The use of the Grade one literacy baseline assessment programme of the Western Cape Education Department

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DECLARATION

The contents of this thesis represents my own work and the opinions contained herein are my own and not necessarily those of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

ABSTRACT

Research has revealed that the academic performances of learners in South Africa are below the required level. The Western Cape Education Department (WCED) launched the literacy and numeracy strategy 2006 – 2016, in response to the low literacy and numeracy levels. In addition, the WCED introduced the Grade one baseline assessment in 2006, as part of the literacy and numeracy strategy. The purpose of this study was to observe the implementation of the Grade one literacy baseline assessment programme of the WCED. This study aimed to determine what literacy barriers, if any, the learners were experiencing and to recommend literacy support strategies, in order to inform teaching practices. The learning theories of the two key Constructivist theorists, Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky have therefore been explored.

Purposive sampling was used for the selection of the participants for this study. The Grade one class, with English as the language of learning and teaching (LOLT), was selected due to the diverse nature of the learners, in terms of their different home languages. Thirty-seven Grade one learners participated in the study.

I used a mixed methods research design in order to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. Multi-method data collection strategies were employed to collect data for this study. The multi-method approach involved: document collection, observation of learners as well as an interview with the Grade one class teacher who conducted the research. The document collection included the learners' admission forms as well as the written baseline assessment scripts of the learners. The admission forms provided biographical information of the learners in terms of gender, home languages, Grade R attendance and their ages. The collection of data assisted in identifying the literacy barriers that the Grade one learners were experiencing.

An interpretivist data analysis style was employed for the qualitative data analyses and the quantitative data analysis was statistical. The results of the quantitative and qualitative data were interpreted together. The triangulation of the data enhanced the reliability of the research findings. The findings suggest that some of the learners experienced literacy barriers in terms of: receptive- and expressive language, perceptual skills and fine motor development. The educator's perceptions in terms of the administration and usefulness of the baseline assessment have also been included. The data was summarised and the information was used to describe the literacy barriers in terms of the biographical variables and to recommend learning support strategies for literacy development.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

LIST OF FIGURE AND TABLES

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and origin to the study

The academic performances of South African learners have been a cause for great concern over the past few years. Many Grade one learners have not attended reception year classes and many of these learners have therefore not acquired the concepts, skills and strategies taught in these classes (Western Cape Education Department, 2007: Foreword). The purpose of this study is to examine the Grade one baseline assessment literacy programme to identify what literacy barriers the learners are experiencing, in order to improve the literacy skills of the Grade one learners. The discussion that follows will highlight the importance of the early identification of literacy barriers and the need to address the barriers.

The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) indicated that the achievement in reading comprehension of South African Grade four learners was below the average score of 500 and achieved a score of 302, the lowest of the forty participating countries (Mullis, Martin, Kennedy & Foy, 2007: 37). The 2005 study of the National Department of Education found that only 28% Grade 6 learners in South Africa performed at the required literacy level (South Africa. Department of Education, 2005: 77), whilst the Joint Education Trust Report (JET), indicates that the systemic evaluation results of Grade 3 learners in 2007 were at an unacceptable level of only 36% (Khumalo, 2008:1). In addition, the study of the Annual National Assessment (ANA) results indicated that the average percentage scores in Home Language dropped from 59% at Grade one level to 28% at Grade six level in 2011 and from 58% to 43% in 2012. (South Africa. Department of Basic Education, 2012: 2-3).

The above results are consistent with my experience as a teacher at a school in a low socio-economic community. I have observed that many learners experienced reading problems. During my experience as a Grade one teacher, I also observed that many Grade one learners lack the knowledge and skills to successfully complete the Grade one baseline assessment at the beginning of the year. Possible reasons why learners are struggling to complete the baseline assessment could be due to a lack of exposure to reading material, language barriers as well as a lack of resources at home. Many learners come from homes where there are no television sets or where there is not enough money to buy electricity for the television set to be operational.

If literacy barriers are not identified and addressed at an early age, it will exacerbate the drop-out rate of learners from schools, the illiteracy rate as well as the unemployment rate, which will contribute to the number of citizens living in abject poverty conditions in South Africa. The National Education Department therefore has a responsibility to implement strategies to improve the literacy levels of South African learners.

In response to the low literacy and numeracy levels of learners in schools, the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) has introduced the Grade one baseline assessment literacy, numeracy and life skills programme, in 2006, as part of the literacy and numeracy strategy 2006 – 2016 (Western Cape Education Department, 2007: Foreword). The literacy and numeracy strategy 2006 – 2016 forms part of the Human Capital Development Strategy of the Western Cape and is based on systemic research conducted by the National Department of Education and the WCED.

1.2 Significance of the study

My study focuses on a Grade one class at a school in a low socio-economic community on the Cape Flats. Education in low socio-economic communities of South Africa is hampered due to a non-stimulating environment, insecurity, language deficiency and poor orientation towards school (Prinsloo, 2005: 28). The amount of money, time, and energy that parents spend on educational resources are considered investments that have the potential to enhance children's cognitive and language skills (Hartas, 2011: 894). Learners from low socio-economic communities often enter school with limited knowledge of vocabulary (Irwin, Moore, Lauren, Tornatore & Fowler, 2012: 21 - 22). The Grade one teachers, who teach learners in English as the language of learning and teaching (LOLT) at the research site, find it very challenging to provide learning support to learners with literacy barriers. Some learners experience literacy barriers such as the inability to understand and speak the LOLT, the inability to identify and name objects, as well as problems with phonemic awareness. These barriers are compounded due to the diverse nature of the classes. The mother tongue languages of many of these learners enrolled in the Grade one classes, at the research site, with English as the LOLT are Xhosa, Afrikaans, both Afrikaans and English, and other African languages. The systemic evaluation results of Grade three and Grade six learners at the research site have also been below the required level over the past few years. It is evident that the literacy levels of learners at the research site are low. The Grade one literacy baseline assessment can play a critical role in identifying the literacy barriers of the Grade one English LOLT learners at the research site. This study will hopefully enhance how the Grade one literacy baseline assessment results can be used.

1.3 Problem statement

As discussed above, various assessments (e.g. PIRLS, ANA and systemic evaluation) indicate that the literacy levels of South African learners are less than satisfactory. Research also emphasizes the need for appropriate support in developing literacy skills from a young age (South Africa. Department of Education, 2001: 24). In low socio-economic communities, emergent literacy development is further hampered by a non-stimulating environment, insecurity, language deficiency and poor orientation towards school (Prinsloo, 2005: 28). The WCED has attempted to address the unsatisfactory development of scholastic skills, including literacy skills amongst young learners by implementing the baseline assessment at the beginning of grade one so that the teachers can identify [literacy] barriers and provide appropriate learning support to address these barriers. However, to my knowledge, no research has been conducted to evaluate how the WCED baseline assessment is conducted, how useful is this assessment strategy in identifying barriers to learning and also what are the perceptions of teachers who conduct this assessment. This study hopes to fill that gap in the context of a grade one class located in a low socio-economic community with its own unique challenges.

1.4 Research question

The main research question in this study is the following:

How can the Grade one literacy baseline assessment results be used to address literacy barriers amongst Grade one learners?

The following research sub-questions will assist in the aim to recommend learning support strategies for literacy:

1. What do the Grade one learners' literacy baseline assessment performances indicate about their emergent literacy skills?
2. What are the Grade one teacher's perceptions about the usefulness of the literacy baseline assessment?
3. What learning support strategies can be recommended to address the literacy barriers (if any) identified by the baseline assessment?

1.5 Research design

1.5.1 Categories of research designs

The procedure for a research design involves the data collection methods as well as how the data should be analysed for the study. The three different categories for research designs include quantitative, qualitative and mixed-methods (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006: 22).

The quantitative researcher collects information about the variables in the study and should choose an instrument that will ensure reliability and validity. The quantitative researcher uses statistics to describe the phenomena of the study in terms of patterns and frequencies. Different forms of data are collected to answer the research question (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005: 133) and can include participant observation, direct observation, in-depth interviews and documents (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006: 315)

I conducted a case study of the implementation and usefulness of the WCED Grade one literacy baseline assessment programme. A case study investigates a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life situation (Yin, 2003: 13). The data analysis in a case study design focuses on one phenomenon in order to get an in-depth understanding. Purposive sampling as well as data collection procedures are intertwined in a case study design (McMillan and Schumacher (2006: 316 – 317).This case study focussed on the responses of the learners to the baseline assessment via observations of how the assessment was conducted and by examining learners' written activities. The Grade one teacher who conducted the assessment was also interviewed to solicit her perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the Grade one baseline assessment tool and process.

1.5.2 Mixed methods research design

I adopted the mixed methods case study approach to research the implementation and usefulness of the WCED Grade one literacy baseline assessment programme. A mixed methods research design for this study involved the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell & Clark, 2011:2). Both quantitative and qualitative research designs are associated with strengths and weaknesses. A mixed methods research design allows the researcher to include the strengths of each method (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006: 402). The researcher has the freedom to use a variety of methods to answer the research question, using both numbers and words (Creswell & Clark, 2011: 13).

1.6 Research methods

The research methods refer to how and from whom the data will be collected, how the participants will be selected (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006: 12).

1.6.1 Selection of participants

Sampling in a research study involves the selection of participants for the study (Graziano & Raulin, 2004: 138). I used purposive sampling to select the participants for this study, as the study focused on the Grade one literacy baseline assessment conducted at one primary school. I selected the Grade one class, with English as the language of learning and teaching (LOLT), due to the diverse nature of the learners in terms of their different home languages. Thirty-three Grade one learners, participated in the study after only thirty-three signed consent forms were received from their parents for participation in the study. The teacher who conducted the literacy baseline assessment was interviewed after the baseline assessment was completed in order to obtain information regarding her perceptions related to the implementation of the baseline assessment activities.

The need for the early identification of learners with literacy barriers is the justification of this study.

1.6.2 The research site

The research site was a primary school, situated in a low socio-economic community, on the Cape Flats in the Cape Town Metropole of the Western Cape. Due to the process of restructuring at district level, a learner support teacher had not been appointed at the research site. The Grade one class teacher had to provide the higher levels of learning support to address the identified barriers. The above-mentioned challenges motivated me to explore whether the Grade one literacy baseline assessment could play a critical role in identifying the literacy barriers of learners in the Grade one English class at the research site.

1.6.3 Data collection strategies

The data collection for this research involved a multi-method approach: document collection, observation of learners as well as an interview with the Grade one class teacher who conducted the research. The document collection included the learners' admission forms as well as the written baseline assessment scripts of the learners.

1.6.3.1 Description of the WCED baseline assessment programme and instrument

I used the WCED 2007 baseline assessment instrument to determine the literacy skills of the Grade on learners. It is a checklist to record which learners are able to or unable to demonstrate the literacy skills required to successfully complete the baseline assessment activities (Western Cape Education Department, 2007: 1). The assessment criteria of the different literacy categories that were assessed is included in the WCED baseline assessment checklist. This document is used by many Grade one teachers in order to determine the prior knowledge and skills of the learners.

The WCED Grade one baseline assessment programme consists of the following sections: an introduction (explanation of implementation), Section A (recording sheets), Section B (exemplar work schedules for the baseline assessment programme), and Section C (alternative version of the baseline assessment programme). The baseline assessment should be conducted within the first three weeks of the school year (Western Cape Education Department, 2007: 68).

I adapted the WCED literacy baseline assessment checklist for my study (Table 4.2) by combining the listening component of the WCED checklist with the speaking component in my observation checklist because both components were simultaneously assessed during the same assessment activities. I also changed the terms "reading and viewing" to "emergent reading" and the "writing" to "emergent writing" in order to align the terms with the Grade R CAPS concepts (South Africa. Department of Basic Education, 2011: 31 - 35). Learners' emergent literacy competence was therefore evaluated in terms of three categories; listening and speaking, emergent reading and emergent writing.

1.6.3.2 Documentary analysis

Documents were used as part of the triangulation strategy of my study in order to increase the credibility of the data of the observation process (Merriam, 2009: 215). In this study the participants' school admission documents as well as their literacy baseline assessments scripts were collected for analysis. Documents are, most importantly, used to corroborate evidence from other sources (Yin, 2003: 87). It allows the researcher to obtain tangible evidence of the participants' knowledge, which is a strength of this data collection strategy. A weakness, however, of this method is that it does not allow the researcher to extract evidence from the environment, since document data collection strategies are non-interactive (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006: 356).

a) Participant school admission documents

The learners' admission files provided me with information regarding the learners' biographical profiles such as their: gender, home languages, Grade R attendance status and their ages. The biographical information was used to statistically describe the learner sample and to analyse participants' performances in terms of the biographical information.

b) Participants' literacy baseline assessment scripts

The participant's written assessment scripts provided me with information regarding the literacy baseline assessment activities and enabled me to confirm the data collected from the observation process. Learners' performances were also analysed in terms of participants' biographical variables; gender, language, Grade R attendance and age. The baseline assessment scripts enabled me to determine the literacy skills, where I was unable to observe all the learners during the same activities. I examined the baseline assessment scripts and recorded my findings in the Literacy assessment checklist by indicating the barriers that the learners experienced with an 'X'. The Literacy assessment checklist enabled me to gather data in terms of the frequencies of the literacy barriers according to the following variables: gender, home language, age and Grade R attendance. This enabled me to identify and statistically describe the different performance and barrier patterns that emerged.

1.6.3.3 Field observations

I observed the learner participants during the baseline assessment activities in order to determine their literacy skills. Observations describe the participants, setting, activities or behaviour of the participants (Merriam, 2009: 130). Observations involve the recording of detailed field notes (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006: 349) and are unstructured and free-flowing. This allows the researcher to take advantage of unforeseen data sources as they emerge (Leedy & Ormond, 2005: 145).

Most of the concepts of the baseline activities were repeated every day during the baseline assessment. In order to ensure manageability of the observation process, I observed four learners at a time to examine their skills during the literacy baseline assessment activities. Colour coded name tags were attached to their school jackets, shirts or dresses in order to facilitate the identification of the learners that I observed. The observation of learners was required as an assessment strategy for the listening and speaking, as well as the emergent

reading baseline assessment activities. This provided me with rich qualitative data that had the potential to enhance the value of this study (Rule & John, 2011: 107 - 108).

The data collected from the field observations were organised in the Literacy assessment checklist (Table 4.2). The Literacy assessment checklist facilitated the interpretation and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data.

1.6.3.4 In-depth interview with the class teacher

The teacher of the Grade one class who had conducted the literacy baseline assessment was also interviewed. Qualitative interviews are open-ended or semi-structured. Semi-structured interviews revolve around a few central questions (Leedy & Ormond, 2005: 146). Interviews in a case study design are guided conversations rather than structured queries (Yin, 2003: 89). As a novice researcher I conducted a semi-structured interview with the teacher, since I needed guidelines.

The purpose of the interview was to obtain information regarding the teacher's perception on the baseline assessment instrument. I used an audio-recorder to record the responses of the teacher in order to ensure that her views were correctly captured for data analysis (Merriam, 2009: 109). Field notes were also taken to record the verbatim responses of the teacher as well as non-verbal communication during the interview, which facilitated data analysis (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006: 355 - 356).

1.7 Data Analyses

I employed two basic forms of data analysis for this study as well as an interpretivist data analysis style, for the qualitative data analyses whilst the quantitative data analysis was statistical.

1.7.1 Qualitative data analysis

Different data collection methods, sources and approaches are involved to interpret interpretivist data (Henning, 2004: 103). The data analysis in this study was an inductive process, and aimed to understand the literacy barriers (McMillian, 2004: 103).

Biographical information of the learners (see table 4.1 in Chapter 4) contains qualitative data that was analysed in order to obtain information regarding the total number of participants in each of the biographical variables. The Literacy assessment checklist (Table 4.2) contains

the assessment criteria for the listening and speaking, emergent reading and emergent writing. This assisted me in organising the data into categories in order to identify patterns regarding the literacy barriers that the learners experienced during the baseline assessment. Colour coding assisted me to identify the patterns. The categories were used as a framework to describe the identified literacy barriers. I transcribed the recording of the interview and wrote an interview elaboration after the interview, which include the interviewee's reactions as well as additional information regarding the meanings of the interview (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006: 373).

1.7.2 Quantitative data analysis

The frequencies of the learners' emergent literacy barriers were organised in Table 4.3 according to each activity and each category. The Biographical information in Table 4.1 and the information in the Literacy checklist (Table 4.2) were used to organise the data in the Frequencies of the emergent literacy barriers in terms of gender, home language, age and Grade R attendance (Table 4.3). The performances of the participants were analysed statistically, the percentage frequency of the learning barriers in terms of the sample as a whole, as well as the different biographical variables (gender, home language, Grade R attendance and age) were calculated. Table 4.3 enabled me to identify the different performance patterns that emerged.

1.7.3 Presentation and interpretation of the results

The data was summarised and the information was used to describe the literacy barriers in terms of the biographical variables. The information was also used to recommend learning support strategies for literacy development

1.8 Validity and reliability

The result of research studies must present insights and conclusions that ring true to readers. Careful attention to a study's conceptualisation and the way in which the data are collected, analysed and interpreted can ensure validity and reliability of research results (Merriam, 2009: 210). Content validity involves the accuracy with which a research instrument actually measures the construct it purports to measure. (Creswell & Clark, 2011: 210). I used a similar version of the WCED baseline assessment instrument (checklist) to rate learner performances during the literacy baseline assessment activities. A task team comprising of WCED officials with knowledge and expertise in early childhood education formulated the WCED version of the baseline assessment instrument. The members of the

task team were drawn from the WCED Curriculum and Specialised Education Support Services Directorates. It is therefore assumed that, much expertise and skill went into the formulation of this tool. The process in formulating the WCED Grade one baseline assessment instrument has enhanced its content validity.

