these games. There were no games available in Teacher A's classroom. Evidence showed that learners had poor organisational skills.

Observations were conducted during winter. Children were often observed coming to school without warm clothing. Both teachers commented about the learners' lack of warm clothing. Teacher A would keep these learners inside on cold days rather than let them out in the cold without suitable winter clothing. Teacher B said, 'I bring warm clothes from home so that I can give these children who are cold something warm to wear. It's one thing to be hungry but it's another ball game being hungry and cold at the same time.' Bronfenbrenner (in Prinsloo, 2005:50) highlights that these socio-economic aspects which are central to the way children learn. Such aspects influence these learners directly and indirectly and have a negative effect on their learning.

4.3.1.4 The language of learning and teaching (LoLT)

The language of learning and teaching (LoLT) was difficult for some learners (NEEDU, 2013:72) as not all learners had Afrikaans as their Home Language. Teacher A mentioned that there were three isiXhosa-speaking learners in her class. These learners were struggling to cope because they did not speak Afrikaans. She mentioned that the Grade 1 teacher who was isiXhosa speaking often had to translate instructions which affected the teaching and learning time of both classes. On one occasion the isiXhosa speaking teacher came into the

classroom and gave the isiXhosa learners an instruction, pointed to the teacher and the books and then left. This indicates that Teacher A was attempting to remedy these language differences. This was a temporary measure but retarded the learners' natural impetus of learning to write with meaning and understanding within the correct context.

Teacher B had two isiXhosa-speaking learners in her class. Since she did not have a translator, she used hand and facial gestures to explain instructions. The LITNUM Strategy (DoE, 2006:20) states that where possible a learner's mother tongue (referred to as LoLT) should 'actively' be supported in the classroom. Evidence from the video recordings showed that in the cases of the isiXhosa speaking learners, teachers did not have the language skills to support their LoLT actively.

4.3.1.5 Transport

The concept of 'transport' does not directly refer to the research title. But lack of transport to school did, however, restrict learners' attendance and consequently their writing abilities. Both teachers experienced learners' absenteeism and late-coming. Their learners were brought to school by bus every day from neighbouring farms and communities. This removed any chance of extra lessons to remediate writing challenges. Both teachers reiterated that 'only a handful of learners were from the local community'. This indicated that transport was difficult for rural learners (Prinsloo, 2005:29).

Evidence showed that there were three learners who often arrived late at School A, so they missed important writing lessons. These learners missed input and writing demonstrations which hampered their writing development. Their work was never complete and had many punctuation, grammar, spelling and spatial errors that needed to be corrected. Again this was problematic because the teacher did not have the time to remediate learners during class. These learners could not stay after school for extra lessons.

Buses and taxi services needed to be paid for. School A had a bus service where at least four buses transported the learners to and from their homes. School B did not have this option available. They relied on the voluntary services of two of the farmers who transported the children in a caravel and a canopied van. Both transporters had to make at least six trips to ensure that everyone arrived at school and returned home safely.

4.3.2 Poor socio-economic backgrounds

During an interview, Teacher A stated that, although the school had learners from different cultures and from poor socio-economic backgrounds, she felt that all the learners got on well with each other. Teacher A said that: 'most of the learners probably only came to school because of the food but there's no progress in their school work. They cannot progress if they are hungry'. Similarly Teacher B said 'this is probably the only meal most of them get'.

Both School A and B are recognised as Quintile 1 schools. Gower (2008:15) states that schools are arranged in terms of 'quintiles'. The poorest 20% of schools are in Quintile 1, 2 and 3, which are located in rural areas and townships. Because they remain under-resourced, they perform more poorly than the wealthier schools in Quintiles 4 and 5. Since Schools A and B were Quintile 1 schools, they were supplied with a feeding programme which gave learners one meal a day. Lack of nutrition suggests a reason for the poor performance of the learners at Schools A and B.

School B recognised the demand and necessity for providing extra nutrition to the learners. The school tried to supply each learner with a cooked meal. But Teacher B did not feel that it could sustain learners. Therefore the school ensured that learners got fruit at one break and a meal during the other. According to Teacher B's interview, '... every second day the learners will get fruit or a sandwich at first break and a cooked meal at second break. Every other day it is just the other way around.'

At both schools learners were observed queuing at break to wait for their meal. Teachers reminded the researcher that this was probably the only meal the learners would have for the day. Teacher B further disclosed that, 'I cannot go on holiday with peace of mind knowing that these learners may not get food while they are at home.' She went on to mention that: '... it nearly broke my heart when we came back to school at the beginning of the term and I overheard one of the boys saying, "I'm so glad to be back at school, I can't remember when I ate last! ..."'

This lack of nutrition became evident when, early in the morning, their teachers asked them to focus on a writing task. Learners from both schools were unable to concentrate early in the morning. In both schools it was observed that learners began asking their teachers; 'When is it going to be break? I'm hungry'. Video recordings revealed that some learners displayed lack of concentration and an inability to focus on the writing task at hand.