The multi-method data collection strategies were employed to enhance the validity and reliability of this research. Lincoln and Guba in Merriam (2009: 210) considers validity and reliability in terms of: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

I provided the teacher, who was interviewed, with a copy of the transcription of the interview that I conducted with her, to check whether I interpreted her perceptions correctly. This was done to rule out the possibility of misinterpreting the participant's perceptions and to address the issue of respondent validation (Merriam, 2009: 217).

Trustworthiness of the data was considered by dating the detailed, descriptive field notes as well as the participant observation grids in order to provide chronological records of the data that I recorded. In addition, I kept a field journal to record self-reflections, decisions that were taken as well as ethical issues (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006: 374).

Population external validity was considered in this study, since the participants performances in the literacy baseline assessment were described in terms of their biographical variables: gender, home language, attendance and age. An independent checker, checked my tally of statistics in order to ensure accurate presentation of the statistical data. In this study the results are only generalizable to other learners with the same characteristics (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006: 134).

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analysed concurrently. The results were interpreted together which facilitated the triangulation of the findings. The triangulation of the data enhanced the reliability of the research findings (Snyder, 2006: 404). I used the results of my study to recommend literacy support strategies that could be used by the Grade one teacher that participated in the study, the other Grade one classes at the same school or at other schools where learners experience similar barriers.

1.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethical guidelines in qualitative research refer to policies regarding informed consent, deception, confidentiality, anonymity, privacy and caring. Most researchers negotiate informed consent in field work. They assure participants of confidentiality and anonymity and

provide a description of how the data will be used (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006: 333 - 334). The following ethical issues apply to both quantitative and qualitative research: providing reciprocity to participants for their willingness to provide data, handling sensitive information, and disclosing the purpose of the research. Data collection procedures in quantitative research need to be administered with as little variation as possible. This will ensure that bias is not introduced into the process (Creswell & Clark, 2011: 179).

For this research study, ethical clearance was obtained from the Education Faculty Ethics Committee of Cape Peninsula University of Technology. I also provided the school manager and the teacher with written evidence of the approval of the WCED to conduct the research. The parents of the learner participants received letters describing the purpose, aims, intended outcomes and potential value of the proposed study. In addition the parents completed consent forms in order to give permission for their children to participate in the study. The parents were informed that their children (participants) could withdraw from the study at any time, since participation in the study was voluntary. I assured the participants' parents of confidentiality during the study and informed them that learners' names would not be used when discussing research findings. Anonymity of participants was therefore guaranteed. The learner participants were also informed that they would be observed during the study. The same above-mentioned ethical principles were emphasized with the teacher participant prior to her consenting to participate in the study.

1.10 Definitions of key concepts

1.10.1 Assessment

This term refers to the different procedures used to monitor the progress of learners (Tompkins, 2010: 28).

1.10.2 Baseline assessment

The term baseline assessment refers to an assessment that is conducted at the beginning of the school year to determine the subject knowledge of learners (Tymms, 1999: 14).

1.10.3 Literacy

Literacy is the ability to read, write, speak, listen and think (Diehl, 2011: 186).

1.10.4 Emergent literacy skills

This term refers to the literacy skills that precede formal reading and include knowledge of the alphabet, concept about print, phonological awareness and expressive vocabulary (Irwin, Moore, Tornator & Fowler, 2012: 20).

1.10.5 Listening and speaking skills

Listening skills refer the abilities of the learners to direct their attention and to understand the instructions, directions and explanations of the teacher (Levey, 2011: 4).

1.10.6 Reading skills

The term refers to the abilities of the learners to understand the meaning of print and involves word recognition, book handling skills and the interpretation of pictures (Center, 2005: 7).

1.10.7 Writing skills

Writing skills refers to the ability to express ideas and needs in written form and to create well-formed sentences in written text. The ability to follow rules for letter formation, information organisation and structure is included in writing skills (Levey, 2011: 9).

1.10.8 Perceptual skills

This term refers to the reception, interpretation and integration of visual, auditory, tactual and kinaesthetic stimuli (Carter & Diaz, 1971: 43). The learners gain knowledge by extracting information from the environment when their senses are stimulated (Forgus & Melamed, 1976: 1).

1.10.9 Perceptual-motor skills

Perceptual-motor skills refer to movement activities that involve the perceptual skills (Cosford, 1982: 71) and involve the gross and fine motor muscles (Mwamwenda, 2004: 45).

1.10.10 Barriers to learning

This term refers to the problems that the learners experience to successfully complete assessment activities (South Africa. Department of Education, 2001: 24).

1.11 Thesis chapter outline

The rest of this thesis is organised as follows:

- Chapter 2: the Grade one baseline assessment literacy programme, literacy development, literacy barriers, language development and the learning theory Constructivism is discussed.
- Chapter 3: describes the research design and methodology for this study.
- Chapter 4: provides the research findings.
- Chapter 5: contains the discussion of the research findings as well as the conclusions and reflections for the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

The aim of the literature review is to discuss the purpose of a baseline assessment and specifically the WCED Grade one baseline assessment literacy programme. Literacy development and support as well as language development is discussed. The literature review also explores the learning theory constructivism, to clarify how learners think and learn.

2.2 Assessment

The importance of assessment in schools has increased due to educational accountability (Wright, 2008: 1). According to Tompkins (2010: 28-29) assessment is an integral part of learning and teaching and a daily component of classroom activities. Teachers use a variety of procedures to monitor the progress of learners in order to prepare appropriate lesson plans that will cater for the different abilities of the learners. Furthermore, they use a variety of assessment tools to assess the progress of their learners. Tompkins advises teachers to observe the learners as they participate in activities and to record the performances of their learners. Tompkins adds that teachers should use checklists to monitor the progress of learners.

2.2.1   Baseline assessment

Tymms (1999: 14, 20) states that different forms of assessments can be conducted to collect information on the progress of learners. A baseline assessment looks at cognitive, affective and behavioural aspects and is conducted at the beginning of a new grade to determine what learners know. The different purposes of a baseline assessment are: to identify the level of learners in order to inform planning, to identify learners with special needs, to compare the result with the learners' progress later and to compare the progress of a group of learners with another group of the same age or grade. Wolfendale (1995: 42-43) proposes that the criteria for baseline assessment should include clear objectives, accurate and reliable recording of information, and the information obtained must be of practical value for future planning. The protection of learners' and parents' rights and evidence of learners' achievements are also important aspects when conducting baseline assessments.

2.2.2   The WCED Grade One Baseline Assessment strategy

The Western Cape Education Department (WCED) Grade one baseline assessment was developed to determine the prior knowledge of learners in terms of the Grade R Literacy, Numeracy and Life Skills criteria. The Grade one baseline assessment is a formative, criterion-referenced assessment. It is a ten day programme and provides an exemplar Lesson Plan Framework for an initial assessment in Grade one in Literacy, Numeracy and Life Skills and consists of different activities. The baseline assessment is administered to learners by the class teacher in the second week of the school year. All learners must be assessed against the assessment criteria of all the concepts. Teachers must use the recording sheet, provided by the WCED, as a checklist to record what activities learners were able to do and where intervention and support are needed. Assessment activities can be administered in groups or as class activities, depending on the strategy of the class teacher. The assessment activities of learners must be kept at school to provide evidence of learners' prior learning. The WCED emphasises the importance of early assessment and identification of barriers to learning in order to provide differentiated learning experiences to learners (Western Cape Education Department, 2007: 1 - 3).

2.2.2.1 The WCED literacy baseline assessment programme

The WCED Grade one literacy baseline assessment programme assesses the knowledge and skills of the Grade one learners in terms of the Grade R literacy criteria (Western Cape Education Department, 2007: Foreword). The age requirements of Grade one learners, for admission to an ordinary public school is six years turning seven in the course of that calendar year. Learners may, however, be allowed to be admitted to Grade one at a lower age if a learner is school ready for Grade one (South Africa, 1996: 62). The admission age of a learner, admitted to Grade one at a lower age than the age requirement, is five years turning six years by 30 June in the year of admission (South Africa. Department of Education, 1996: 6).

Perceptual motor skills as well as cognitive skills are underlying skills that are included in the assessment of the literacy concepts (Western Cape Education Department, 2007: 14). According to the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), the literacy skills of the Grade R learners are developed in the Home Language Programme (South Africa. Department of Basic Education, 2011: 20) and include the development of the following skills: Listening and speaking, emergent reading and phonics and emergent writing and handwriting (South Africa. Department of Basic Education, 2011: 31-35).

This study will focus on the literacy component of the baseline assessment programme. The baseline assessment literacy programme assesses the following skills and knowledge: listening and speaking, reading and writing. The WCED baseline assessment lesson plan (Western Cape Education Department, 2007: 30-66) provides the description of suggested baseline assessment literacy activities as well as a list of resources that must be used for the activities in order to assess the literacy concepts. Some of the literacy activities have also been integrated with the Numeracy and Life Skills lesson plans.

The WCED assessment instrument will be discussed in Chapter 3.

2.3 Literacy development

Literacy is the ability to read, write, speak, listen and think (Diehl, 2011: 186). Diehl informs that these abilities are interrelated and that it should be developed in an integrated manner to ensure effective literacy development. Language plays an important role in literacy development. Wise, Sevcik and Morris (2007: 311) state that the abilities of learners to pay attention in order to listen to class discussions are important skills as class discussions may give learners access to vocabulary and opportunities to improve listening comprehension, which may support the development of reading skills.

Lindfors (2008: 52 - 53) explains that collaboration is an important factor in oral language development because it contributes to the development of literacy. The following quote from Vygotsky (1978: 87) emphasises Lindfors views on collaboration:

> *"What a child can do with assistance today she will be able to do by herself tomorrow."*

Instructions in phonemic awareness, phonics, oral reading, vocabulary, reading comprehension and writing contribute to literacy development. Communication takes place through language and it includes verbal as well as non-verbal language such as facial expressions, gestures, body posture and intonation. Communication also includes reading and writing (Dednam, 2005: 119 - 120). Dednam (2005: 120) states that the main functions of communication are to inform, express feelings about self and others, greetings and the use of the imagination which includes dramatization, fantasy and storytelling. According to the Department of Basic Education (2011, 8), the language programme is integrated into all other subject areas. Language is used across the curriculum in all oral work, reading and writing. Many of the listening and speaking skills will be developed in Mathematics and Life

Skills and themes from the Life Skills programme can be selected to provide a context for the teaching of language skills.

2.3.1 Emergent literacy

The stages that children go through in their early development of speech and language are important for the establishment of their interpersonal communication skills (Whitehead, 2011: 52). Whitehead (2011: 56) explains that children begin to learn the sounds of their language in playful communications with their caregivers. Whitehead (2011: 61) also mentions that early grammatical utterances enable young children to interact with others, to get things done and to comment on a state of affairs in the environment. Bruce and Spratt (2011: 16) postulate that the way the brain works to co-ordinate vision, hearing and movement is crucial in literacy development. The first steps a toddler takes require co-ordination of the body's movements, which is an important part of the journey into language and literacy. Bruce and Spratt (2011: 18) add that the way in which the eyes, hands and fingers move together is vital for the development of reading and writing. Levey (2011: 9) explains that toddlers' drawings and scribblings, as they pretend to write, are important for the development of emergent literacy skills.

Irwin, Moore, Tornator and Fowler (2012: 20 - 21) state that emergent literacy skills play an important role in literacy development and include alphabet knowledge, concepts about print, phonological awareness and expressive vocabulary. Learners need to recognise the letters of the alphabet in order recognise words. Concept about print is the ability to differentiate between letters, numbers, words and pictures and can be taught while reading a simple book to the learners with large, clear print and labelling what is on each page. Book handling is also an important skill and includes the ability to hold a book properly and the knowledge that reading progresses from left to right. The teacher can initially teach book handling skills through example. The learners must also be explicitly taught how to hold a book and turn the pages with books that have repetitive patterns.

Emergent literacy skills precede formal reading and support the development of decoding skills and reading comprehension (Girard, Girolametto, Weitzman & Greenberg, 2013: 46 - 47). Irwin, Moore, Tornator and Fowler (2012: 20 – 21) suggest that phonological awareness and sensitivity refers to the ability to distinguish between the sounds of spoken words and to recognise rhyming words as well as the ability to segment words into syllables. Good expressive vocabulary promotes reading success. They advise teachers to teach these skills in an integrated manner during literacy instruction.

Tompkins (2010: 114) postulates that young children begin to read by recognising logos on fast-food restaurants, shops in the environment and commonly used household products. They recommend the following activities to develop emergent literacy skills: name writing, singing rhyming songs and storybook reading. The inclusion of print concepts, sound awareness and oral language are also advised when implementing these activities. According to Levey (2011: 8) emergent literacy skills are the early pre-reading abilities that support later literacy.

According to the Curriculum and Policy Statement (CAPS), (South Africa. Department of Basic Education, 2011: 49 - 52) Grade R learners are expected to: talk about common experiences in pictures, participate in action songs and rhymes, recognise initial consonants and vowels of common words, copy short sentences and words written by the teacher, write from left to right and from the top to the bottom of a page and to draw pictures to convey a message about a personal experience and to use it as a starting point for writing. Emergent writing includes activities in all areas of language and other subjects. The Life Skills CAPS (South Africa. Department of Basic Education, 2011: 25) state that learners are expected to use colour in their drawings. Furthermore, Mayesky (2012:196) explains that learners who start to perceive differences in colour, start to experiment with different colours in their drawings.

2.3.2 Literacy barriers

Children who experience reading and writing difficulties in the early stages of education often perform poorly on academic measures (Nancollis, Lawrie & Dodd, 2005: 325). Nancollis, Lawrie and Dodd explain that their slower development may be associated with behaviour problems and low motivation that further inhibit the achievement of their potential at school. According to Levey (2011: 2), spoken language capabilities are vital for the development of literacy skills. Children must be able to attend to and understand the spoken language in order to develop the skills needed in all academic areas. Nancollis, Lawrie and Dodd (2005: 325) add that the acquisition of competent literacy skills is dependent on adequate oral language as well as familiarity with visual symbols and books. They explain that social deprivation delays children's development of both language and literacy skills. Levey (2011: 5) explains that children's inability to respond to questions about stories that were read in the class allows for the early identification of potential language difficulties. Levey further explains that a lack of interest in reading material, for example preferring to look at books with pictures instead of books with words, is one of the signs of potential reading difficulties. Nancollis, Lawrie and Dodd (2005: 326) postulate that the provision of early intervention can prevent the adverse effects of social deprivation on children's language and literacy.

Levey (2011: 3) advises teachers to make careful observations of the child's language or behavioural issues in order to understand the nature of the problem. This will enable the teacher to determine how to address these concerns and to monitor how the child responds to these interventions. Levey explains that this process of observation and classroom-based interventions provide important data should there be a need for a more formal evaluation to be conducted. The aim of this study is to identify literacy barriers that is not inherent but to identify factors outside. The idea is not to approach the study from a deficit model but the central focus is to nurture literacy.

2.3.3 Possible factors that may impact literacy development

The following factors may impact literacy development:

2.3.3.1 Attention and memory

Learning and memory cannot be separated partly because unless past experiences can be remembered, it is impossible for learning to take place. People think and reason using facts that they remember and deal with the concept of time with the aid of memory (Mwamwenda, 2004: 212). Mwamwenda emphasises that memory plays an important role in a learners' success at school and beyond. Stimuli that enter the sensory register and that are processed are stored in the short-term memory. Mwamwenda further explains that short-term memory cannot store information for a long time. Long-term memory is capable of storing all a person's lifetime experiences. Florit, Roch, Altoè and Levorato (2009: 946) postulate that memory skills contribute to listening comprehension.

The recognition of information depends on existing information in the long term memory. Rehearsal of information received in the sensory system occurs when the information is selected for further processing. Rehearsal involves repeating and reciting the information in order to store it in long-term memory. Organisation of information enables a learner to remember the information easily. Information that has been organised into smaller units and that has been linked to other information in related units will assist the learner to remember the information in the related unit. New information is meaningful if the learner is able to relate it to existing information. Important factors that facilitate the retention of information are: recognition, rehearsal, organisation, meaningfulness, activity and attention (Mwamwenda, 2004: 212 – 2013, 2014).

Erbay (2013: 423) explains that attention is a person's conscious skill to focus his or her attention on a specific issue, ignoring all internal and external disturbances. It (attention) is

19

the process of selecting important information for further processing (Mwamwenda, 2004: 214). Erbay clarifies that learners can perceive and make sense of surrounding events by means of attention skills. The abilities of the learners to direct their attention contribute to their knowledge levels Erbay (2013: 427) and is an important aspect in concept development (Vygotsky, 1978:33). Dednam (2005: 138) emphasises the importance of developing language etiquette during the listening and speaking sessions.

The teacher must encourage the learners to listen at all times and to give attention while others are speaking. Mwamwenda (2004: 214) states that the following external factors influence attention: the intensity of a stimulus, for example a loud noise or bright colours; an unusual item or event; a change in teaching approach, directing the learners' attention to certain information. The following internal factors influence attention: interest in the activities will draw a learners' attention, unsatisfied physical and social needs of the learner will have a negative impact on the level of attention of a learner as well as fatigue. The attention of learners will also be aroused if they are curious about the information, if they are allowed to explore and to manipulate objects in order to gain information. Levey (2011: 6) advises teachers to shorten instructions, repeat the instructions and allow learners to repeat the instructions in order to make sure that learners understand the instructions.

2.3.3.2 Perceptual skills

The role of perception in the classroom is of paramount importance (Carter & Diaz, 1971: 43). They explain that the term perception refers to the reception, interpretation and integration of visual, auditory, tactual and kinaesthetic stimuli. A dysfunction in any of these areas may have negative effects on formal learning. Sekuler and Blake (2002: 15) state that perception involves a sequence of interrelated events that mutually influence each other. Dednam (2005: 370) emphasises that visual, auditory and tactual-kinaesthetic perceptions are the most crucial perceptions that enable adequate scholastic performance. According to Forgus and Melamed (1976: 1 -3), the learner gains knowledge by extracting information from the environment when the learners senses are stimulated. Learning, memory and thinking play an important role in perceptual development and enables the learner to extract more information from the environment. Joubert (2013: 140) advises teachers to support learners with perceptual development barriers by guiding them to use their senses optimally during perceptual development activities in order to ensure that messages going to their brains are interpreted correctly (Joubert, 2013: 140).

a) Visual perception

Visual perception is used to distinguish objects from their backgrounds and to discriminate objects from one another. Visual perception helps a person to recognise objects and determines how a person interacts with the object (Sekuler & Blake, 2002: 217, 219). Carter and Diaz (1971:43) explain that knowledge through print is acquired through visual perception. The ability to interpret pictures is an important skill as it will assist learners to develop reading skills. Learners with visual perception barriers may therefore experience learning barriers. Dednam (2005: 370) emphasises the importance of the following visual perceptions that enable learners to master their schoolwork: visual discrimination, form consistency, visual closure, visual analysis and synthesis, visual sequence, spatial orientation, visual figure-ground perception and visual memory.

Cosford (1982: 43) states that visual discrimination is the ability to see details that make one object or symbol different from the other for example 'l' and 'j' or 'come' and 'came'. Grové and Hauptfleish (1981: 2) explain that a learner who struggles with visual discrimination will find it difficult to distinguish between different forms and will consequently find it difficult to read as form perception is the basis of reading. Dednam (2005: 370) postulates that visual discrimination enables learners to differentiate between symbols and words that almost look alike. Visual discrimination will also assist learners to identify to distinguish between different colours. The findings of a research conducted by Woodrome and Johnson (2007: 128) suggest a significant association between visual discrimination and letter identification.

Dednam (2005: 370) explains that form consistency is the ability to identify objects on the basis of their form and enables learners to identify words on sight without confusing the words with those words that look alike. Dednam states that visual closure is the ability to identify a word even if the learner cannot see the whole word and explains that this ability enhances speed. Visual analysis and synthesis enable the learner to analyse words into sounds and to synthesise sounds into meaningful words (Dednam, 2005: 370).

Visual sequencing is the ability to see the order of objects or letters for example "was" and "saw". Poor visual sequencing will affect spelling because the learner will not be able to write a word from memory since the learner will be unable to remember the correct order of letters in words (Cosford, 1982: 44).

Visual figure-ground perception is the ability to distinguish objects in the foreground from objects in the background in order to determine a meaningful whole (Grové & Hauptfleisch, 1981: 8). The discriminatory approach of colouring in pictures by using different colours to

identify and highlight different shapes in a picture of overlapping shapes will assist learners in distinguishing the important information from the unimportant information (figure-ground visual discrimination) (Sekuler & Blake, 2002: 303). Learners who experience barriers with visual figure-ground perception will lose their place when reading and will have difficulty copying work from the board as the learner will be unable to concentrate on the word that must be copied but will be distracted by the other surrounding words (Cosford, 1982: 45 – 46).

The use of colour in pictures will support learners with visual figure-ground perception as it will assist them to identify objects in the background of a picture (Sekuler & Blake, 2002: 303). Joubert (2013: 187) recommends that teachers ask questions relating to the picture in order to teach learners to distinguish the important objects in the pictures. Learners who experience barriers with visual figure-ground perception will often lose their place when reading and will have difficulty copying work from the board as the learner will be able to concentrate on the word that must be copied but will be distracted by the other surrounding words (Cosford, 1982: 45 – 46).

Visual memory is defined as the ability to remember exactly what something looks like even though it is not in front of you. It is an important skill as learners with poor visual memory will have difficulty in learning to write because they cannot remember what the letters look like. They will also have problems with spelling because they cannot remember what the words look like (Cosford, 1982: 43).

b) Auditory perception

Priyadarshi, Goswami and Sen (2012:168) describe auditory perception as the ability to identify, organise and interpret information received through the auditory senses. Auditory perception skills impact the abilities of the learners to benefit from instructions, follow directions and participate in class discussions. Zhang and McBride-Chang (2010: 332) argue that poor auditory perception results in reading problems due to difficulties with phonological awareness. The following auditory perceptions are important for literacy development: auditory discrimination, auditory analysis, auditory memory as well as sound symbol association (Dednam, 2005: 370 – 371).

Auditory discrimination is the ability to hear similarities and differences between sounds. Learners experience problems with auditory discrimination find it difficult to discriminate between sounds of the five vowels such as the short 'I' sound and the short 'e' sound and between words such as "pat" and "pet". Dednam emphasises that learners with auditory

discrimination difficulties find it difficult to distinguish between sounds such as "b" and "d", "m" and "n" and words like "brown" and **"drown"** (Dednam, 2005: 371). Cosford (1982: 22) postulates that learners who experience auditory discrimination barriers will also find it difficult to identify words that rhyme. Grové and Hauptfleish (1981: 5) add that learners with auditory discrimination barriers will find it difficult to discriminate between sounds and words that are more or less similar, for example "k" and "t", "m" and "n", "b" and "h", "was" and "vase" as well as "back" and "bag". They may not be able to beat rhythmic patterns and divide words into syllables.

Auditory analysis and synthesis is the ability to analyse spoken words into sounds and to synthesise them into words again (Dedam, 2005: 371). Zhang and Mcbride-Chang (2010: 323), argue that problems with phonological awareness are related to speech sounds due to difficulties in synthesising speech sounds as in the rhyming word "bat".

Auditory memory is the ability to remember what the ears have heard (Grové & Hauptfleish, 1981: 6) and impacts the ability to remember the sounds of letters in the correct order when reading or spelling. Learners with this problem find it difficult to remember information they have heard (Dednam, 2005: 371). Grové and Hauptfleish (1981: 6) explain that learners with auditory memory barriers find it difficult to carry out instructions, tell a story they have heard, and to answer questions on stories.

Sound symbol association is also an important skill in both reading and writing since it enables learners to remember the sounds that belongs to the letters of the alphabet (Cosford, 1982: 23).

Auditory figure-ground identification is the ability to give attention to a specific conversation while others are involved in other conversations in the same room. Learners who experience problems with auditory figure-ground identification have problems to hear specific important information. They tend to listen to outside noises while the teacher explains a concept (Dednam, 2005: 371).

Auditory closure relies on the knowledge of the language structure and vocabulary of the learners as a learner who does not hear every word in a conversation will be unable to understand what has been said.

2.3.3.3 Perceptual-motor development

Perceptual motor skills refer to movement activities that involve the perceptual skills of the learners (Cosford, 1982: 71). Motor development influences intellectual, social and emotional development as it promotes the skilful execution of movement activities. These abilities in turn enhance the development of self-concept and self-confidence.

The gross motor muscles develop in the arms and legs and develop ahead of fine motor muscles (Mwamwenda, 2004: 45). According to Grové and Hauptfleisch (1981: 26), accurate movement and control over the muscles are necessary for all intellectual functions. Laszlo and Bairstow (1985: 5) postulate that body movement activities will improve motor control and will assist learners to develop the correct posture to support written activities (Laszlo & Bairstow, 1985: 5). Towle (1978: 375) explains that a comfortable writing position is important for effective writing skills. A learner must sit on a comfortable chair and at the table height must also be comfortable. The learner's feet must be flat on the floor, the forearms on the table surface with the non-writing hand holding the page at the top. The page should be tilted at an angle approximately sixty degrees from vertical (to the left for right-handed learners and to the right for left-handed learners). Learners whose gross motor muscles have not been developed properly yet will consequently experience problems with correct writing.

Fine motor muscles are used to control the hands and fingers (Mwamwenda (2004: 45). Fine motor co-ordination involves finer and more complex movements that are executed by using the hands, fingers and wrist muscles (Joubert, 2013: 186). Laszlo and Bairstow (1985: 173) emphasises the importance to development the fine motor muscles since it will assist the learners with the correct pencil grip and the correct movement when writing the letters. The correct pencil grip will enhance the handwriting skills of the learners (Browne, 1996: 101). Mwamwenda (2004: 52) states that many learners experience difficulty in writing in their first two years of formal education, due to the fact that their fine motor muscles have not been developed properly yet, as writing involves hand-eye co-ordination. Joubert (2013: 187) postulates that eye-hand co-ordination is the ability to execute movements with the hands that are led by the eyes. (Grové & Hauptfleish, 1981: 7) emphasises the importance of eye-hand co-ordination skills since learners with poor eye-hand co-ordination will also find it difficult to copy words from the writing board and will struggle to write properly. Browne (1996: 101) advises that beginning writers should use print script to support handwriting development. According to Joubert (2013: 188 – 189) a comfortable writing position is important during written activities. The position of the arms, elbows, hand, wrist, fingers and writing tool must ensure the maximum coordination of the moving parts. The way in which the writing tool is held plays an important role in learning to write and developing a good

writing style. Annandale (2013: 1) recommends the dynamic, tripod pencil grip and explains that it is the preferred grip because it allows the learner to write quickly and fluently and it requires tiny movements of the hand muscles.

Body movement activities will also improve the body image of the learners. According to Cosford (1982: 74), body image refers to the awareness of a person's body and the movement of the body. Grové and Hauptfleisch (1981: 18) state that a learner must be aware of his / her body own body movements, the two sides of the body and he / she must also be able to distinguish between left and right and understand the concepts: in, out, top, bottom, front and back. Grové and Hauptfleisch explain that learners who experience problems with body image, are often clumsy, confuse letter certain letters of the alphabet such as "b" and 'd' as well as words such as 'tap' and 'pat' and will write the letters and words back to front. Grové and Hauptfleisch add that laterality is an inner awareness of left and right, which underlies all horizontal movements and positions of the body. An inner awareness of left and right enables a person to detect left and right outside his / her body. This ability, as well as eye movements from left to right support reading. Furthermore, learners with body image problems will also find it difficult to cross the midline with any purposeful movement. A right-handed learner will for example write only on the right side of the page or move the page to the right and work only from the midline. Left-handed learners will twist their bodies into a position that will enable them to continue from the midline to the right side. Awareness of the body image may assist learners to distinguish between left and right as well as top and bottom (Grové & Hauptfleish, 1981: 18).

The following activities are recommended to improve the gross motor co-ordination of the learners: throwing a ball into a basket; hitting a suspended ball with a bat (Laszlo and Bairstow, 1985: 180 – 183), balancing by standing on the preferred leg, walking forward on a balancing beam, jumping up and down as well as catching a bounded ball with both hands (Zelaznik & Goffman, 2012: 387). Laszlo and Bairstow (1985: 173) state that activities that involve learners in moving such as crawling over and under apparatus are also important as it help learners to concentrate.

The development the fine motor co-ordination may be supported by involving the learners in the following activities: pegboard tasks that involve the placing of round, square or hexagonal pegs in holes; connecting dots with straight lines as well as the handling of nuts and bolts (Laszlo & Bairstow, 1985: 5, 173). The threading of beads, tracing, modelling with clay or dough, finger painting and cutting out pictures from old magazines will develop the fine motor co-ordination of the learners (Grové & Hauptfleisch, 1981: 68 – 69).

The following exercises may improve the awareness of a learner's body image include: touching different parts of the body with closed eyes, touching one body part with another body part, indicating body parts on dolls, tracing the outline of another learner's body while lying on a large piece of paper, join parts (puzzle) to form a human figure, following instructions to hop on left or right leg and to walk in different directions (Grové & Hauptfleisch, 1981: 68 – 69).

Activities that involve body movement will improve motor development and control and will assist learners to develop the correct posture to support written activities (Laszlo & Bairstow, 1985: 5, 173). What this is showing is that perceptual skills are interdependent and assist the development of the whole child. That is why it is important to include a variety of activities in the literacy programme. This can strengthen the programme – encompassing all the skills for the holistic development of the child.

2.3.3.4 The home language of the learners

Many learners who are taught through the medium of English, which is not their home language, are limited in their English proficiency (Nel, 2005: 150). Cameron (2003: 107) explains that young learners whose language of learning and teaching is not the same as their home language, experience challenges with the meaning of words and sentences. Dednam (2011: 129-131) emphasises that the learners whose home language differ from their language of learning and teaching (LOLT) may have a language backlog which might result in emotional and social difficulties, since they may not be able to use language adequately and may find it difficult to understand what others are saying. Dednam adds that this may lead to anxiety, emotional insecurity and a lack of motivation. In addition, these learners may: seem shy when they have to communicate in class, develop a low self-esteem and distance themselves from the learning situation, the teacher and their peers, which further hampers their language use and development.

According to Nel (2005: 151-152) the phonological and linguistic demand of the home language and English differ. This causes emotional and social difficulties since the learners are unable to use the language skills that they have acquired. These learners develop non-verbal communication strategies and just shrug or drop their heads when they are asked to respond to questions and to contribute to class discussion (Nel, 2005: 151-152). Dednam (2011: 151) emphasises the importance of the learners' vocabulary and comprehension skills and explains that inadequate vocabulary and comprehension skills might contribute to the inability to identify words on sight.

2.3.3.5 Grade R education

According to Harty and Alant (2011: 88 89) the Constitution of South Africa (Bill of Rights 1996), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1999), the Pan-African Forum for Children's African common position, as well as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1997) address the issues related to early childhood development, education and intervention. Apart from the South African Education Department, more than thirty other departments have developed specific policies, laws and programmes in recognition of the need to focus on early childhood development. In terms of the Education White Paper 5 on early childhood development (South Africa. Department of Education, 2001: 27 - 28), reception year education has been universalised. The Department of Education explains that provision of reception year education changed from a system that was seventy-five percent privately funded to a system that is seventy-five percent publicly funded. Early childhood education provides opportunities to young children to master different skills through active participation and can play a crucial role in addressing issues that will prevent learners at risk from developing learning barriers (Harty & Alant, 2011: 90). Early childhood education can play an important role in developing the school readiness of learners.

According to Prior, Bavin and Ong (2011: 4), school readiness is a multi-dimensional concept and covers a birth to five years development process. Two classes of child attributes are relevant to measure school readiness: cognitive capabilities and literacy skills such as language competence, familiarity with letters and sounds of words, attention and concentration capabilities; and personal attributes such as sociability, engagement with school and with peers, self-regulated behaviour, curiosity and the ability to persist in set tasks. Prior, Bavin and Ong emphasise that school readiness is important since children's capabilities at school entry correlate significantly with later skills. Quirk, Furlong, Lilles, Felix and Chin (2011: 80) postulate that a growing body of research categorised the elements of school readiness into the following readiness areas: cognitive, social-emotional and behavioural as well as physical. They add that children who have a broad base of school readiness experiences have been found to acquire complex skills more rapidly than those who do not have them.

Cognitive readiness has been found to be a predictor of later academic achievement. Children with low emotional regulation abilities are less productive and have difficulty learning in the classroom environment. Physical readiness refers to the general health and well-being of a learner at school entry and the physical environment a child may be exposed to during the pre-school years. A child's physical readiness for school, strongly affects a

learner's cognitive, social-emotional and behavioural readiness (Quirk, Furlong, Lilles, Felix & Chin, 2011: 81).

The Department of Basic Education (2011: 20 – 21) states that the Grade R daily programme provides opportunities for learners to develop perceptual-motor skills, which may promote the development of their gross- and fine motor co-ordination that may promote the use of a pair of scissors, their abilities to manipulate a writing tool and to use a page appropriately. Further, the Grade R daily programme promotes the incidental development of the learners' literacy skills through sound and word games for example "I spy with my little eye". These games may support the development of the social skills of the learners. Grade R education may assist learners to become au fait with classroom routines and to focus on educational activities for reasonable periods which may support learners to develop the required literacy skills at the end of Grade R (South Africa. Department of Basic Education, 2011: 20 – 21).

According to the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) learners are expected to acquire the following skills at the end of Grade R: talk about common experiences in pictures, participate in action songs and rhymes, recognise initial consonants and vowels of common words, copy short sentences and words written by the teacher, write from left to right and from the top to the bottom of a page and to draw pictures to convey a message about a personal experience and to use it as a starting point for writing (South Africa. Department of Basic Education, 2011: 49 - 52).

2.3.3.6 Gender

According to Mwamwenda (2004:261) both biological and environmental factors play a role in gender differences. Children's perceptions of themselves are determined by the expectations, treatment and interactions with the world outside the school. Children become aware of what is expected of them as boys and girls through these expectations, treatment and interactions (Browne, 1996: 167). Below and Skinner (2010: 241) claim physiological-maturational and cultural-societal factors may be related to male deficits in reading skills. Researchers investigating physiological-maturational theories found that males tend to perform better on tasks requiring simultaneous processing and worse on tasks involving sequential processing. Simultaneous processing refers to the ability to integrate parts of information into a meaningful whole and sequential processing is the ability to process information in sequence. Below and Skinner (2010: 241) explain that although both types of processing may affect learners ability to learn and perform, sequentially orientated word-attack skills, are critical to pre-reading skills.