Learners' poor socio-economic background challenged these teachers in another sense. Both teachers were limited as to which reading and writing texts they could introduce to their learners. Learners' limited knowledge of the world restricted the authentic content that the teachers could use. It was interesting, however, to observe that some of these learners were 'street smart' and would have conversations about cigarettes, hairstyles such as Mohawks and shaved heads. But they struggled to transform, apply and evaluate writing skills during the writing lessons. Lack of language and writing stimulation from home negatively affected learners' ability to transform, apply and evaluate writing skills.

4.3.3 Writing support from the WCED

The LITNUM Strategy (WCED, 2006:29) is intended to improve the proficiency of teachers, to guarantee effective teaching and learning of subjects, to develop a high level of literacy and numeracy skills. In addition, it states that: 'advocacy, family and community literacy is a priority. WCED officials should train volunteers, community development workers and NGO's in order to address the learning turnaround in schools'. This strategy was designed to focus on the way teaching and learning occur in the classroom. The outcome of this document was to ensure that teachers received the necessary support to deal with critical aspects of classroom teaching (WCED, 2006:29). When reflecting on the results of this research project it was significant to find that the following statements from the LITNUM Strategy resonated with teachers from both schools. Table 4.2 indicates problems in their writing classrooms.

Table 4.2 Statements from the LITNUM Strategy that were identified as challenges to both teachers

Statements for improvement from the LITNUM Strategy (WCED, 2006:29)	Challenges found in Teacher A's class	Challenges found in Teacher B's class
• appropriate time spent on teaching Languages and Mathematics at the appropriate level	√	√
• learners spend appropriate time on learning Languages and Mathematics	√	√
• lessons are well-planned	√	Not a challenge
• appropriate resources available and used	√	√
• learners are correctly and appropriately assessed	√	√
• full use is made of the knowledge gained from assessing the learners	√	Not a challenge

Statements for improvement from the LITNUM Strategy (WCED, 2006:29)	Challenges found in Teacher A's class	Challenges found in Teacher B's class
• teachers focus on teaching and supporting individual learners, not just the learning area and whole-class teaching	√	Not a challenge
• classroom practice promotes good discipline	Not a challenge	√
• there is evidence of learner progression	√	
• the language needs of the learners are addressed	√	√
• barriers to learning experienced by learners are addressed	√	√
• school management and school support teams, EMDC officials and parents/guardians receive regular and appropriate reports	Not observed	Not observed
• a love for Language and Mathematics, literacy and numeracy, is evident in teachers which engenders a spirit of excitement to learn in their learners	√	Not a challenge
• teachers know and understand how learners learn	√	Not a challenge
• all learning outcomes are addressed and learners attain the outcomes at the appropriate level	√	√
• all aspects of the learning areas are comprehensively taught	√	Not a challenge
• the multi-lingual nature of classes is addressed	√	√
• effective teaching methodology is practiced, including large class teaching methodology, where appropriate.	√	Teacher B struggled with multigrade and many learners in the class

As indicated above, Teacher A found it a challenge to teach writing methodology to a rural multigrade class. She wanted more assistance from the WCED and had this to say:

They must come and show us, but that has not happened. The year is over, how do you begin next year? Are we going to have to teach multigrade again? Nobody has ever shown me how. I just carry on with what people say so when they leave they take the results and that's it....Yes, they say it is easy; they

come in here and tell you to do this and this. They tell you to give the learner who is restless a book. But how can you only give one learner a book, the others are also going to say 'but I also want to read a book because that one is drawing...'

During the interview, Teacher A expressed her frustration and went on to say that: 'The WCED makes demands but offers very little support in order to meet these requirements.' It appears that the WCED are not explaining to teachers how to manage the planning and teaching of multigrade classes.

The NEEDU Report (2013:64) revealed the following comment from a Grade 2 monograde teacher teaching in Gauteng:

I need more: I need someone to stand in front of the class and show me how to do these things. We have so many different things, we can't keep up. I need to be shown practically, not just explained theoretically.

From the NEEDU Report and the current research project, it can be understood that the lack of support from the NDoE is not only a challenge in the Western Cape but nationally.

Teacher B was less concerned about the WCED providing support for her. She was more concerned about her own teaching methodologies and how she could improve her learners' writing processes and strategies. During the interview Teacher B stated:

I am constantly looking for ways to assist these learners understand and remember what I have taught them. They are capable of so much more and I will continue to try every method I know to help them.

These critical aspects from the LITNUM Strategy (2006) have been listed. Both teachers' responses during their interviews and observing their teaching methods have been observed. It is clear that very little of the LITNUM Strategy has been interpreted by the teachers because there has been virtually no explicit support and assistance from WCED officials. It appears that demands are constantly made on these teachers but much-needed support in rural multigrade education is lacking.

4.3.4 Creating a writing ethos including discipline

As Cambourne (2004:28) explains, learners are able to learn to write if they are supported in a systematic and well-planned writing environment. Writing should be explicitly demonstrated by someone they trust and respect. He also adds that children learn effective writing skills in an environment that is 'stress free'. This is not easily achieved, particularly in the case of these two teachers. They were presented with many challenges which made it difficult to

achieve a stress-free environment that encouraged learner engagement. Woolfolk, et al. (2008:482) supports this notion. He states that disengagement has serious consequences, especially for learners at risk from poverty.

Teacher A was a disciplinarian and maintained a strict ethos in her class. This suggests that it was a way for her to enforce engagement. She explained:

If you don't keep your hand on them, they will just go on and do what they want. I am very strict with them.

Her style of discipline did not create an ethos in the classroom in which her learners could relax, engage with each others or improve their writing skills. This style of discipline hampered the possibility of socially constructing knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978 & Cambourne, 2004). Evidence revealed that Teacher A encouraged learners to be more independent in constructing their knowledge since she struggled to support them in their writing development. On the occasions when the teacher had to reprimand the learners, it was because the learners were not engaged in any activities. This indicated that the teacher was not well prepared for her learners. Lack of planning resulted in ill-discipline (Prinsloo, 2008:450) and a poor ethos for writing (Cambourne, 2004:30).

While Teacher B created a positive writing ethos in her class, she found it hard to discipline learners. This was evident in all observed lessons. Learners did not stop talking and interrupting the teacher while she was teaching. It was difficult for Teacher B to send writing activities home because they would neither be completed nor returned to school. During the interview she said:

... many learners have little experience with discipline at home as they often have to fight for the attention of their parents over that of their siblings.

Although the principal was not a participant in this study, he visited this class before the second observation and reprimanded the learners for their behaviour. He requested them to:

Please have manners and respect, show me that I can be proud of you.

It was interesting to note that the writing skills were much better that day. Learners took their teacher more seriously and focused on their writing task. There were fewer interruptions by the learners.

Learners' awareness of being a 'knowledgeable other' appeared to contribute to their behaviour. Learners could not gauge when it was appropriate to talk and when it wasn't.

They were so used to talking to each other and helping each other that they could not separate this when the teacher was talking. During video observations learners demonstrated short attention spans, which resulted in poor writing behaviour. Large class sizes had a negative impact on the way writing was taught and the ethos it created. Home environment, influence of poverty and unrealistically high level of the curriculum, were also factors in the behaviour of these learners (Prinsloo, 2005:450).

4.3.5 Parental illiteracy

Since most of the parents were farm workers, illiteracy was a common barrier. Teacher A mentioned that most of the parents were illiterate and therefore incapable of assisting their learners with reading and writing tasks. She stated that:

Most of the time, older siblings have to accompany parents to parent meetings to help them understand what the teacher is explaining.

Later in the interview, however, she mentioned:

It is not always possible for the siblings to assist so the parents don't come to school ... There is currently no local support offered to assist the parents in developing their literacy level.

Illiteracy is another aspect of Bronfenbrenner's (Swart & Pettipher, 2005:14) ecological cycle, which affects language stimulation of learners and development of writing. Teacher A hoped that one day something would be done to assist parents so the learners could develop their literacy skills to a higher level of competency. She said:

I am not giving up hope that one day somebody will come and help these parents and things will change ... At the moment I cannot send any writing tasks home because they will disappear or get too dirty and nobody will help the learners with their tasks.

It appeared as though both teachers were unaware of the READ programme as explained in Section 2.3.3.4. Teacher B's responses to this problem were similar. She, however, mentioned that she had the opportunity to advise parents on how to support and stimulate their learners at home. She also mentioned:

... experienced parents who wanted to know more...

The school had a learning support teacher, but Teacher B found the process of taking learners out of the class distracting and not as enriching as it could have been. There was

too little time and a large number of learners who needed further learning support. She mentioned:

Because there are so many learners who need support, the time is limited as the remedial teacher is only one person who has to help so many learners.

Parental illiteracy had a deleterious effect on how the learners learnt to write. Despite teachers' efforts, learners showed very little interest in writing and appeared to be unengaged (Woolfolk et al., 2008:549). Their lack of interest in writing could also stem from their inability to understand how writing works since they were not encouraged to write at home (Woolfolk, et al., 2008:94).

4.3.6 Learners' challenges

After inductively analysing interviews, observations and learners' workbooks, three superordinate themes became evident. Each theme is discussed using examples taken from Teacher A and then Teacher B. These themes are: learners who experienced writing challenges, ILST (Individual Learners Support Team), and peer support.

4.3.6.1 Learners who experienced writing challenges

Because writing is such a complex skill, scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978) and mentoring needed to take place in order for learners to develop their writing skills confidently and in such a way that they are understood (DoE, 2002). Further investigation was conducted to discover how learners with writing difficulties were identified and supported. During the interview, when the issue of learners who experience writing challenges (Dednam, 2008:136-138) was discussed, Teacher A responded by saying that:

I don't have any idea of how to help those learners. (Nervous laugh). That's why I feel I need more support. Because I don't know how to help them I just go on and if they still don't know I just carry on. I try and take them and we do the same things again.

Her response was an honest one when her lessons were observed. It was clear that she had neither the knowledge nor skills to assist these learners in their writing tasks. Her learners' books revealed the same writing errors (spelling and grammar) repeatedly with no remedial intervention and no evidence of progression.