Browne (1996: 169, 172 -173) informs that research studies found that emergent literacy skills development may be influenced by gender differences. Boys seem to be better at listening and speaking activities while girls are better with emergent reading and writing activities. Mwamwenda (2004: 262) explains that studies have shown that girls perform better than boys in reading, spelling and languages. Research studies conducted on a comparison of school readiness scores by de Lemos (2008: 88) and on gender differences by Below and Skinner (2010: 251) found that girls enter school with stronger emergent reading skills than boys. Browne (1969: 172) states that girls seem to find books more interesting than boys and learn to read more quickly than boys. Browne adds that girls and boys interest in reading are affected by the models of adult readers they see and that women read more fiction while men tend to read more information texts. Browne (1969: 173) informs that research has also revealed that boys and girls hold very different attitudes towards writing. Girls often enjoy imaginative and personal writing, while boys feel less competent at writing and prefer factual and technical writing. According to Browne (1969: 173) these views are not genetic but are created by the institutional and societal examples that children see around them.

Below and Skinner states that other researchers suggest that gender differences in reading skills are influenced by environmental or cultural/societal causes for example teachers may hold higher expectations for females during reading activities. Interest and motivation may also contribute to reading deficits in males. Although boys prefer non-fiction and informational material that provides fact over fictional materials, fictional reading is typically used during elementary school reading instruction (Below & Skinner, 2010: 241).

Browne (1969: 170 - 173) recommends a careful selection of themes, resources and activities for oral activities in order to ensure that gender differences are not reinforced. Organisational strategies such as allocating learners to non-stereotype roles during oral activities for example a boy as a scribe and a girl as the group leader, may support boys to be better listeners and will develop the confidence of girls during oral presentations. Browne advises that a greater balance between fiction and non-fiction may enhance the reading achievements of boys and girls, since it may support the learners in their least preferred choices of reading material.

2.3.3.7 The age of a learner

Grové and Hauptfleisch (1981: 9 – 10) postulate that school maturity refers to a biological growing process in the development of children when certain aptitudes appear before the start of formal schooling. This involves physical and mental security and is a biological

process that cannot be hastened. They explain that maturation is the stage when children are ready for formal instruction in reading, writing and mathematics and is usually reached by children at about the age of six. Grové and Hauptfleisch add that intellectual maturity, however, is not a guarantee for success at school, because children who are intellectually mature may not be school ready if they do not feel secure. They emphasize that these children may not be able to realize their potential (Grové & Hauptfleisch, 1981: 9 – 10).

According to de Lemos (2008: 73 – 74) children all over the world start school at about the age of five or six years. Children are seen as being ready to take on more responsible tasks and to be capable of more formal learning at this age. de Lemos explains that most children learn to read between the ages of five to seven and adds that while the ability to read is dependent on a number of underlying skills that is linked with development, the acquisition of reading is in most cases not achieved without formal instruction in reading. Thus, both development and learning are necessary in achieving reading skills. According to Crone and Whitehurst (1999: 604) school readiness influences learners' responses to academic instruction, mastery of skills and performance relative to classmates.

Crone and Whitehurst (1999: 604) informs that research studies conducted on school and reading readiness found that age at school entry is one of the indicators of school readiness. The policy on the admission age of learners to schools results in a group of learners being almost a year younger than their classmates. The studies conducted on differences between the youngest and oldest learners in a grade, found that the younger learners are more likely to experience emotional difficulties, be labelled with a learning disability or be retained in a grade (Crone & Whitehurst, 1999: 604). In addition Crone and Whitehurst (1999: 608 – 609) found that older children outperformed their younger classmates in emergent literacy skills at the end of Kindergarten. By the end of the first grade, the differences in literacy skills between the oldest and the youngest learners disappeared statistically and reversed in direction. The results of a study conducted by de Lemos (2008: 88) on school readiness across different cultures and language groups found that differences in the school readiness scores are higher at the younger age levels than the older age levels in most of the cultural groups. Younger learners, however, outperformed the older group in Hong Kong and indicated that schooling overcame the effect of age.

2.3.3.8 Socio-economic factors

The amount of money, time, and energy that parents spend on educational resources are considered investments that have the potential to enhance children's cognitive and language skills (Hartas, 2011: 894).

Prinsloo (2005: 28) states that education in low socio-economic communities of South Africa is hampered due to a non-stimulating environment, insecurity, language deficiency and poor orientation towards school. Dednam (2005: 128) explains that socio-economic factors that contribute to literacy barriers are poor nutrition, deprivation due to poverty, alcohol and drug abuse, as well as neglect.

According to Irwin, Moore, Lauren, Tornatore and Fowler (2012: 21 - 22) learners from low socio-economic communities often enter school with limited knowledge of vocabulary. They explain that vocabulary knowledge is an important skill as learners with limited vocabulary will experience problems with the identification of words when reading. The findings of a research conducted by Parsons and Schoon (2011: 212) suggest that children with poor language development grew up in a family environment characterised by reduced levels of material and human resources. In addition the findings suggest that parents of poor readers may be less likely to have an extended education, but they can be encouraged to be interested in their child's education, as well as their own, with family learning programmes. A research study conducted by Hartas (2011: 907) found that the educational qualifications of parents are important aspects in the literacy skills of learners. Learners with educated parents were on average six months ahead with literacy compared to their peers whose parents did not have any educational qualifications.

Tompkins (2010: 29) states that parents play a crucial role in assisting their children to become successful readers and writers by participating actively in read aloud activities and modelling reading behaviour. Home-literacy activities promote children's academic success. In middle class communities, parents are enthusiastic to support their children with literacy activities at home whereas there is little or no support from parents in the low socio-economic communities. Tompkins encourages teachers to reach out to parents in new ways if parents did not respond positively to invitations to parent-teacher meetings. She adds that teachers should conduct curriculum nights and hold learner-student reading and writing workshops. Tompkins (2010: 29) advises teachers to allow the parents to ask questions, to share their insights about their children and provide clear direction how to read aloud to their children and how to respond to their children's writing. Harty and Alant (2011: 94) encourage schools to organise parent support groups since it could provide opportunities for parents to discuss common problems. In addition they advise schools to arrange workshops, for example, on parenting skills to encourage parent involvement. Furthermore, schools should arrange meetings with psychologists for parents who need support in dealing with issues (Harty & Alant, 2011: 94).

2.3.3.9 Environmental factors

The environment of the learners is an important factor in language development, which in turn will enhance their literacy skills, since language is learnt through interaction with others (Mwamwenda, 2004: 149). Learners use language to learn, communicate and to share their experiences with others (Tompkins, 2010:8). An understanding relationship between the teacher and learners as well as a stimulating classroom environment will also enhance literacy development (Landsberg, 2005: 69 - 70).

The physical literacy environment refers to the design, arrangements and display of various literature material. It includes the availability of a classroom library with a variety of genres, dramatic play area, block center, the science table as well as a print-rich classroom. A print-rich classroom includes posters, signs, teacher and learner writing samples that are related to the classroom theme (Guo, Justice, Kaderavek & McGinty, 2012: 310).

It is the responsibility of the teacher to create a learning environment and facilitate understanding between the learners and the teacher as well as among learners and to co-ordinate interactions in the learning environment. The teacher should create a classroom environment which is rich in opportunities for the learners in order to attribute meaning to what they learn (Landsberg, 2005: 69 - 70). Tompkins (2010: 28) advises teachers to monitor the progress of learners to ensure that they are progressing at the expected pace in reading and writing in order to support learners who are not progressing appropriately. Joubert (2013: 22) encourages teacher to acquire and implement teaching and learning strategies and methods that will support learners to achieve the outcomes of the classroom activities.

Classroom arrangements should make provision for appropriate space for learners during whole class activities, small groups and individual activities. The teacher should encourage productive learner involvement by arranging learners in class activities that promote effective teacher- learner interactions (Denver school, 2013: 2). Effective classroom management is an important aspect in a literacy rich classroom. Research demonstrates that effective literacy teachers make their behavioural expectations clear for all literacy activities by teaching, facilitating and strengthening appropriate classroom behaviour through consistent reinforcement and feedback (Ball & Gettinger, 2009: 193). Joubert (2013: 24 -25) explain that it is important for teachers to ensure that learners pay attention at all times. Joubert advises teachers to call overeager learners to attention during class activities in order to give other learners a chance to participate.

Guo, Justice, Kaderavek and McGinty (2012: 310) state that the psychological literacy environment refers to how the teacher interacts with learners to support their literacy development during classroom activities. The teacher should provide a positive and supportive learning environment, characterised by frequent conversations, modelling of complex concepts and explicit discussions of literacy terms and uses in order to create a psychologically rich literacy environment. According to Ball and Gettinger (2009: 192) a teacher's choice of literacy tools and activities influences the way in which learners learn. Ball and Gettinger (2009: 193) advises teachers to explain to learners what is expected of them when she introduces class activities and how they should behave during activities (Ball & Gettinger, 2009: 193).

2.4 Literacy Support

Differentiated learning and teaching strategies to support learners who experience learning barriers are important in an inclusive education classroom. According to the Education White Paper 6 Special Needs Education (South Africa. Department of Education, 2001: 24), all children have the ability to learn within the education system. Early identification of learners, who experience barriers to learning, is important within an inclusive education environment, in order to provide support to learners who experience barriers.

According to Landsberg (2005: 66-67), mainstream schools must provide support for learners who are in need of low intensity support. Learning support in the mainstream school must form part of the day to day classroom practice. The Department of Education requires districts to establish district-based support teams in order to provide support to teachers with the implementation of inclusive education. Mainstream schools should be provided with a learning support teacher to assist teachers with the provision of learning support. The learning support teacher must also assist schools with the establishment of an Institutional Level Support Team (ILST) that will be responsible to support teachers to address the learning barriers of specific learners.

Center (2005: 19) advises an inter-active balanced approach to literacy to support learners who experience literacy barriers. Listening to stories is important in order to support the development of the listening comprehension of the learners. Tompkins (2010: 20) advises teachers to include read aloud sessions in the literacy programme in order to model fluent reading and reading with expression in order to capture the attention of the learners. The involvement of learners in the dramatization of stories and role-play activities, facilitate their active participation and could result in effective relationship building (Joubert, 2013: 81, 84).

According to Irwin, Moore, Lauren, Tornatore and Fowler (2012: 21 - 22) stories from big books with large print during story reading will draw learners' attention to print. They recommend that learners need to learn two to three new words a day in order to develop their literacy skills. They explain that books are the richest source of diverse literacy and advise that story time be utilized to help learners to develop a rich expressive vocabulary. According to Lockett and Jones (2009: 177) research indicates that learners engaged in story-telling show improvements in their cognitive abilities and are able to enhance their vocabulary and oral skills through sharing stories. Learners who frequently listen to stories display greater attention spans and listening skills and have stronger writing skills.

Joubert (2013: 59, 44) postulates that listening games will promote the development of the listening skills of the learners. The inclusion of games in the literacy programme will enable learners to learn in a playful manner. Grové and Hauptfleisch (1981: 104) recommends that games with word cards will allow opportunities for learners to play in groups. Listening games may improve the abilities of the learners to carry out instructions and to convey a message. This could enable them retell a story they have heard, and to answer questions on stories, which may improve their listening comprehension skills (Grové & Hauptfleish, 1981: 6). In addition, learners learn the rules of the games at the same time, which support the development of self-control (Vygotsky, 1978: 99). Mwamwenda (2004: 53) explains that the inclusion of games may assist in developing acceptable social behaviour since it will encourage learners to interact with others, understand the feelings of others and to establish open communication with others. Furthermore, it may assist the learner to feel happy and to develop self-confidence.

Dednam (2005: 370) recommends that learners must also be involved in visual perception activities, since it will assist learners to extract information from the environment (Forgus & Melamed, 1976: 1). This may support learners to identify, organise and interpret observed objects. The teacher must allow them the opportunities to identify and differentiate between different objects in order to enable them to identify different sight words without confusing words that look alike. Activities that involve learners with the sequencing of pictures of a story, that they have listened to, will assist with visual discrimination. Visual discrimination enables learners to differentiate between symbols and words and will enhance the ability to distinguish between words that look alike (Dednam, 2005: 370). Dednam (2011: 140 - 141) states that the involvement of the learners in picture and word games that relate to the stories that were read, will create opportunities for learners to sort pictures as well as sound or word cards that may improve the visual discrimination of the learners. Learners must also be engaged in activities that allow them to match word cards with objects in the class or on picture cards. Activities with a variety of pictures or sounds on a page will allow learners

opportunities to identify the pictures or sounds that look the same as the first picture or sound in order to develop phonemic awareness. Learners must also be engaged in activities that allow them to identify specific objects in the background of a picture on worksheets in order to improve their visual figure-ground perception. Visual figure-ground perception will assist learners to distinguish between objects in the foreground and objects in the background (Grové & Hauptfleisch, 1978: 8). According to Sekuler & Blake (2002: 303) the use of different colours to identify and highlight different shapes in a picture of overlapping shapes will assist learners to distinguish the important shapes from the unimportant shapes. Questions relating to the pictures can be used to teach learners to make these distinctions (Joubert, 2013: 187). Visual figure-ground perception is an important skill as it will assist learners to read books without losing the place on the page (Dednam, 2005:370).

Diehl (2011: 199) explains that learners who experience literacy barriers must be supported by means of a holistic approach that include: phonological awareness, vocabulary, reading comprehension and writing. Joubert (2013: 104) advises teachers to guide learners to develop the learning styles that they don't normally prefer in order to support active participation in all the activities in the literacy programme. The use of concrete apparatus is also important to support learners who experience literacy barriers. Continuous assessment of learners' progress is also important in order to scaffold them to the next level by building on their prior knowledge. Scaffolding is a learning process, whereby learners are assisted to get to the next level of understanding by the teacher or a peer (Powell & Kalina, 2009: 244).

Learners must also be allowed to draw their experiences, since drawing is an important emergent literacy skill and it allows learners to express their ideas and concepts about the world (Levey, 2011:8 - 9). Owocki (1999: 21 – 22) advises teachers to provide a scaffold as learners talk about their drawings by asking questions and by expanding on what the learners are saying. Bruner's learning theory in Mwamwenda (2004: 192) refers to this approach as discovery learning, whereby a simple object (picture) is used to ask questions in order to elicit responses from learners and enabling them to discover new information or insight

2.4.1 A balanced approach to literacy

Center (2005: 7 - 8) recommends a balanced approach to reading in order to develop the literacy of the learners. Center states that a balanced approach to reading involves the skills approach, which involves the explicit instruction of sound and symbol association, as well as the comprehension of the written word. Center emphasises the importance to teach the two

processes in balance in order to ensure that learners understand and enjoy the reading text. Center recommends a print-rich classroom to create an interest in reading and writing.

Center (2005: 19 - 21) explains that the vocabulary of learners can be improved during the shared reading lesson with a focus on word directed activities. This will assist the learners to acquire a basic sight vocabulary. The development of listening comprehension during story time is also important as it helps learners to connect speech and print and advises teachers to read stories from big books with large print and pictures. The teacher must also generate interest during story telling by involving learners in the discussions of the pictures and events in the stories. Irwin, Moore, Tornatore and Fowler (2012: 22) advised teachers to explain the meaning of new words in order to improve the vocabulary of the learners. The new words must also be repeated several times in a book, it is therefore important for teachers to select books for storytelling that allow for repetition of words. The learners can act out the verbs in the stories. They should also be encouraged to relate the new words to situations in their lives. The use of the new words in different context is also recommended (Irwin, Moore, Tornatore & Fowler, 2012: 22).

2.5 Language development

Language is a multidimensional and open system in which humans communicate their thoughts to others who understand them. Paralinguistics and linguistics are the two basic means of communication. Paralinguistics includes facial expression, gestures, body posture and intonation and it plays an important role in the comprehension of language. Linguistics is the utterances of words and sentences. Communication can also take place through written language and includes reading and writing (Dednam, 2005: 119-120). Students use language to learn, communicate and to share their experiences with others (Tompkins, 2010:8).

2.5.1 The spoken language

Speech is the ability to utter meaningful sounds which involves the movement of the lips, tongue and jaw. Learners must be able to understand the spoken language in order to develop the skills needed in all academic areas (Levey, 2011: 2 - 3). Learners are able to make meaning of a series of speech sounds and to reconstruct them into words and sentences, if the language is familiar. This information is stored and recalled at a later stage. The following cognitive functions are used to store and recall this information: grouping, differentiation, generalisation and association (Dednam 2007: 119-120).

Spoken language competence involves semantic knowledge, phonological knowledge and grammar knowledge. It is important for a person to understand the meaning of words in order to understand what someone is saying (Byrnes & Wasik, 2009: 95). Byrnes and Wasik (2009: 950) explain that the matching process involves the following: the person hears a word, recognises it and takes action.

Dednam (2005: 120 – 121) states that metacognition is the awareness about a person's own thinking processes as well as the ability to apply this knowledge to monitor and control cognitive processes. Dednam adds that this ability enables learning and the evaluation of the quality of learning. In addition, metacognition is involved in the spoken language, reading and written language. The foundation phase learners' metacognition knowledge grows as they learn about reading and writing processes and strategies that the readers and writers use (Dednam 2005: 120-121).

Receptive language is the ability to understand the spoken language and consists of a learner's listening skills. It involves the ability to understand the teacher's directions, instructions and explanations. Receptive language enables learners to remember details of stories. Good receptive language skills allow the learners to understand words, sentences and stories. Learners with receptive language difficulties often forget the earlier portion of directions, especially when the directions are lengthy (Levey, 2011:4). Research conducted by Florit, Roch, Altoè & Levorato (2009: 935 – 936) found that memory and basic language skills, which include verbal ability and vocabulary knowledge, contribute to listening comprehension. In addition, Florit, Roch, Altoè and Levorato (2009: 947), found that receptive language abilities are powerful predictors of listening comprehension. Levey (2011: 4) states that learners' receptive language are supported when the instructions are shorter or repeated or when the learners are asked to repeat the directions in order to make sure they understand the instructions.