Lack of writing skills demonstrated in the learners' books from Teacher A indicated four common issues:

- They did not have the vocabulary and comprehension to transform their thoughts into written work;
- Their handwriting skills were not well developed;
- Few opportunities for writing were granted; and
- The teacher's lack of writing pedagogy hampered their writing progress.

Teacher A did not demonstrate a spelling lesson. The researcher felt that this was a gap in her teaching of writing to her learners. During the interview, Teacher A explicitly stated that each learner had a dictionary. No dictionaries, however, were seen on the desks or on the shelves. While observing a writing lesson it was noticed that a learner had spelt a word incorrectly. When asked if she had a dictionary, she pulled out an A5 blank book with pictures and writing activities. The question was asked again: 'Do you have a dictionary, a book with words in it?' She replied: 'No teacher!' This observation highlighted that Teacher A assumed that her learners accessed their dictionaries when needing to spell words correctly.

Teacher B demonstrated a sound knowledge of learning support techniques in order to assist learners who struggled to write independently. Cambourne (2004:28) suggests that learners engage with the task more readily if it is presented by someone they trust and if they feel they are capable of achieving the outcome. Peer support was often used. Learners helped each other when the teacher was busy. This was the case in Teacher B's classroom.

4.3.6.2 Individual Learner Support Team

Teacher A did not appear to understand what was meant by the term ILST (Individual Learning Support Team). She mentioned, however, that a volunteer (female pensioner) came to assist some of the learners. It was made clear that she was not from the Department of Education.

- Researcher: So from the school's side there isn't a system to know who is struggling. So there's not actually a programme for that learner who is struggling?
- TA: No, it's just that person who comes in.

Although School A had a psychologist, he/she had not visited the school in a long time. Teacher A reiterated that it was only the volunteer that gave some sort of support to those learners who needed it. When this volunteer visited the school, she read with some of the learners in Teacher A's class. During the research period spent with Teacher A there was no evidence of this person.

School B did not have planned meetings to identify learners who needed remedial support: this was left to the discretion of the teacher. The school had a learning support teacher from the WCED. The learning support teacher took learners out of the class for group sessions. Teacher B's methodological and pedagogical knowledge gave her the confidence to assist some of her own learners. She had identified learners, whom she had not yet been able to assist and had begun working on developing an Individual Education Programme (IEP) for these learners.

4.3.6.3 Peer Support

Peer support was not evident in Teacher A's classroom. She explained that learners helped each other. But this was not observed. Teacher A explained that she noticed how a specific boy (pseudonym used) was assisted by his peers:

They are learning from each other. They are aware of those learners who are struggling like 'Steve' so they will erase his mistakes and tell him what to do. Although they don't know that 'Steve' is very weak, they know that he is not at the same level.

Her response indicated a discrepancy in understanding socially constructed knowledge. She stated in the above phrase that her learners were aware of other struggling learners. In the second half of the phrase, however, she stated that learners 'don't know how weak he is'. She also mentioned that she had not noticed any of the learners making fun of those who needed help. She said:

The children are good with each other, they don't make fun of the ones that can't do it but they help them.

On two occasions, it was observed that some boys commented on this particular boy's lack of writing skills. The teacher was not aware of this. The learners who were struggling continued to struggle. They neither possessed the skills to ask for assistance nor did they possess the skills to help themselves.

4.3.7 Summary

The most significant impediment that indirectly and directly confronted the teaching and learning of writing was that of poverty. Both schools served learners from poor socio-economic backgrounds (Bronfenbrenner in Swart & Pettipher, 2005:10; Hook, 2009:501). Lack of nutrition at school and stimulation at home directly impacted on how learners performed academically. At both schools, learners' poor reading skills were identified by this

study as a grave stumbling-block in their writing development (Dednam, 2008:122). This added to the poor writing levels of the learners and was possibly the most significant reason for these learners not achieving writing levels as suggested by the RNCS document (DoE, 2002).

From the data collected, many obstacles in the teaching of writing could be identified. These include: differentiated teaching (Tomlinson, 2005), addressing all the writing requirements from the RNCS document (DoE, 2002), poverty and lack of resources (Prinsloo, 2005). In this study, these challenges hampered the way the learners attempted to write. In both cases, Teacher A and B had learners who experienced writing challenges and needed extra support in their writing activities.

While conducting this research the curriculum was in the process of changing from the familiar RNCS to the new CAPS. This change produced a great deal of anxiety for these teachers. The curriculum in use was that of a monograde school curriculum. The rigid curriculum negatively affected teachers' ability to implement requirements. A great deal of negative energy was expended on the fact that the curriculum was undergoing yet another change (Hoadly & Jansen, 2010:142). Both teachers mentioned that they felt that the WCED was not accommodating them because they expected the same results from their classes as they would from monograde classes. Teacher A expressed her need for more support from the WCED (NEEDU, 2013:64) while Teacher B concerned herself with developing ways in which she could support her own learners' writing development.

Ultimately, the strict approach of Teacher A and the lack of discipline by Teacher B prevented the development and creation of a writing ethos free from stress.

4.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Significant findings have been made based upon qualitative data drawn from observations, video recordings, interviews and documents. Conclusions have been drawn in an attempt to answer the sub-questions set out earlier (in Section 4.2 and 4.5). The first sub-question presented and discussed findings such as: the pedagogy of teaching writing, the importance of creating a writing ethos in the classroom, elements of writing and supporting learners in the writing process. The second sub-question was discussed using the following themes: teacher challenges, poor socio-economic backgrounds, writing support from the WCED, creating a writing ethos including discipline, parental literacy, and learner challenges. Finally, a summary of the findings has been provided for each teacher. In Chapter 5, further findings are discussed, conclusions are drawn and recommendations are offered.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study was twofold: first, to explore and investigate current writing practices; second, to discuss challenges experienced in two rural multigrade Foundation Phase classes. This study provides professional insights into the needs of teachers and learners during the writing process in these and other such schools.

This study presented the research questions, offered a background, presented a critical review of current national and international literature, described the case study methodology used and presented the results, which were analysed and deliberated. Finally, this chapter offers further interpretations, some recommendations for further study and draws some conclusions that have emerged from the study about writing practices in rural multigrade Foundation Phase classes.

5.2 DISCUSSION

In the previous chapter significant findings and results were introduced and discussed analytically and critically. Subsequent considerations that expand the findings presented in Chapter 4, and extend the comprehensiveness of this study, are presented in Chapter 5. These discussions are underpinned by the theoretical framework and appropriate national and international literature argued in Chapter 2. Seven further elements emerged, namely:

- The role of a teacher;
- The teacher's pedagogical knowledge of how to teach writing skills (knowledge of writing);
- Curriculum and resource available to multigrade teachers;
- Relations between reading and writing;
- The school climate and environment;
- Assessing writing; and
- The impact of poverty and illiteracy.

Each of these elements is discussed in more depth in order to connect practice with theory.

5.2.1 The role of a teacher

This study has shown that the character and qualification of the teacher played a critical role in writing practices at the two rural multigrade Foundation Phase classes. Cambourne (1988:43) states that a teacher is required to fulfil many roles, as listed in the Norms and Standards for Educators (DoE, 2000:6-15). This document as well as the NCS shows that the most significant role of the teacher is that of a 'facilitator of learning'. This facilitation should occur in an environment where certain conditions (Cambourne's eight conditions of learning – Appendix 10) are met in order to enhance a constructive classroom environment. These learning conditions can be sustained best by teachers who provide writing activities that encourage self-investigation. Vygotsky (in Zuckerman, 2003:196) states that the teacher structures the conditions for learning activities at the beginning of formal education. A discussion of each of the eight conditions for learning as observed in both classes can be seen in Appendix 10.

Teacher A attempted to incorporate the eight learning conditions into her class but she was unable to scaffold them. Teacher B was more successful in scaffolding the eight conditions as a systematic approach to her teaching (Vygotsky, 1978). This present study shows that Teacher A is an authoritative teacher and uses individual constructivism as an approach to teaching writing. Teacher B, on the other hand, naturally leans toward a social constructive paradigm and teaches writing as a collective and integrated subject.

Cambourne (2004) suggests that the conditions mentioned above cannot be taught in isolation. They are dependent on the level of interpretation and scaffolding of each condition. These conditions do not exist autonomously but require the teacher to offer opportunities for them to grow. Whitehead (2010:169) suggests that children act like teachers of writing. This statement reflects the importance of Cambourne's (1988; 2000) condition of demonstration, where children need to see their teacher engage in writing. Furthermore, to be a facilitator of writing, the teacher needs to provide activities that enhance self-investigation. Teachers should consider an environment that can supply inspiration, meet real needs, provide supportive environments, offer informative feedback about writing and suggest new thinking skills (Whitehead, 2010:173). Providing these guidelines at an early stage of writing development is beneficial to teaching and learning. Common teacher characteristics that distinguish good teaching have been identified by Woolfolk (2010:545) as clarity, organisation, warmth, enthusiasm and knowledge. Hoadley and Jansen (2010: 237) emphasise that teachers have a particularly important role to play. The right kind of teacher is vital and contributes to the transformation of education in South Africa. The NCS (2001c) envisions teachers who are qualified, competent, dedicated and caring.

5.2.2 The teacher's pedagogical knowledge of how to teach writing skills (knowledge of writing)

Hoadley and Jansen (2010:108) posit that the teachers' content and conceptual knowledge of what they teach is possibly the most important resource of all. According to their findings, the President's Education Initiative Research Project (1999, in Hoadley and Jansen, 2010) finds that too many South African teachers lack basic conceptual subject knowledge. They believe that teachers who have substantial subject knowledge are more able to enhance the learning process through an extensive range of illustrations. They can integrate prescribed content with the broader world. Hoadley and Jansen (2010:108) further affirm that knowledge is closely related to the teacher's ability to understand concepts and content, use methodologies effectively, make use of resources such as textbooks or charts and use time and classroom space efficiently. Teacher B was able to meet these criteria.