Expressive language is the ability of the learners to express themselves in meaningful ways. It involves the sequencing of words when constructing sentences, as well as in longer conversations and stories. It also involves the ability of the speaker to speak about certain topics when communicating with others. The ability to participate in conversations is an important skill as it enhances positive social relations (Levey, 2011:6). The findings of a research conducted by Levey (2011: 7), indicate that some learners did not respond to questions due to the fact that they do not have the vocabulary knowledge to structure sentences in order to respond. Spoken language competence involves a desire to communicate with others, respect for others, to get along with others and to take turns to speak (Byrnes & Wasik, 2009: 39). Byrnes and Wasik (2009: 39) explain that spoken

language competence connects language abilities to social competence. Mwamwenda (2004: 53) explains that social competence is the ability of the school going child to relate to the authority of the teacher, follow school rules, make new friends, learn to get along with others as well as to develop an interest in the acquisition of knowledge in a formal and structured manner.

Researchers have argued that spoken language skills are important as learners who enter school with high levels of phonological, semantics and grammatical knowledge learn better than learners with lower levels of these forms of knowledge. These learners are also able to form positive social relationships and adapt to the demands of the classroom whereas socially incompetent learners do poorly at school and are at risk for a variety of problems later in life. Learners with high level social skills are more likely to engage in classroom activities and to comply with the verbal commands of their teachers (Byrnes & Wasik, 2009: 44).

Dednam (2005: 371) states that the reciting of rhymes will encourage learners to listen to the rhymes in order to identify rhyming words. Dednam adds that learners must also be encouraged to listen to words with alliteration and to repeat the words and identify the beginning sounds of the words that they have heard. According to Center (2005: 16) listening and oral comprehension activities will assist to develop learners' receptive language and expressive language as well as their reasoning. A research study by Florit, Roch, Altoè and Levorato (2009: 947), found that both receptive and expressive language abilities are powerful predictors of listening comprehension.

2.5.2 Reading

Center (2005: 7, 16) states that two basic processes are involved in reading: learning to decipher print and the understanding of the meaning of print. A balanced approach to reading instruction is when the process of deciphering words is combined with the comprehension of the written word. A balanced approach to reading involves the explicit instruction of sound-symbol association and comprehension. According to the CAPS (South Africa. Department of Basic Education, 2011: 51 – 56) the first term requirement for Grade one, in terms of sound-symbol association, states that learners should be able to identify at least two vowels and six consonants (South Africa. Department of Basic Education 2011: 51, 56).

2.5.3 The written language

Writing is an important component of language and is closely linked to reading and oral. It enables the writer to write the message logically so that the reader can understand. It

involves: syntactic and semantic, pragmatics and the use of capital letters and punctuation. It also involves the ability to spell words correctly. Handwriting is involved and it is to form letters and numbers with a writing instrument (Dednam, 2005: 127-128). A good command of a language will assist learners to understand the written language (Center, 2005: 8.)

2.5.4 Possible language problems and manifestation of problems

Learners who experience problems with receptive language are unable to follow the instructions of the teacher and constantly ask the teacher to repeat the instructions. Problems with expressive language manifest when learners experience problems to find the correct words to express themselves in order to be understood. The learners' speech are often interrupted by "uh… uh …uh" and refers to objects as "that thing" and their sentences are short (Levey, 2011:6).

Learners who experience emergent reading problems show little interest in the reading process or phonemes. They cannot remember phonemes due to perceptual problems and find it hard to discriminate between different sounds. These learners are not interested in letter-sound relations as they cannot discriminate between the letters visually or they cannot discriminate aurally between the sounds related to the letters.

Problems with the identification of sight words, to use internal and external clues in words are due to perceptual problems, attention deficit and memory problems. Problems with phoneme analysis refer to problems with vowels, consonants, blends, diagraphs and diphthongs. Learners, who experience problems with rhythm, also experience problems with structural analysis because they cannot identify the word syllables when singing songs. Learners who are experiencing problems with contextual clues concentrate on sounding out words, but do not know the content of the text as they do not understand what they are reading.

Reading problems result in inadequate vocabulary and comprehension skills and include the inability to identify words on sight as well as inference problems. Learners, who are unable to understand what they are reading, are unable to evaluate and appreciate the content (Dednam, 2005: 134-135).

Written Language problems: Dednam (2005: 134-135) explains that these learners keep their sentences as short as possible and give very little information to avoid making mistakes. They do not understand instructions due to limited vocabulary. These learners avoid discuss ions and find it hard to follow narratives. Their sentences are not logically ordered, are without depth and variety.

Linguistic problems: According to Dednam (2005: 134 – 135), problems with the spoken language cause the learners to use incorrect sentence construction, to write short sentences and to repeat basic, high frequency words.

The cause of inadequate spelling is due to problems with letter-sound relations. These learners write unknown words phonetically and ignore spelling rules.

Untidy handwriting: the line formation and size of letters are uneven, word and letter spacing are poor and their writing speed is very slow or fast. Slow writers tend to press very hard on their pencil while writing (Dednam, 2005: 136-138).

2.5.5 Support Strategies to Improve Language

Joubert (2013: 22 - 24) states that it is the responsibility of the teacher to acquire and implement teaching and learning strategies and methods in order to realise the outcomes of the classroom activities. Levey (2011: 6-7) recommends the following strategies to support learners with receptive problems, the teacher must shorten the instructions, repeat the instructions, allow learners to repeat the instructions and make sure that learners understand the instructions. Levey advised teachers to include a variety of activities that will improve listening skills. Learners with receptive language problems must be supported by making use of pictures when referring to objects and when introducing a topic. A text rich class is encouraged, with words displayed around the classroom. Some learners do not respond to questions due to the fact that they do not have the vocabulary knowledge to structure sentences in order to respond.

Vocabulary words should be taught in a specific context (Levey, 2011:7) in order to support learners with expressive language barriers. Lockett and Jones (2009: 177) advised teachers to involve learners in social interaction in order to create opportunities for language use. Joubert (2013: 75, 79) postulates that learners who frequently listen to stories, display greater attention spans and listening skills and have stronger writing skills. The involvement of the learners in speaking activities such as describing conversations, describing objects or pictures, conveying a message as well as the reciting of rhymes and singing of songs create opportunities for learners to use language which might improve their expressive language. Joubert advises teachers to support learners in smaller groups, as group work can create an environment in which learners can actively participate in the learning situation. Mixed ability group activities will provide opportunities for learners to work together and to learn from each other (Joubert, 2010: 26).

2.6 Constructivism as a theoretical framework

Given the fact that literacy is the focus of this study, the learning theory constructivism will be explored, to clarify how learners think and learn.

The two key constructivist theorists are Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. Constructivism focusses on the prior knowledge of learners in order to assist learners to construct new knowledge and involves learners in problem solving activities. Piaget's cognitive constructivist theory emphasises the construction of knowledge by the individual, whereas the emphases in Vygotsky's social constructivist theory is on the construction of concepts through social interaction. Assessment activities to determine the existing knowledge of learners are therefore important, as well as activities that allow learners to solve authentic problems (Powell & Kalina, 2009: 242). Powell & Kalina (2009: 249) recommends the use of both theories alternatively and interactively in the classroom.

Piaget's Cognitive Constructivist theory involves four different stages of development. As the individual goes through the different development stages their schemas are constructed through the process of assimilation and accommodation. When learners are confronted with new knowledge, they go through a state of disequilibrium while trying to make sense of the new information, until a state of equilibrium is reached. (Powell & Kalina, 2009: 242-243).

Mwamwenda (2004: 84) in reference to Piaget, states that maturational factors play an important role in the attainment of the different stages of development. The teacher must ensure that literacy activities are developmentally appropriate in order to ensure that learners comprehend what is being taught. The two stages of development involved in the Foundation Phase are the pre-operational stage and the concrete-operational stage. In the pre-operational stage the learner's ability to reason has not been developed yet. The learner uses objects, symbols or words to represent a real object in the immediate environment. Language development is important during the pre-operational phase as it enhances the learners' communication skills and allows learners to internalise words and actions. The teacher should therefore involve learners in activities that require them to use their imagination, to be creative, to draw and to express themselves vocally. In the concrete-operational stage, the learner is able to use concrete objects as evidence in the logical thinking process with logical thinking and reasoning as the learner also uses these abilities for assessing objects and situations and to draw conclusions. Activities planned for learners in the concrete-operational stage must allow learners the opportunities to actively manipulate concrete objects such as the use of sound cards to synthesize and analyse words. The learner is also able to draw conclusions on the basis of concrete objects. Learners must be

engaged in activities that allow them to categorise and compare concrete objects in order to search for solutions to problems that were posed to them (Mwamwenda, 2004: 87-90, 96). Piaget's cognitive constructivist theory incorporates the importance that each individual learner needs to learn at his or her own pace (Powell & Kalina, 2009: 243).

Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory incorporates social interaction, collaboration and the use of language in the development of critical thinking skills of the learners. Language usage in the classroom is the most important process in a social constructivist setting (Powell & Kalina, 2009: 243). Powel and Kalina (2009: 245) state that Vygotsky believed that language correlates to consciousness and that it in turn leads to a meaningful structure. Lindfors (2008: 52-53) explains that collaboration is an important factor in oral language development which contributes to the development of literacy. Lindfors further explains that literacy collaboration activities should be slightly ahead of the learner's development, but the learner must still be able to grasp the meaning of the work covered in the activity. Collaboration involves a partnership between an expert and a novice and requires the learner to be actively engaged in the activity while being supported by the more competent partner. Pelech and Pieper (2010: 13) advise teachers to employ differentiated instruction teaching strategies and explain that it integrates constructivist learning theory, learning styles and brain development in order to meet the unique needs of each learner.

One of the main aspects of Vygotsky's theory is the zone of proximal development (ZPD). It (ZPD) is a zone where a learner is assisted with a learning concept and is referred to as co-operative learning. Co-operative learning forms an important part in the creation of a social constructivist classroom (Powell & Kalina, 2009: 244). Pelech and Pieper explain that it provides opportunities for learners to assist one another by sharing their knowledge (Pelech & Pieper, 2010: 50). Vygotsky (1978: 89) states that the ZPD refers to the actual developmental level of a learner that can be determined through problem solving and the potential level of development that can be determined through problem solving under guidance or collaboration with more capable peers. Powell and Kalina (2009: 244) postulates that social constructivism includes scaffolding, which refers to the ZPD where learners are assisted to advance to the next level of understanding through social interaction. The existing knowledge of the learner plays an important role in the ZPD as the learner needs to connect new experiences with the existing knowledge.

Vygotsky (1978: 33-36) explains that practical activities, perception of objects, speech and the ability of the learners to direct their attention play important roles in the development of concepts. The ability of a learner to memorise plays an important role in the early stages of cognitive development. Pelech and Pieper (2010: 13) advises teachers to employ

differentiated teaching strategies, since it integrates constructivist learning theory, learning styles and brain development and will assist to meet the unique needs of each learner. Pelech and Pieper explains that integration refers to a set of strategies that the teacher employs during classroom activities in a diverse classroom. Activities that stimulate multiple senses of the learners should therefore be included in the literacy programme (Pelech & Pieper, 2010: 35). The inclusion of strategies that create opportunities for learners to explain, demonstrate, think, share and work with others are important aspects in the learning process (Pelech & Pieper, 2010: 49) The inclusion of games in the education programme develops the imagination of the learners. The learners learn the rules of the games at the same time, which supports the development of self-control (Vygotsky, 1978: 99). Picture card games and repetition in stories and rhymes will assist learners to memorise. The use of pictures in activities promotes a constructivist environment through the visual mode of teaching which supports knowledge retention (Pelech & Pieper, 2010: 95). Visual literacy is the ability to interpret, decode, understand and appreciate visual messages (Pelech & Pieper, 2010: 89 – 90). The ability to internalise external activities is important for the development of higher mental processes (Vygotsky, 1978: 38-50; 56-57). Pelech and Pieper (2010: 47) encourages teachers to engage learners in creating visual messages, for example drawing their experiences in order to create a constructivist environment through visual literacy. A creative, constructivist environment may encourage learners to work in groups, express their learning in different ways, learn through their senses and formulate new thinking patterns.

The goal of the constructivist method of learning and teaching is to create an atmosphere in which learners feel comfortable and that exposes learners to an inquiry method of teaching that will allow them to reach their full potential (Powell & Kalina, 2009: 249). An improvement in the learners' understanding of the language of learning and teaching will have a positive impact on the literacy performances of learners.

2.7 Conclusion

The literature review focused on literature related to my research area and to my research questions in particular. I discussed assessment and in particular, the WCED Grade one baseline assessment, literacy and language development as well as attention and perceptual development. The constructivist learning theory has also been explored.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the selected research design for this study and provides a description of how the research was conducted. The research design includes the aim, justification for the research, and the selected research methodologies. The research methodologies include sampling, data collection strategies and procedures as well as the procedures for presenting and interpreting the data. The validity of the research and the ethical considerations for the research are also considered in this chapter.

3.2 Research aim

The aim of this study was to observe the implementation of the Grade one baseline assessment literacy programme in order to collect data that will assist in identifying what literacy barriers, if any, the Grade one learners were experiencing, in order to improve their literacy skills.

3.3 Research question

The study attempted to answer the following research question:

How can the Grade one literacy baseline assessment results be used to address literacy barriers amongst Grade one learners?

The following sub-questions assisted in the aim to recommend learning support strategies for literacy:

1. What do the Grade one learners' literacy baseline assessment performances indicate about their emergent literacy skills?
2. What are the Grade one teacher's perceptions about the usefulness of the literacy baseline assessment instrument?
3. What learning support strategies can be recommended to address the literacy barriers (if any) identified by the baseline assessment?

3.4 Research design

3.4.1   Categories of research designs

A research design describes how a study was conducted and summarises the procedures for the study. The procedures include the methods of data collection that were used for the study and determines how the data should be analysed. The purpose of a research design is to generate empirical evidence in order to answer the research questions. Research designs are classified in three major categories: quantitative, qualitative and mixed-method. There are different types of research designs within each category, which are used to describe the design (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006: 22).

A quantitative research design involves collecting information about the variables in the study. Ideally, the researcher should choose an instrument that has established the reliability and validity that is needed and that will provide sufficient variability of scores. The researcher plans the procedures that will be used to collect the data and decides where, when and how the data will be collected. In quantitative research, statistics are used to describe the phenomena being studied in terms of patterns and frequencies. The statistical data may also be used to determine whether a relationship exists between two or more variables. The issue is the extent to which the calculated statistics accurately portray the actual relationship. Statistics guide the findings of a quantitative research study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:130 -135).

Qualitative research is inquiry in which researchers collect data by interacting with selected people in their natural settings. A qualitative approach to research is able to make meaningful contributions to a deeper understanding of what we study in different ways. Qualitative research describes and analyses people's social actions, beliefs, thoughts and perceptions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006: 315). Researchers collect and examine numerous forms of data to construct a meaningful picture of a complex, multifaceted situation in order to answer research questions (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005: 133). Qualitative studies are important for theory generation, policy development, for the improvement of educational practices and to illuminate social issues (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006: 315). The goal of qualitative research is to understand social phenomena from the participants' perspectives (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005: 133). Qualitative researchers use interactive strategies to study participants' perspectives. These interactive strategies can include participant observation, direct observation, in-depth interviews and documents. Qualitative research strategies are flexible and researchers use various techniques to obtain valid data. The role of the

qualitative researcher is to become immersed in the situation and the phenomena of the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006: 315 -316).

I chose a mixed method research design because it allowed me to conduct a case study of the implementation and usefulness of the WCED Grade one literacy baseline assessment programme, which enabled me to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. A case study is an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 2003: 13). A case study enables the researcher to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life situations (Yin, 2003:2). McMillan and Schumacher (2006: 316 – 317) state that the data analysis in a case study design focuses on one phenomenon that was selected by the researcher, to get an in depth understanding, regardless of the number of sites or participants. They also mention that the processes of purposive sampling, data collection and partial data analyses are intertwined rather than sequential in a case study design. In line with case study design, I used multiple methods of data collection: observation of learners being assessed and how the assessment process was conducted, analysis of learners' response sheets in the written assessment activities, and an interview with the grade one teacher who conducted the assessment.

3.4.2 Mixed methods research design

A mixed methods research design is defined as a research design that includes at least one quantitative method and one qualitative method (Creswell & Clark, 2011: 2). With mixed methods designs, researchers are not limited to using techniques associated with traditional designs, either quantitative or qualitative (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006: 28). Mixed methods research provides strengths that offset the weaknesses associated with both qualitative and quantitative research. Some researchers argue that quantitative research is weak in understanding the context in which people and the voices of the participants are not directly heard. Furthermore, quantitative researchers are in the background and their own personal biases and interpretations are seldom discussed. Qualitative research, on the other hand, claims to address these weaknesses. However, there are also methodological challenges related to qualitative research. Qualitative research is seen as deficient because of the personal interpretations made by the researcher, the bias created by this and the difficulty in generalising the findings to a large group (Creswell & Clark, 2011: 12). The use of both approaches allows the researcher to incorporate the strengths of each method (Snyder, 2006: 402). In addition, mixed methods research allows the researcher the freedom to use all methods possible to address a research problem using both numbers and words, combining deductive and inductive thinking, employing skills in observing people as well as recording behaviour (Creswell & Clark, 2011: 13).