A print-rich environment is a vital resource in developing writing skills. It is, however, the teacher's ability to draw on the environment creatively that deepens the learners' knowledge of writing. Vygotsky (1978) claims that teachers make special contributions to children's learning and development by using their greater knowledge to guide children with less competence and direct them to a place of understanding just beyond their present understanding (ZPD) (in Whitehead, 2010:96).

This investigation shows that there is a significant difference in the pedagogical competencies of the two teachers. Teacher A (in her 50's) received a teacher-training diploma and had very different, more teacher-directed methods of teaching writing. She did not appear to have a clear understanding of how to support her learners to write competently. She lacked confidence in her own abilities to teach writing in a multigrade class. This study concludes that Teacher A would benefit from further training and exposure to constructivist teaching styles in order to become more confident teacher.

Teacher B (in her 20's) showed confidence in her ability to teach writing. She varied her teaching methods. Teacher B displayed a wealth of knowledge about teaching writing in a child-centred participatory manner. Her knowledge was also evident in extensive, well thought-out planning. She deployed strategies to teach writing across both grades. She identified learners who required extra attention and knew which skills were needed to assist them. She provided extra scaffolding to these learners. Since Teacher B had not received additional remedial training, it is fair to assume that she was a natural teacher.

5.2.3 The curriculum and resources available to multigrade teachers

Piaget (1972) believes that the curriculum should not be overloaded. Educators should constantly review it. In this study it is evident that the curriculum was neither aligned nor adjusted for multigrade education. Both teachers were the only Grade 2/3 multigrade teachers in their schools. Both felt isolated, because they had no one to share their many concerns. Distance, time and transport prevented them from meeting teachers from other schools to discuss what to teach or how to teach it.

According to Hoadley and Jansen (2010:105-106), resources do not only consist of physical resources such as, textbooks, stationery, wall charts, photocopiers or audiovisual equipment. Resources also include teachers' content and pedagogical knowledge. Lack of writing resources in Teacher A and B's cases compromised the way they taught. Having the right resources is essential and influences the quality of teaching and learning.

To a degree, resources also affect how a curriculum plan is implemented (Hoadley & Jansen, 2010:105). Time, space, and teacher knowledge are less tangible but important resources nonetheless. Space is a physical resource that should be available for teaching and learning. It can influence the way we teach and how the curriculum is implemented.

In order to address the Learning and Teaching Support Material (LTSM) needs of teachers, the LITMUM strategy (WCED, 2006:38) states that:

Learning and teaching support material must be selected in conjunction with the teacher's strategy and methodology for teaching literacy to support the teacher's work in the classroom. LTSM should be at an appropriate level for each individual learner and address the particular learning style and needs of the learner. The WCED will mobilise what it can from e.g. magazine donation, private donations etc. It is envisaged to contract a reading laboratory project – graded pieces provided on reading cards for learners to read with some questions to develop skills. These will not replace books but will supplement them cheaply and be part of a drive to build up supplies of Xhosa reading materials.

The WCED makes provision for the supplementation of learning and teaching support material. But these resources were seldom available or accessible. The availability of a suitable curriculum with relative resources proved difficult for both teachers in this study. Lack of support with regards to the curriculum used at the time hindered Teacher A from teaching writing skills effectively but not Teacher B. A distinct link between the effectiveness of a curriculum and the competency of these teachers was discussed. The pending change to the curriculum imposed anxiety and insecurity upon the teachers. Physical resources, space, time and basic nutrition further exacerbated the inefficiency of writing development.

Another noteworthy observation during this research process was the close connection between effective use of the curriculum and teacher's knowledge. Curriculum plans should be guidelines rather than prescriptions. Teachers need some autonomy in translating plans into practice. In order to achieve this, teachers should be supported by the provision of extra knowledge and training as well as the time to attend training (Hoadley & Jansen, 2010:108). A concluding comment may be that, had these teachers received support in conceptualising and actualising multigrade teaching, they may have produced better writing results.

Teacher A had a large class but did not make use of the space effectively. There were no segregated subject areas. There was no book corner. Very little group work took place. The teacher had resources on her wall. This study shows that although Teacher A had resources on the wall they were not used to their fullest potential.

As stated by Teacher B, although she had very little space on the mat, she tried to do group work. Teacher B developed many resources prioritising the needs of the learners and not the demands of the WCED. In some cases, activities for Grades 2 and 3 were the same, but differentiated skills were required from each grade. It can be concluded that Teacher B was an initiator and developed resources to assist her learners.

Together with the unrealistic curriculum, lack of resources proved to be taxing for both Teacher A and B. Both teachers found the curriculum to be overloaded. Not enough time was available to consolidate and perfect writing skills in each grade. They felt that they had to 'just move on' in order to keep up with the demands of the WCED.

5.2.4 Relations between reading and writing

Cambourne (1988:186, 2004) states that it is unacceptable, even deplorable, to treat reading and writing as if they are separate areas of learning or disconnected fields of concern. He says, 'writing encapsulates reading'. He notes that while reading is possible in the absence of highly developed knowledge of, or skill in writing, writing cannot take place in the absence of reading. Reading a text often leads to writing about what was read which in turn leads to a verbal discussion of both. Therefore it is safe to conclude that reading and writing are essential components in the construction of language. This is stated in the LITNUM Strategy 2006-2016 (WCED, 2006:18):

The reciprocity of reading and writing is an essential connection that all learners need to develop. When a learner reads, he/she is decoding the message of the writer. When a learner writes, the learner's thinking needs to be organised to encode the message. The ability to read or decode a word does not guarantee that a student will be able to write or encode the same word. Writing happens at

many different levels of understanding and thinking. The writer needs to understand the basic principles of letter-sound correspondence, letter formation, and use systematic patterns in words and word clusters to spell words. The WCED therefore emphasises the importance of requiring learners to construct sentences and to engage in extended writing from Grade 1 onwards as an integral part of the process of developing literacy skills.

Evidence from this study strongly endorsed the reciprocity of reading and writing. During both interviews, Teachers A and B confirmed that their learners struggled to write because they did not have a solid foundation in reading. A lack of reading confidence hampered the learners' ability to write with self-assurance. The clear relation between reading and writing was evident in this case study. The learners' poor reading and spelling skills slowed their progress in acquiring writing skills.

5.2.5 The school climate and environment

This study has shown that the school environment played an important role in the way learners developed their writing skills. A positive school climate defined by adults can encourage learners to learn, discover, explore and develop (Cooke, 2007:xxi). In contrast, a negative school climate and environment can smother the desire to learn. Caring is a key component in the lives and development of children (Cooke, 2007:xxi).

Bronfenbrenner (1979 in Hook, 2009:501) explains that development is the evolving interaction between the environment and the developing person. He emphasises the interplay between individuals and their environment. He focuses on the mutual accommodations that occur between them (Hook, 2009:501). In this study it was interesting to note how poor the environments that learners came from prejudiced their written work in varying degrees. One example of this was that both teachers needed to accommodate, and be more sensitive about, which texts were used in the classroom. Texts needed to be contextually relevant.

Conclusions can be drawn from this study. Since both these schools were in rural areas and the learners came from poor socio-economic environments in which parents were often illiterate, attempting writing skills was a difficult task for both the teachers. Teachers provided a caring environment as in both cases the teachers were concerned about the learners' health and well-being.

5.2.6 Assessing writing

Macintosh (2003:195) as well as Meyer, Lombard, Warnich and Wolhuter (2010:v) suggest that the practice and management of assessments should be viewed in the light of the following aspects: openness and transparency; the need to collect and evaluate a wide range of evidence about an individual's performance and the involvement of the learner in the teaching and learning process. Furthermore Macintosh (2003:196) states that assessment should:

- Promote learning as a central aim;
- Have the potential for formative as well as summative usage and for continuous as well as final assessment;
- Be inclusive and realistic;
- Cover the full range of the stated knowledge, skills, and concepts and understanding; and
- Be arranged in such a way as to be fair to all learners without bias.

Although there were no formal assessments observed in the course of the data collection process, Teacher A mentioned that she conducted weekly assessments that had been prescribed with a set rubric. She stated that these assessments were used formatively and diagnostically but this was not observed. Teacher B mentioned four techniques she used to assess different styles of writing such as weekly tests, assessments, marking, and observations. The researcher witnessed Teacher B using her daily teaching formatively. She continuously reflected on the results of the learners' previous written work to re-teach and consolidate the writing skills needed by the learners. In summary Teacher B taught diagnostically to promote realistic learning in her class.

5.2.7 The impact of poverty and illiteracy

Within their classes, both teachers witnessed dire poverty and parental illiteracy. These factors significantly hindered learners' academic and writing performance. Hoadley and Jansen (2010:111) state that educational inequalities still persist. They refer to eight factors that undermine academic performance in rural areas of South Africa:

- Resources are poor;
- Many teachers in rural schools have low qualification levels;
- Learning difficulties are more evident;
- Parental illiteracy;

- Difficult home-learning environments, in which homework has to be done in the dark without electricity and in busy and noisy rooms such as common living areas;
- Poor communication between provincial administrations and schools;
- Learners obliged to help farmers or parents with home care resulting in irregular school attendance; and
- Higher levels of poverty in rural areas.

All of these eight factors related to both teachers and their learners in this study. These factors pose constant challenges. Bronfenbrenner (in Hook 2009:506) states that parents and teachers should collaborate in educational planning to counter such difficulties.