Mixed methods designs may be fixed and/or emergent. Fixed, mixed methods designs are mixed methods studies where the use of quantitative and qualitative methods is predetermined and planned at the start of the research process, whereas emergent mixed methods designs are found in mixed methods studies where the use of mixed methods arises due to issues that develop during the process of conducting the research. Emergent mixed methods designs generally occur when a second approach is added after the study is underway because one method is found to be inadequate (Cresswell & Clark, 2011: 54). Key decisions in choosing a mixed methods design is the: level of interaction between the quantitative and qualitative strands; priority of the quantitative and qualitative strands; timing when data sets are collected and when the results are used from the two sets of data within a study as well as where and how to mix the quantitative and qualitative strands (Creswell & Clark, 2011: 64 – 66).

Mixed methods designs can differ, depending on the purpose of the research design as well as the sequence in which quantitative and qualitative methods are used and the emphasis given to each method. The following designs are different types of mixed methods designs: explanatory design (quantitative and qualitative data are gathered sequentially with an emphasis on quantitative methods), exploratory design (qualitative data collection is followed by a quantitative phase) and triangulation design (both quantitative and qualitative data are collected simultaneously) (Snyder, 2006: 402 – 404). The use of a mixed methods research design requires the researcher to employ the skills required to conduct both quantitative and qualitative methods.

I adopted the mixed methods case study approach to research the implementation and usefulness of the WCED Grade one baseline assessment literacy programme. The WCED Grade one baseline assessment literacy programme is a ten day programme that assesses the literacy skills of the grade one learners at the beginning of the school year. This was a concurrent mixed methods research approach (Creswell & Clark, 2011: 66), since the case study enabled me to collect quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously and to merge the data using both quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods. In addition, it enabled me to interpret the results of the two strands (quantitative and qualitative) together to provide a better understanding of the literacy barriers that the learners experienced and to describe relationships between the groups of participants in terms of the following variables: gender, home language, age and Grade R attendance. An interview with the Grade one teacher enabled me to describe the Grade one teacher's perception of the literacy baseline assessment activities, her role, feelings, concerns and thoughts on the baseline assessment (Creswell & Clark, 2011: 63 – 66). The qualitative aspect of the study provided me with the opportunity to gather data describing the context in which the baseline assessment was

conducted and insight into how various factors influenced learner performance in the assessment.

3.5 Research methods

The researcher decides from whom data will be collected, how the participants will be selected and how the data will be collected (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006: 12). A discussion on the selection of participants, the research site as well as the data collection strategies employed, will follow.

3.5.1 Selection of participants

The selection of participants is referred to as sampling (Graziano & Raulin, 2004: 138). Purposive sampling was used to select the participants for the study, as the study focused on the Grade one literacy baseline assessment conducted at one primary school. Thirty-seven Grade one learners and their class teacher who conducted the literacy baseline assessment participated in the study. I selected the Grade one class, with English as the language of learning and teaching (LOLT), due to the diverse nature of the learners. The mother tongue languages of many of these learners are Xhosa, Afrikaans and both Afrikaans and English. At the time of the baseline assessment, there were forty learners in the Grade one class that I observed. Only thirty-three of the Grade one learners, participated in the study after only thirty-three signed consent forms were received from their parents for participation in the study.

The study sample of learner participants consisted of 20 females and 13 males. The second sample just included the teacher of the Grade one class who had conducted the baseline assessment that I observed. She provided me with the learner scripts on which some of the assessment activities were done. I also observed her conducting all the literacy baseline assessment activities. In addition, I interviewed her after the completion of the ten day baseline assessment programme, in order to obtain information regarding her views related to the value of and implementation of the baseline assessment activities.

The justification for this study is the need for the early identification of literacy barriers and the need to address the barriers to improve literacy skills in order to eradicate illiteracy as well as the drop-out rate of learners. This study will hopefully enhance how the Grade one literacy baseline assessment can be used in future.

3.5.2 The research site

The research site was a primary school, situated in a low socio-economic community, on the Cape Flats in the Cape Town Metropole of the Western Cape. In terms of the Education White Paper 6 (South Africa. Department of Education, 2001: 45), schools must be provided with appropriate curricular (and other) support by the relevant Department of Education service structures. In this case the WCED district level support team managing the district in which the school was located, was responsible for co-ordinating and/or providing support to learners who were experiencing barriers to learning. However, the support emanating from the local district was insufficient, since a learner support teacher had not been appointed at the research site, due to the process of organisational restructuring that had taken place at district level. Therefore the higher level of learning support that a learning support teacher usually provides, either through consultation with the class teachers or via direct intervention with learners identified as needing more support than what the class teacher could provide, was not available at the research site.

The inadequate support from the WCED at district level, for learners experiencing barriers to learning was further compounded by the socio-economic challenges faced by the learners and the community. Education in low socio-economic communities of South Africa is hampered due to a non-stimulating environment, insecurity, language deficiency and poor orientation towards school (Prinsloo, 2005: 28).

In the absence of a learning support teacher, the Grade one class teacher had to play the role of the learning support teacher and try to give higher levels of learning support to address the identified barriers. Given the challenges faced by learners and the school, I was motivated to explore whether the Grade one literacy baseline assessment could play a critical role in identifying the literacy barriers of learners in the Grade one English class at the research site. The study also enabled me to recommend literacy support strategies that could be used by the Grade one teacher in future at the research site as well as in other classes experiencing similar challenges.

3.5.3 Data collection strategies

I used multi-method data collection strategies to collect the data for my study. My study involved document collection, which included the written baseline assessment scripts of the learners and the learners' admission forms, field observations of the Grade one baseline assessment activities, as well as an interview with the class teacher who conducted the

literacy baseline assessment. The rationale for the use of these strategies is included in the discussion that follows.

3.5.3.1 Description of the WCED baseline assessment programme and instrument

The WCED 2007 baseline assessment instrument, which is a standard recording document, was used to determine the literacy skills of the Grade one learners. It is a checklist to record which learners can or cannot demonstrate the required skills (Western Cape Education Department, 2007: 1). The WCED baseline assessment checklist provides the baseline assessment criteria of the different literacy categories that were assessed. This assessment document is used by many Grade one teachers to determine the prior knowledge and skills of their learners. The WCED gave schools four Grade one baseline assessment options to choose from since 2008. Schools could choose the original version of the WCED Baseline Assessment Programme, or an adaptation of the original version. Alternatively a school could use the WCED assessment activities in formulating their own assessment programme or schools could develop their own assessment activities or use their own baseline assessment programme. Schools had to however, ensure that their programme addresses all the baseline assessment outcomes. The observation of learners provided rich information in attempting to understand and describing the barriers learner participants experienced during the literacy baseline assessment. Document collection and analysis enabled me to determine the literacy skills of the learners in terms of their written baseline assessment activities. The admission forms of the participants provided me with information of their biographical details.

The WCED Grade one baseline assessment programme (Western Cape Education Department, 2007: Foreword) is a written document. It consists of the following sections: an introduction, Section A (recording sheets), Section B (exemplar work schedules for the baseline assessment programme), and Section C (alternative version of the baseline assessment programme). The introduction explains how the teachers must plan for the implementation of the activities. The recording sheets are checklists to record the performances of the learners as explained above. The exemplar work schedule provides teachers with an outline of activities to be implemented and the skills, knowledge and attitudes that must be assessed. The exemplar lesson plans are included in the work schedule section and is a ten day programme. The lesson plans explain how the activities can be implemented as well as the focus for assessment. The baseline assessment should be conducted within the first three weeks of the school year (Western Cape Education Department, 2007: 68). An alternative baseline assessment programme has been included in Section C and contains lesson plans for a fifteen day programme. The Grade one teachers at

the research site implemented the ten day programme (revised WCED Baseline Assessment Programme, 2007).

I adapted the WCED literacy baseline assessment checklist for my study (Table 4.2) in the following manner: I combined the listening component of the WCED checklist with the speaking component in my observation checklist because both components were simultaneously assessed during the same assessment activities. I also changed the terms "reading and viewing" to "emergent reading" and "writing" to "emergent writing" in order to align the terms with the Grade R CAPS concepts (South Africa. Department of Basic Education, 2011: 31 - 35). In addition, I combined the "thinking and reasoning" as well as the "language structure and use" categories of the WCED checklist with the "listening and speaking" as well as the "emergent reading" categories in the adapted checklist. The rationale for combining those categories is that the "thinking and reasoning" and "language structure and use" categories have been integrated with the listening and speaking, emergent reading and emergent writing categories of the CAPS Home Language programme (South Africa. Department of Basic Education, 2011: 8). Learners' emergent literacy competence was therefore evaluated in terms of three categories; listening and speaking, emergent reading and emergent writing. The activities included in each category are listed below and will be discussed in chapters 4 and 5.

The listening and speaking category of the baseline assessment, assessed the abilities of the learners to *listen attentively to stories for enjoyment, respond to questions, follow instructions, participate in games and songs, match colours, share information* and to *use language appropriately.* Seven activities were conducted in the listening and speaking category of the baseline assessment.

The emergent reading category assessed the abilities of the learners to *recognise words in the environment, hold a book and to turn pages appropriately, interpret pictures, recognise the sound symbols of the alphabet, to complete a puzzle, to recall and to identify similarities and differences in a picture* as well as their *abilities to complete a figure-ground activity.* The learners were involved in eight different activities in order to assess their emergent reading skills.

The emergent writing category assessed their abilities *to manipulate their writing tools, use letters to represent writing, directionality, the ability to write on a page, use colour in their drawings and to convey a message about their drawings.* Six emergent writing activities were conducted in this category.

3.5.3.2 Guidelines in the implementation of the Grade one baseline assessment strategy

The Western Cape Education Department (2007: 4) advises teachers to prepare their classrooms for the baseline assessment by setting up display tables for themes and subject focus areas such as the reading and fantasy corners. The teachers are also advised to display the following wall charts and posters: Weather charts, calendars and birthday charts. The WCED also advises teachers to prepare and display name cards of the learners in the class. The learners' name labels must also be taped on their tables. The items in the classrooms must also be labelled.

The teacher must also prepare resources for free-play activities that can be done when learners have completed their set baseline assessment tasks. Free-play activities include: reading, drawing, cutting and pasting, modelling, building, threading, puzzles, perceptual and literacy games. The WCED advises that the resources for the free-play activities should be accessible for the learners. The teacher must teach the learners to use the activities and to tidy up after the free-play activities. Teachers were also advised to gather the learners on the floor during whole class assessment activities Western Cape Education Department (2007: 32).

The Western Cape Education Department (2013: 1) circulated a letter to schools that advised teachers that it was not necessary to work through the entire WCED 2007 baseline assessment programme and that they could adapt the programme in order to integrate the programme with the teaching of CAPS. They (the WCED) also advised teachers that the baseline assessment programme should not exceed ten days. The teachers at the research site decided to try to stick to the baseline assessment activities, but a few of the activities were integrated with the Curriculum and Policy Statement (CAPS).

My study involved the collection of data using the multi-method strategies. The procedure for collecting the data as well as the data collection strategies used are graphically represented in Figure 3.1:

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│                   Use of multi-method approach                    │
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         │                        │                        │
         ▼                        ▼                        ▼
┌──────────────────┐    ┌──────────────────┐    ┌──────────────────┐
│   Qualitative    │    │   Quantitative   │    │   Qualitative    │
│    component     │    │    component     │    │    component     │
└──────────────────┘    └──────────────────┘    └──────────────────┘
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Data collection strategies:	**Document collection strategies:**	**In-depth Interview with teacher:**
1**.** Classroom observations of the implementation of the literacy baseline assessment Research instruments: Detailed field notes & observation grid	1. Quantitative analysis of learner performances in the literacy baseline assessment	*Research instruments*: Semi-structured interview schedule Audio recording of Interview. Written notes on verbatim responses
2. Document analysis: Qualitative analysis of learners' baseline assessment scripts	*Research instruments:* 1. Learner's baseline assessment scripts & 2. Learners' school admission documents 3. Literacy baseline assessment checklist	

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        ┌─────────────────────────────────────────┐
        │             Analyses of data             │
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        │                 Findings                 │
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Figure 3.1: Graphical representation of data collection procedure and strategies

3.5.3.3 Documentary analysis

The most important use of documents is to corroborate evidence from other sources (Yin, 2003: 87). The strength of this method is that it allows the researcher to obtain tangible evidence of the participants' knowledge. A weakness of this method is that it does not allow the researcher to extract evidence from the environment, as document data collection strategies are non-interactive (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006: 356).

Documents are products of the context in which they were produced and are therefore grounded in the real world (Merriam, 2009: 156). Documents were used as part of the

triangulation strategy of my study in order to increase the credibility of the data of the observation process (Merriam, 2009: 215). In this study the participants' school admission documents as well as their literacy baseline assessments scripts were collected for analysis and will be briefly discussed.

a) Participant school admission documents

The learners' admission files provided me with information regarding the learners' biographical profiles such as their: gender, home languages, Grade R attendance status and their ages. The biographical information was used to statistically describe the learner sample (see Table 4.1 in Chapter 4). Participants' performances in the literacy baseline assessment was also analysed in terms of the biographical information (see Table 4.2 in Chapter 4).

b) Participants' literacy baseline assessment scripts

Participants' written assessment scripts provided information regarding the written literacy baseline assessment activities. It also assisted me in identifying literacy barrier patterns regarding the perceptual skills, since it enabled me to confirm the data collected from the observation process. The performances of the learners as indicated in Table 4.2 were also analysed in terms of participants' biographical variables; gender, language, Grade R attendance and age in Table 4.1. A few of the concepts of the paper-based activities were not repeated and I was unable to observe all the learners during the same activities. The baseline assessment scripts therefore enabled me to determine the literacy skills of the learners', of the activities, where I was unable to observe all the learners during the same activities. Each learner's baseline assessment scripts were kept in plastic sleeves. The learners' names were written on each activity page, which facilitated the identification of the learners. The teacher provided me with the baseline assessment scripts after the completion of the baseline assessment process which was conducted over ten days. I examined the baseline assessment scripts and recorded my findings in the Literacy assessment checklist by indicating the barriers that the learners experienced with an 'X'. The Literacy assessment checklist enabled me to gather data in terms of the frequencies of the literacy barriers, for each emergent literacy category, and in terms of the different biographical variables. The frequencies of literacy barriers for each emergent literacy category, were organised in a table in terms of: gender, home language, age and Grade R attendance. In this manner I was able to identify and statistically describe the different performance and barrier patterns that emerged.

3.5.3.4 Field observations

Observations describe the participants, the setting, the activities or behaviour of the participants (Merriam, 2009: 130). Detailed field observations are recorded as field notes during the observation process (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006: 349). Observations are unstructured and free-flowing. The advantage of this method is that it allows the researcher to take advantage of unforeseen data sources as they surface (Leedy & Ormond, 2005: 145). It enables the researcher to observe the participants in their natural environment that facilitate the collection of spontaneous data. It also enables the researcher to observe non-verbal cues of the participants: their body language, how they feel about certain activities and what they do during the activities. The weakness of this method is that the researcher may establish social relationships with the participants that can affect the type of data collection. Observing and listening are also demanding since it requires the researcher to use all his/her senses whilst observing (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006: 346-347).

I did not observe all the learners during the same activity. Most of the concepts of the baseline activities were repeated every day during the baseline assessment. I observed four learners at a time to examine their skills during the literacy baseline assessment activities, in order to ensure manageability of the observation process. The learners wore colour coded name tags on their school jackets, shirts or dresses in order to facilitate the identification of the learners that I observed. The teacher also assisted by placing the four learners that I identified each day on the left side on the mat during the class discussions. I observed the learners at their tables during the paper-based activities and in smaller groups in the reading corner during role-play reading. Name tags were also pasted on the tables that facilitated the identification of the learners that I observed during the paper-based activities. The observation of learners was required as an assessment strategy for the listening and speaking, as well as the emergent reading baseline assessment activities. The observation of learners focused on cognitive, affective and behavioural aspects and enabled the recording of their reactions to the various assessment activities that were administered. This provided me with rich qualitative data that had the potential to enhance the value of this study (Rule & John, 2011: 107 - 108).

Initially I tried to use a structured observation grid but later adapted this method with field notes during the class activities, as it was more manageable to record my observations, since it facilitated the recording of verbal as well as non-verbal cues of the participants. I only used the observations grid to record the learners' behaviour during the role-play reading and the handwriting activities. Detailed, field notes were taken, during the course of the daily baseline assessment activities. Learners' responses regarding their body language, how they

felt about certain activities and what they did during the activities, were recorded by means of the detailed, descriptive field notes. The data collected from the field observations were organised in the Literacy assessment checklist (Table 4.2). The Literacy assessment checklist facilitated the interpretation and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data.

3.5.3.4 In-depth interview with the class teacher

An interview was also conducted with the teacher of the Grade one class who had conducted the literacy baseline assessment. Qualitative interviews are open-ended or semi-structured. Semi-structured interviews revolve around a few central questions (Leedy & Ormond, 2005: 146). Interviews in a case study design are guided conversations rather than structured queries (Yin, 2003: 89).

As a novice researcher I needed guidelines, I therefore conducted a semi-structured interview with the teacher of the Grade one class that I observed during the baseline assessment. Structured interview questions are followed by a set of choices and the respondents select one of the choices as the answer, whereas semi-structured interview questions have no choices from which the respondent has to choose. Rather, the questions are phrased to allow for individual responses. The questions are open-ended but fairly specific (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006: 204). Semi-structured interviews are particularly useful to novice researchers because they provide a guideline of questions to help steer the interview process and maintain focus on the issue being explored; but at the same time, they provide latitude to ask other questions and probe further. In this manner, the researcher (and the interviewee) has the opportunity to add depth to the study in line with the qualitative tradition of research. The purpose of the interview was to obtain information regarding the teacher's perceptions of the baseline assessment activities, as well as her role, feelings, concerns and thoughts on the baseline assessment. I used an audio-recorder to record the responses of the teacher in order to ensure that her views were correctly captured for data analysis (Merriam, 2009: 109). Field notes were also taken to record the verbatim responses of the teacher as well as non-verbal communication during the interview, which facilitated data analysis (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006: 355 - 356).