In this study, both teachers confirmed that all the learners in their classes were from poverty-stricken homes and communities. In some cases, poverty was identified as a direct result of single-parent homes. In other cases at least one parent did not work. It was evident from this study that poverty and illiteracy were dominant factors in both schools. Such inequalities resulted in the poor performance of the learners attending the two rural schools in this study. Learners and teachers were faced with many learning and writing set-backs, including lack of support from their home environments. Lack of communication from parents made it harder still to teach their children to write effectively.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

In this study both schools were in rural areas and experienced socio-economic hardship. The critical distinction between the two teachers was their attitude and pedagogical knowledge of writing. Based on the findings of this research two recommendations are applicable. The first recommendation is how to create a constructive writing classroom environment conducive to learning writing skills and developing confident writers in a rural Foundation Phase multigrade class. The second recommendation, from the experiences of the researcher, is how to replicate or extend this research.

5.3.1 Recommendations on how to create a constructive classroom environment conducive to learning writing skills

In this section two recommendations are made for the overall improvement of writing in rural multigrade classes and schools.

- Cambourne's eight conditions of learning, and his principles for an effective constructivist classroom environment should be made known to all multigrade

teachers as a way forward for writing methodology and pedagogy. This recommendation may assist in the management of larger classes.

- Multigrade education needs to be recognised by all departments in the WCED and at a national level. The curriculum may be reviewed in the light of streamlining it to suit and incorporate options and opportunities for multigrade teachers in rural schools.

5.3.2 Recommendations on how to develop confident writers in a rural Foundation Phase multigrade classroom

Recommendations are structured from a broad perspective looking at developing a theoretical framework to recommendations for the WCED, curriculum development and suggestions of additional support systems. Later, recommendations for teachers and learners are presented. Finally a further recommendation is made on the basis of the current study.

- A gap identified in this study was the teachers' pedagogical knowledge of teaching multigrade writing classes. It is recommended that teachers be exposed to a variety of techniques to teach writing. They should have experience of teaching writing in a multigrade class. They should be provided with a curriculum that outlines clear guidelines for teaching writing skills in a multigrade classroom.
- The diagnostic teaching of writing would be a recommendation to assist teachers to identify and correct gaps.
- Extra seminars provided by the WCED, could focus on difficulties these teachers face in terms of poverty, skills, resources, curriculum knowledge, support and finally the management of teaching two or more grades in one class.
- Writing workshops, also provided by the WCED, may enhance and refresh teachers understanding of teaching writing pedagogy.
- Various resources, books and materials on writing should be provided and updated regularly. Activities should be gauged according to developmental stages.
- Effective writing assessments and rubrics need to be developed by the WCED and circulated in order to lessen the workload of multigrade teachers.

- Teachers could also be trained in learning support and remediation methods in order to assist their learners and meet the needs of each learner. They could be trained in reading and writing facilitation and support, which could be more readily available to children in rural multigrade classes.
- Furthermore, these teachers should have access to extra assistance, for example, class assistance and/or facilitators, social workers, at least two learning support facilitators, Occupational Therapists, Speech and Language Therapists, Educational Psychologists and NGO's who can assist with parental literacy.
- It is recommended that learners be exposed to various self-directed and independent tasks, which will free the teacher in order to assist learners who have difficulty writing. Learners should be exposed to print-rich environments throughout the year.

5.3.3 Recommendations for further research

Should a wider study be conducted in future, the researcher, from her experiences in this study, would recommend the following:

- The sample size of two classes was sufficient for a case study in terms of time and depth. For a deeper interpretation of the topic as a whole, however, it is recommended that one more school be included.
- The study should be conducted over consecutive days and not once a week.
- In preparation for interviews, it is better to provide teachers with a printed copy of questions beforehand so that they can refer to it during the interview, should they need to. This allows them to clear any misunderstandings about questions. They could ask questions about certain concepts that were perhaps not familiar to them.
- It is recommended that the interview schedule and questions be piloted to refine the wording of the questions.
- It is recommended that the study form part of a larger action research project which focuses on developing a multigrade curriculum for multigrade teaching of writing.

5.4 CONCLUSIONS

The emphasis of the study focused on how two multigrade rural Foundation Phase teachers taught writing in their classrooms. Four main conclusions can be drawn.

First, the impact that poverty and illiteracy have on the development of writing skills for rural multigrade children must be acknowledged and addressed. This should be prioritised by the NDoE. It is easy to take for granted basic resources such as water, nutrition, family and warm clothes. But without these basic necessities, effective learning and the development of effective writing skills will continue to be hindered.

Second, there is an urgent need for curriculum and resource development for rural multigrade teachers particularly in their teaching of writing skills. This study has revealed that the change of curriculum has not solved the unique problems of multigrade education. Teachers need stability as well as extra training to remain updated with the curriculum as well as how to teach writing in a multigrade environment.

Third, all pre-service teacher-training institutions should include a module in their training so that students are exposed to the complexity of teaching in either rural or urban multigrade environments. Included in under-graduate teacher training, teachers should be explicitly taught how to teach writing diagnostically and how to support struggling learners.

Finally, the teaching of writing should be prioritised in both teacher-training institutions as well as being offered, on a part-time basis, by 'knowledgeable other' groups of people. In-service workshops on how to teach writing, and specifically how to teach it in multigrade classrooms, should be offered. These courses should be offered by 'knowledgeable others', NGO's, and the WCED. These workshops, however, should be easily accessible and affordable to all teachers.

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