3.6 Data Analyses

Two basic forms of data analysis were employed for this study. An interpretivist data analysis style was employed for the qualitative data analyses whilst the quantitative data analysis was statistical, but it was only descriptive. A discussion on the qualitative and quantitative data analysis for this study follows.

3.6.1 Qualitative data analysis

Interpretivist data analysis involves different data collection methods, sources and approaches to interpret the data (Henning, 2004: 103). The data analysis was an inductive process, as it aimed to understand the literacy barriers (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006: 364), in order to recommend learning support strategies.

Biographical information of the learners (see table 4.1 in Chapter 4) contains qualitative data that was analysed in order to obtain information regarding the total number of participants in each of the biographical variables. The Literacy assessment checklist (Table 4.2) contains the following biographical information: home language, Grade R education, age, as well as the emergent literacy categories: listening and speaking, emergent reading and emergent writing. The assessment criteria for the listening and speaking, emergent reading and emergent writing have been obtained from the key concepts of the WCED: Grade one baseline assessment recording sheet (Western Cape Education Department, 2007: 6-9). The criteria of the baseline assessment activities assisted me in organising the data into categories in order to identify patterns regarding the literacy barriers that the learners experienced during the baseline assessment. I used colour coding to assist me in identifying the patterns. The categories were used as a framework to describe the identified literacy barriers. After the interview, I transcribed the recording of the interview and wrote an interview elaboration, which include the interviewee's reactions as well as additional information regarding the meanings of the interview (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006: 373).

3.6.2 Quantitative data analysis

The information in Table 4.1 (Biographical information) and Table 4.2 (Literacy assessment checklist) were used to organise the frequencies of the emergent literacy barriers in terms of gender, home language, Grade R attendance and age (Table 4.3), for each activity as well as each category (listening and speaking, emergent reading and emergent writing). Participants' performances were analysed statistically, the percentage frequency of the learning barriers in terms of the sample as a whole, as well as the different biographical variables (gender, home language, Grade R attendance and age) were calculated. Table 4.3 enabled me to identify the different performance patterns that emerged.

3.6.3 Presentation and interpretation of the results

The data was summarised and the information was used to describe the literacy barriers in terms of the biographical variables. In addition, the information was also used to recommend learning support strategies for literacy development.

3.7 Validity and reliability

Research studies must present insights and conclusions that ring true to readers. Validity and reliability can be approached by paying careful attention to a study's conceptualisation and the way in which the data are collected, analysed and interpreted (Merriam, 2009: 210). Content validity refers to how accurately a research instrument actually measures the construct it purports to measure. In other words, to what extent do the items included in the research instrument accurately represent the construct being measured (Creswell & Clark, 2011: 210). The WCED introduced an exemplar Baseline Assessment Programme in 2006. An independent study was conducted in 2007 to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the programme. A number of recommendations were made and these were addressed in the revised Baseline Assessment Programme (Western Cape Education Department, 2007: Foreword). The checklist that was used to rate learner performances during the literacy baseline assessment activities was a very similar version of the WCED baseline assessment instrument. The WCED version was formulated by a task team comprising of WCED officials with knowledge and expertise in early childhood education. They were drawn from the WCED Curriculum and Specialised Education Support Services Directorates. It is therefore assumed that, as an official WCED assessment instrument, much expertise and skill went into the formulation of this tool. Thus, the process in formulating the WCED Grade one baseline assessment instrument has enhanced its content validity. The changes that I made to the instrument have been discussed above in this chapter.

Multi-method data collection strategies were employed in order to enhance the validity and reliability of this research. A discussion on the validity and reliability in both qualitative and quantitative data will follow.

The data from the observations of the learners and the baseline assessment written activities were collected as well as data from the participants' admission documents and an interview of the Grade one class teacher who administered the research. Lincoln and Guba in Merriam (2009: 210) considers validity and reliability from a perspective that is congruent with the philosophical assumptions of the qualitative paradigm and name these concepts credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Rich descriptions of the case and context, contribute to quality and trustworthiness of a case study and helps to establish the credibility of the case study. Thick descriptions furthermore, promote reader-determined transferability. The term transferability is used as an alternative for generalizability in qualitative research (Rule & John, 2011: 107 - 108). Transferability refers to the applicability of the findings to other situations under similar conditions (Merriam, 2009: 225).

I corroborated with the teacher to ensure the reliability of the observations of the learners' responses. I gave the teacher, who was interviewed, a copy of the transcription of the interview that I conducted with her, to check whether I interpreted her perceptions correctly. This was done to address the issue of respondent validation. Respondent validation facilitates feedback on the emerging findings from some of the participants in order to rule out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants said and did (Merriam, 2009: 217).

The detailed, descriptive field notes and participant observation grids that were used to record the data were dated in order to provide chronological records (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006: 368-369). The researcher took extra precautions to guard against influencing the outcome of the study by keeping a field journal to record self-reflections, decisions that were taken during the data collection process, as well as ethical issues to ensure the trustworthiness of the data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006: 374).

Validity in quantitative results means the degree to which scientific explanations of phenomena match reality. It refers to the truthfulness of findings and conclusions. Explanations about observed phenomena approximate what is reality and the degree to which explanations are accurate comprises the validity of the design. There are four types of validity in quantitative research: statistical conclusion validity, internal validity, construct validity and external validity. In quantitative research statistics are used to determine whether a relationship exists between two or more variables. Internal validity is strongest when possible sources of error are effectively controlled by the study's design so that those sources are not reasonably related to the study's results. Construct validity refers to research designs that makes inferences about unobservable mental states and experimental interventions. External validity refers to the generalizability of the results (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006: 134 - 140).

In this study population external validity was considered since the participants performances in their literacy baseline assessment were described in terms of their biographical variables: gender, home language, attendance and age. My tally of statistics was checked by an

independent checker in order to ensure accurate presentation of the statistical data. External validity refers to the generalizability of the results. In this study the results is only generalizable to other learners with the same characteristics (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006: 134).

The quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analysed concurrently and the results were interpreted together which facilitated the triangulation of the findings. The triangulation of the data enhanced the reliability of the research findings (Snyder, 2006: 404). This study enabled me to recommend literacy support strategies that could be used in future by the Grade one teacher at the research site as well as in other Grade one classes at the same school or at other schools where learners experience similar barriers.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical guidelines in qualitative research include policies regarding informed consent, deception, confidentiality, anonymity, privacy and caring. Most qualitative researchers use discussions and negotiations to solve ethical dilemmas in fieldwork. Informed consent is regarded as dialogue with each participant. Participants are assured of confidentiality and anonymity. In addition, a description of how the data will be used is also provided (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006: 333 - 334). Ethical issues such as providing reciprocity to participants for their willingness to provide data, handling sensitive information, and disclosing the purpose of the research apply to both quantitative and qualitative research. In quantitative research the procedures in quantitative data collection need to be administered with as little variation as possible so that bias is not introduced into the process (Creswell & Clark, 2011: 179).

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Education Faculty Ethics Committee of Cape Peninsula University of Technology. Permission was also obtained from the Western Cape Education Department to conduct the research at the research site. The school manager and the teacher of the research site were also provided with written evidence of the approval of the WCED to conduct the research. The parents of the learners, of the research site, completed consent forms in order to give permission for their children to participate in the study after they had received letters describing the purpose, aims, intended outcomes and potential value of the proposed study. Parents were clearly informed that participation in the study by their children was voluntary, that they could withdraw their children from the study at any time and that participants (children) themselves had the right to withdraw from the study at any time if they wished to. It was also emphasized that refusal in participation would not negatively influence the learners in any way including their relationships with the class teacher, the school and their scholastic progress. Participants' parents were ensured of

confidentiality during the study and that learners' names would not be used when discussing research findings. Anonymity of participants was therefore guaranteed. The same ethical principles of informed, voluntary participation, unconditional withdrawal, anonymity and confidentiality was emphasized with the teacher participant prior to her consenting to participate in the study.

3.9 Summary

This chapter outlined the research theory that informed my study as well as the data collection and data analysis process of my study. I used a mixed methods research design which enabled me to conduct a mixed methods case study of the implementation of the Grade one baseline assessment. The case study also enabled me to collect both quantitative and qualitative data, which enabled me to interpret the results in order to achieve a better understanding of the literacy barriers of the learners and to describe the barriers that the learners experienced.

Multi-method strategies were used to collect the data for my study; and include document collection, field observations and an interview. The data collected from the learners' scripts and observation of learners were tabulated in a Literacy assessment checklist (see Tables 4.2 & 4.3) that assisted me to identify patterns regarding the literacy barriers of the learners for the sample as a whole and also for the variables of gender, home language, Grade R attendance and age. An interview with the teacher was conducted to obtain information regarding the teacher's perceptions of the baseline assessment. This information also assisted me in recommending learning support strategies in improving the literacy skills of learners, and provided deeper insight into the factors that played a role in the implementation of the baseline assessment activities.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The analysis of the findings of my case study, which was conducted to determine the literacy skills of the Grade one learners during the Grade one literacy baseline assessment programme, will be presented in this chapter.

I provide information regarding the research participants, a checklist that indicates the barriers that the learners experienced as well as a description of their performances during the literacy baseline assessment activities that were conducted. I also provide a narrative account of how the baseline assessment activities were conducted. The data for this research was gathered by: observing the learners, examining their activity sheets and conducting an interview with the class teacher who administered the assessment. The data was analysed in order to answer the research question: How can the Grade one literacy baseline assessment results be used to address literacy barriers amongst Grade one learners? This research question has three sub-questions namely:

1. What do the Grade one learners' literacy baseline assessment performances indicate about their emergent literacy skills?
2. What are the Grade one teacher's perceptions about the usefulness of the literacy baseline assessment instrument?
3. What learning support strategies can be recommended to address the literacy barriers (if any) identified by the baseline assessment?

4.2 The research participants

Thirty-three learners participated in the study. Twenty were girls and thirteen were boys. Four participants were five- and-a half years old, fourteen were six years old, twelve were six-and-a half, two were seven and one learner was seven-and-a half years old. The home language profile of the thirty-three learners was as follows: eighteen of them spoke English as home language, eight spoke Xhosa and five learner spoke Afrikaans. Two learners' spoke both English and Afrikaans at home. Twenty-six of the participants attended Grade R whilst seven did not.

All the learners met the age criteria in terms of the admission age of the Department of Basic Education. The age requirements of Grade one learners, for admission to an ordinary public

school, is six years turning seven in the course of that calendar year. Learners may, however, be allowed admission to Grade one at a lower age if school ready (South Africa. Department of Education, 1996: 62). The admission age of a learner, admitted to Grade one at a lower age than the age requirement, is five years turning six years by 30 June in the year of admission (South Africa, Department of Education, 1996: 6). Table 4.1 provides an overview on the information of the research participants.

Table 4.1: Biographical information regarding participants

Gender	Total	Age in years	Male	Female	Total	Home language	Male	Female	Total	Grade R education	Male	Female	Total
Females	20	5½	1	3	4	English	8	10	18	Attend-ed	10	16	26
Males	13	6	5	9	14	Xhosa	3	5	8	Did not attend	3	4	7
		6½	6	6	12	Afri-kaans	2	3	5				
		7	0	2	2	Afri-kaans / English	0	2	2				
		7½	1	0	1								
Total	33		13	20	33		13	20	33		13	20	33

The Literacy assessment checklist (Table 4.2) was used to record the results of the literacy baseline assessment activities that were administered as whole class and group activities. The performances of the learners will be described under the following categories: listening and speaking, emergent reading and emergent writing. Each category included a number of skills that a learner had to demonstrate during the baseline assessment activities. The learner's performance gave an indication of his or her literacy skills and barriers as indicated in the Literacy assessment checklist (Table 4.2).

As explained in section 3.4.3, I adapted the WCED literacy baseline assessment checklist for my study in accordance with the Grade R CAPS concepts (South Africa. Department of Basic Education, 2011: 31 - 35). I colour coded the Literacy assessment checklist (Table 4.2) according to the barriers that the learners had experienced during the assessment of the

literacy skills to assist me in identifying the literacy barrier themes. The literacy barriers are indicated in the following manner: yellow indicates receptive language, green indicates expressive language, blue indicates perceptual skills, and pink indicates barriers with motor development. I provided an explanation regarding the association between each activity and the identified barrier in Chapter 5.

The information gathered from Table 4.2 was used to answer the first research question in the section that follows.

4.3. What do the Grade one learners' literacy baseline assessment performances indicate about their emergent literacy skills?

In order to answer this research question, I observed four learners at a time during most of the baseline assessment activities, as most of the activities were repeated daily during the baseline assessment programme. Some of the activities were only administered once during the baseline assessment. It was therefore difficult for me to observe all the learners at the same time during these activities. In those instances, I examined the activity sheets of the learners which provided me with sufficient information to evaluate the literacy skills that were assessed. I also examined the learners' activity sheets to confirm my observations regarding their literacy skills. I shall provide a description of the results of the different skills that were assessed, as recorded in the Literacy assessment checklist in Table 4.2. The first category is listening and speaking.

Table 4.2: Literacy assessment checklist

Grade one baseline assessment

Name	Home Language	Grade R education	Age in Grade one	Gender	Listening & speaking							Emergent Reading								Emergent Writing					
					Listens attentively	Responds to questions	Follows instructions	Participates confidently	Matches colours	Shares information	Language use	Recognises words	Book handling skills	Interprets pictures	Identify sound symbol	Completes puzzle	Ability to recall	Identifies differences in a picture	Completes figure-ground activity	Manipulates writing tools	Uses letters to represent writing	Directionality	Ability to write on a page	Ability to use colour	Ability to convey a message using drawing
Learner 1	E	Y	6	F	X	X	X			X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X					x	
Learner 2	E	Y	6	M			X					X				X	X	X		X					
Learner 3	E	Y	6	M					X								X			X					
Learner 4	E	N	6	F			X	X									X			X					
Learner 5	AE	Y	6	F			X	X												X					
Learner 6	E	Y	5½	F																X				X	
Learner 7	E	N	6½	F	X		X	X				X	X		X	X	X		X		x	x	x		X
Learner 8	E	Y	6½	M								X	X			X	X							X	
Learner 9	AE	Y	6	F						X		X			X	X	X							X	
Learner 10	A	Y	7	F	X					X		X		X	X	X								X	
Learner 11	E	Y	6	M					X							X	X	X		X				x	
Learner 12	E	Y	6	F												X	X								
Learner 13	XH	Y	6	F		X	X	X		X	X			X	X		X	X		X					X
Learner 14	XH	Y	6½	M		X				X	X		X	X			X								X
Learner 15	E	N	7	F	X					X				X			X								X
Learner 16	XH	Y	6½	F	X	X	X			X	X		X	X	X		X								X
Learner 17	A	N	6	F									X				X	X							
Learner 18	E	Y	6	M		X	X	X	X			x	X		X	X	X	X	X		x	X	x	X	X
Learner 19	E	Y	5½	M												X	X							x	

65

Table 4.2: Literacy assessment checklist

Name	Home Language	Grade R education	Age in Grade one	Gender	Listens attentively	Responds to questions	Follows instructions	Participates confidently	Matches colours	Shares information	Language use	Recognises words	Book handling skill	Interprets picture	Identify sound symbol	Completes puzzle	Ability recall	Identifies differences in a picture	figure-ground activity	Manipulates writing tools	Uses letters to represent writing	Directionality	Ability to write on a page	Ability to use colour	Ability to convey a message using drawing
					Listening & speaking							Emergent Reading								Emergent Writing					
Learner 20	E	Y	6½	F									X				X								
Learner 21	XH	Y	6½	M	X	X	X			X	X			X	X										
Learner 22	XH	Y	6½	F		X	X			X	X			X	X		X							X	
Learner 23	E	Y	5½	F																					
Learner 24	XH	Y	6	F			X			X				X	X	X	X								X
Learner 25	A	Y	6½	M			X						X		X	X	X			X				X	
Learner 26	A	N	6½	M		X							X		X									X	
Learner 27	E	Y	6	M						X			X	X	X	X		X							
Learner 28	E	Y	6	F		X								X		X			X					
Learner 29	E	N	6½	M			X						X		X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X
Learner 30	XH	Y	6½	F						X	X		X	X	X		X			X					X
Learner 31	E	Y	5½	F									X												
Learner 32	A	Y	6½	F						X			X	X											
Learner 33	XH	N	7½	M						X				X			X								
Total					6	9	13	5	3	14	7	6	15	13	16	14	24	8	4	10	3	3	3	12	9

Key				Colour code	
A	Afrikaans	M	Male		Receptive language barriers
E	English	F	Female		Expressive language barriers
XH	Xhosa	X	Literacy Barriers		Perceptual barriers
AE	Afrikaans & English				Motor development barriers
Y	Attended Gr R				
N	Did not attend Gr R				

4.3.1 Listening and speaking skills

The following listening and speaking skills of the learners were assessed: *listen attentively, respond to questions, follow instructions, participate confidently, match colours, share information and language use.* Participants' performances in these skills are discussed.

4.3.1.1 Ability to listen attentively and to respond to questions

The teacher prepared her classroom for the baseline assessment by displaying a variety of books in the reading corner for story-telling sessions. The forty learners in the class sat on the mat in front of the classroom during story-telling sessions, although only thirty-three of these learners participated in the study. Before the teacher started to read the story, she asked questions about the cover of the book, introduced the title, explained the meanings of the author and the illustrator. During the story she showed them the pictures and after the story she asked questions about the pictures, events and characters. The four learners that I observed, at a time, sat on the left side of the mat. A few of the learners who sat at the back on the mat became distracted during the story-telling sessions and did not participate in the discussions and respond to the questions on the stories.

I combined the two skills *listens attentively* and *responds to questions* in Table 4.2, since these two skills of the learners were assessed during the same activities. The learners listened to stories read by the teacher and were expected to answer questions posed by the teacher during and after storytelling. The abilities of the learners to listen attentively to stories with enjoyment and to show understanding by responding appropriately to questions about the stories were assessed. I observed the learners during these activities and recorded my observations in field notes in order to complete the Literacy assessment checklist.

The data indicates that most of the learners were able to listen attentively to the stories. Only six of the thirty-three participants were unable to listen attentively. Of the six learners, one of the learners was fidgety and only displayed interest when the teacher discussed the pictures of the story, whilst another two learners did not display any interest in the story even when the pictures were discussed. Two other learners displayed an interest in the story at first but became distracted after a while. One of the learners sat quietly and seemed very distracted as she looked around without displaying any interest in the story and the pictures.

Of the six learners who were unable to listen attentively, three spoke English, two Xhosa and one of them spoke Afrikaans at home. Four of the six learners attended Grade R. One of the

six learners was six years old, three of them were six-and-a half and two learners were seven years old. Five of the learners were females and one learner was a male.

The abilities of the learners to answer questions on the stories posed by the teacher, during and after story-telling were also assessed. I observed the learners during these sessions and recorded my observations in field notes. Nine of the thirty-three learners who participated in the study did not respond to the questions on the stories. One of the nine learners just shrugged his shoulders and three of the learners dropped their heads when the teacher asked them to respond to the questions about the stories. Three other learners just smiled and two others just looked at the teacher when asked questions about the stories. The home languages of six learners who did not respond to questions about the stories were not the same as the language of learning and teaching. Five of them Xhosa and one spoke Afrikaans as home language. Eight of the nine learners attended Grade R. Four of them were six years old and five were six-and-a half. Five were females and four of were males.

Three of the nine learners who were unable to direct their attention during the story-telling session, were also unable to answer questions on the stories.

4.3.1.2 Ability to follow instructions and to participate in games and action songs with confidence

The games and action songs that were introduced to assess the abilities of the learners to follow the instructions given by the teacher were conducted as whole class activities. The instructions were given to the whole class, smaller groups were then involved in the activities in order to assess whether they were able to follow the instructions.

I combined the two skills *follows instructions and participates confidently* in Table 4.2, since these two skills of the learners were assessed during the same activities. I observed the learners during these activities and recorded my observations in field notes.

Thirteen of the thirty-three learners did not satisfactorily follow the instructions given by the teacher during games and songs in order to execute the actions of the games and action songs effectively. Eight of the thirteen learners participated actively in these activities but it seemed as if they were unable to follow the instructions given by the teacher and became confused during the activities. Some of these learners were hesitant to participate at first but started to participate as the action song progressed. They were unable to execute the correct actions that corresponded with the words of the action song and muddled the order of the actions. The other five learners were not confident to participate actively in the execution of

the actions of the games and action songs. These five learners did not participate in the singing of the action songs. Two of them just listened quietly and looked very uncertain, while the other three learners hesitantly attempted to do the actions towards the middle of the activity, but muddled the order of the actions as they struggled to execute the correct actions that corresponded with the words of the action song. They just smiled shyly and gave up.

Six of the above-mentioned thirteen learners' home language was English, five of them spoke Xhosa, one spoke Afrikaans and one learner spoke both Afrikaans and English. Ten of the thirteen learners attended Grade R, seven learners were six years old and six learners were six-and-a half years old. Eight of these learners were females and five learners were males.

4.3.1.3 Ability to listen to instructions in order to match colours

Containers with wax crayons of different colours were provided at learners' work stations as well as a worksheet with a drawing of a boy in order to assess whether the learners were able to *listen to the instructions* given by the teacher. The boy in the drawing was playing on a patch of grass with a ball. He wore a long sleeved sweater, a pair of trousers as well as a pair of shoes. The learners were expected to colour the drawing with a specific colour allocated to a specific part of the drawing. All the learners were sitting at their tables during this activity.

The learners were instructed to colour the boy's sweater orange, the pair of trousers purple, the pair of shoes brown, the dots on the ball red and the rest of the ball yellow. The abilities of the learners to listen to the teacher's instructions in order to colour the items in their pictures correctly, were assessed. I examined the activity sheets of the learners and recorded the results of the activity in the Literacy assessment checklist (Table 4.2), since the activity to assess this skill was only administered once during the baseline assessment. I was therefore unable to observe all the learners during this activity. The examination of their activity sheets enabled me to determine whether they were able to match the colours according to the instructions given by the teacher.

Only three of the learners did not colour all the items on their activity sheets according to the given instructions. One of the three learners coloured all the items correctly, except for the boy's shoes. He coloured the boy's shoes purple, the same colour as the pair of trousers. The second learner did not colour the grass. He coloured all the other items correctly but he also used purple to colour in the shoes at first and realised his mistake when the teacher gave the instruction to colour the shoes brown. He then used the brown to colour over the

purple shoes. The third learner coloured in the boy's pair of trousers and shoes correctly but coloured the boy's sweater red instead of orange. He only coloured in a portion of the ball and did not colour in the grass.

The home language of the three learners who were unable to match the colours according to the instructions of the teacher was English. They all attended Grade R, were all six years old and were all males.

4.3.1.4 Ability to share oral information and to use language appropriately

Pictures that represented family, friends and a school as well as action pictures were displayed against the chalkboard in front of the class. The teacher introduced the activities by explaining to the learners that the picture is about a family, friend, a school etc. These pictures were used to involve the learners in *class discussions* in order to assess their abilities to share information and to use language appropriately in terms of the vocabulary of the themes that were discussed. The learners were also asked to share their news with the class. The teacher asked the learners to tell the class about their family and friends.

Learners were also asked to tell the class what they did the previous day at home. The whole class sat on the mat during these activities and the learners were instructed to raise their hands if they wanted to contribute to the discussions. Some of them were eager to shout out the answers to questions that were posed to other learners. The teacher had to constantly remind them not to shout out the answers. A few of the learners who sat at the back on the mat became distracted and did not participate in the discussions. The teacher also asked questions to those who did not voluntarily contribute to the class discussions to try and involve them in the discussions of the pictures and to share information, in order to assess their abilities to share oral information and to use language appropriately.

The learners were observed during these activities and I recorded my observations in field notes.

Fourteen of the thirty-three participants were not confident to share information with the class during the class discussions. Some learners just smiled while others dropped their heads or shrugged when asked by the teacher to tell the class about their families and to share their news. Some learners were passively distancing themselves and seemed as if they were in a world of their own while others were distracted during the activities. One of the learners played with the learner's hair in front of her. These learners did not articulate anything during the class discussions.

Of the above-mentioned fourteen learners, three learners' home language were English, eight spoke Xhosa, two Afrikaans and one of them spoke both Afrikaans and English as home language. Twelve of the fourteen learners attended Grade R. Five of these learners were six years old, six learners were six-and-a half years, two were seven years and one learner was seven-and-a half years old. Ten of the fourteen learners were females and four were males.

Most of the learners who participated actively in the class discussions were able to use appropriate vocabulary that related to their family, friends, the school and the environment. Only seven of the learners who participated in the class discussions were unable to use appropriate vocabulary. Two of these learners switched to Afrikaans to express themselves. The other five learners did not participate freely in the class discussions; they only responded with one or two words when prompted by the teacher. It was difficult to determine the abilities of some of the learners to use language effectively, since they were not confident to share information during the class discussions.

The home language of one of the learners, who was unable to use language appropriately, was English and six learners' home language was Xhosa. All seven learners attended Grade R. Two of them were six years old and five were six-and-a half years old. Five of the learners were female and two were males.

4.3.1.5 Summary of findings in relation to listening and speaking skills

The learners were involved in listening and speaking activities for an assessment of their abilities to: *listen attentively* to stories, *respond to questions* on the stories and to *follow instructions in order to participate in games and action songs.* Their abilities to listen to instructions in order to *match colours*, *share information* and *use language appropriately* were also assessed. In all the activities there were learners who did not satisfactorily demonstrate those skills. The skill in which the highest number of learners performed unsatisfactorily, was the ability to share information whereas the skill in which the highest number of learners performed satisfactorily was the ability to listen attentively to stories.

The data from the results of the listening and speaking activities as organised in the Literacy assessment checklist in Table 4.2, assisted me in identifying possible barriers with: receptive language, expressive language and perceptual skills.

4.3.2 Emergent Reading

The following emergent reading skills of the learners were assessed: *recognise words, book handling skills, interpret pictures, identify sound symbols, complete a puzzle, recall items, identify differences in picture* and successfully *complete a figure-ground activity*. A discussion of the assessment of these skills follows.

4.3.2.1 Ability to recognise words

The learners were involved in activities that expected them to *recognise words in the environment.* They were observed in order to assess their abilities to identify their own names amongst all the name tags of the learners that were spread out on a table. The teacher asked groups of learners to identify their name tags and I observed them in order to assess their abilities to identify their own names.

The data indicates that all, but one learner, were able to identify their own names. The learner, who was unable to identify his name, looked at all the name tags that were displayed on the table. He was unable to identify his name tag amongst all the name tags that were displayed on the table. He then looked at the teacher and said: "My name is not there." The teacher assisted him by pointing to his name tag. There is also a possibility that the learner may have been able to identify his name but just could not locate his name tag amongst all the name tags on the table.

The learners were also expected to look for the logos of supermarkets and department stores in magazines and to cut them out and paste them on their pages after the teacher displayed and discussed different logos of supermarkets and department stores. The teacher instructed learners to look for the same logos in the magazines as was displayed in front of the class. The learners were observed and their activity sheets were also examined to assess their abilities to identify logos of supermarkets that are regarded as high frequency words in the environment. I observed that most of them were able to paste the logos of the supermarkets. Six (one was the learner who was also unable to identify his name) of the thirty-three learners were unable to identify the logos of supermarkets and department stores as these learners pasted pictures of other products instead of the logos of supermarkets and department stores. There is a possibility that these six learners did not understand what a logo meant and confused it with the products bought from supermarkets and department stores.

Four of the six learners, who were unable to identify the logos of supermarkets and department stores, spoke English as home language, one of them spoke Afrikaans and the other learner's home language was both Afrikaans and English. Five of the learners attended Grade R and three of the six learners were six years old, two were six-and-a half years old and one learner was seven years old. Three of them were females and three were males.

4.3.2.2 Book handling skills

The learners were involved in role play reading activities. Groups of learners were asked to 'read' their story books in the reading corner. They were observed while they were busy with role play reading in order to assess their abilities to *hold the books in an appropriate manner and to turn the pages appropriately* while role-play reading.

I observed that fifteen of the thirty-three participants were unable to hold a story book and turn the pages appropriately during role play reading. Some learners only used their index fingers or thumbs to turn the pages at the middle edge of the page, while others used three and four fingers to turn the pages wildly at the middle edge. Most of the learners talked quietly about the pictures as they paged through their books. Some learners pointed to the pictures while a few pointed to the pictures and words. Only two (included in the fifteen) learners did not display any interest in the pictures or words of the books.

Of the fifteen learners who were unable to hold a story book appropriately, eight of them spoke English at home, three spoke Xhosa and four of them spoke Afrikaans at home. Eleven of the fifteen learners attended Grade R. One learner was five-and-a half years old, four were six years old and ten of them were six-and-a half years old. Eight of the fifteen learners were females and seven were males.

4.3.2.3 Ability to interpret pictures

The teacher displayed big activity pictures and learners were expected to identify objects in the pictures and to identify and discuss the activities in the pictures. The whole class sat on the mat in front of the class during these activities. These activities were repeated daily during the baseline assessment. The teacher displayed a different picture every day and explained the theme in the picture to the learners by informing them that the picture was about topics such as a family, a school or animals. The learners were asked to identify objects in the pictures, what was happening in the pictures and what the different characters were doing. Many of the learners who sat at the back on the mat became distracted during these activities.

I observed the learners in order to assess their abilities to recognise objects in the pictures and to interpret the pictures. I recorded my observations in field notes during these activities.

Thirteen learners did not respond to the teachers request to identify the objects in the pictures and to identify and discuss the activities in the pictures. Some of these learners just shrugged and some of them looked down when the teacher asked them to talk about the pictures. All these learners were also unable to share information effectively (4.3.1.4) during the class discussion and six of these learners were also unable to respond to questions on the stories (4.3.1.1).

Three of the above-mentioned learners spoke English at home, eight of them spoke Xhosa and two spoke Afrikaans at home. Eleven learners attended Grade R. The ages of the learners were as follows: four were six years old, six were six-and-a half, two were seven years old and one learner was seven-and-a half years old. Nine of them were females and four were males.

4.3.2.4 Ability to identify the sound symbols of the alphabet

The teacher displayed a big alphabet chart in order to assess the learners' abilities to identify the sound symbols of the alphabet. The teacher asked individual learners to *identify certain single sound symbols* on the alphabet chart. She also displayed pictures and individual learners were asked to *name the objects in the pictures* and to *identify the beginning sound symbols* on the alphabet chart. Each learner was only given the opportunity to identity five to six sound symbols, as opposed to all the sounds of the alphabet, during these sessions. There is therefore the possibility that some of the learners might have been able to identify the other sound symbols of the alphabet. The whole class sat on the mat during these activities.

The learners were observed during these activities and I recorded my observations in field notes. I observed that sixteen of the learners were unable to identify single sounds and to identify words that start with single sounds. Fifteen of the sixteen learners did not respond when the teacher asked them to identify the sounds on the alphabet chart. The other learner confused the letter names and the sounds of the alphabet.

Six of the sixteen learners who were unable to identify the sounds of the alphabet spoke English as home language, six learners spoke Xhosa, three of them spoke Afrikaans and another learner spoke both Afrikaans and English. Thirteen of the sixteen learners attended

Grade R. Their ages were as follows: seven of them were six years old, eight were six-and-a half and one learner was seven years old.

4.3.2.5 Ability to complete a puzzle

A drawing of a teddy bear was displayed (A-4 size) that served as a reference for the learners during the puzzle activity. The whole drawing of the teddy bear was displayed. Each learner received a similar drawing of a teddy bear that was divided into seven parts. The parts were numbered from one to seven. The learners were instructed to cut out the different parts of the teddy bear and to *complete the drawing of the teddy bear by pasting the puzzle pieces on a worksheet*. The teacher explained to them that their drawings must look like the one that was displayed. The learners were then instructed to go to their tables to complete the activity.

Learners' teddy-bear activity worksheets were used to assess their abilities to complete the puzzle.

The data indicates that fourteen of the participants were unable to complete their puzzles successfully. Four of them were unable to paste the puzzle pieces of a teddy-bear correctly in order to complete the drawing whilst four other participants could not successfully organise the puzzle pieces since some of the puzzle pieces were missing. There is a possibility that the puzzle pieces fell on the floor during the activity and that they were unable to locate it. The other six learners did not paste their puzzle pieces on the pages in order to complete the puzzle. Two of the fourteen learners also struggled to cut out the puzzle pieces. One of these two learners struggled to cut out the different body parts of the teddy-bear and cut away the face while the second learner struggled to use the pair of scissors correctly.

Of the fourteen learners who were unable to complete the puzzles, ten of them spoke English at home, one spoke Xhosa, two of them spoke Afrikaans and one learner spoke both Afrikaans and English. Twelve of them attended Grade R. One of the learners was five- and-a half years old, eight of them were six years, four were six-and-a half and one learner was seven years old.

4.3.2.6 Ability to recall

A chart with drawings of a glass, drum, flag, present and a frog was used to assess the abilities of the learners to *recall the items in the picture.* Groups of learners were instructed to go to the reading corner. The chart was displayed against the board in the reading corner.

The learners were asked to first name the items in the picture before the picture was removed from the board and placed face-down on the mat. They were then asked if they could remember what they saw in the pictures. They were instructed *to name the items they saw in the picture* in order to assess their abilities to recall the items.

Twenty-four learners were unable to recall all the items in the picture. Fourteen of these learners' home language was English, six of them spoke Xhosa, three spoke Afrikaans and one of them spoke both Afrikaans and English at home. Seventeen of the twenty-four learners attended Grade R. The ages of the learners were as follows: one of them was five-and-a half years old, twelve were six years, eight were six-and-a half, two of them were seven and another one was seven-and-a half years old. Fourteen of them were females and ten were males.

4.3.2.7 Ability to identify differences

The learners were also expected to *compare two similar pictures in order to identify the differences in the second picture.* The teacher displayed a page with the two pictures and instructed the learners to circle the differences in the pictures. The learners were confused with the instruction and were not sure what was expected of them. The teacher then clarified the instruction by explaining that they must look at the two pictures and only circle the items that are different in the second picture. Some of them did not only circle the differences in the second picture but circled items in the first picture as well. They only settled down with the activity after the teacher clarified the instructions and emphasised that they must only circle the differences in the second picture.

Eight of the thirty-three learners were unable to identify the differences in the picture despite the teacher clarifying what had to be done. Six of the learners spoke English as home language and two of them spoke Xhosa at home. Seven of the eight learners attended Grade R. Six learners were six years old and two of them were six-and-a half. Three of them were females and the other five were males.

4.3.2.8 Ability to complete figure-ground activity

Each learner received a page with a house in the background being overlapped by shapes. A circle partially overlapped the top right side of the roof and a small portion of the top right wall of the house. A triangle partially overlapped the top left side of the roof. A rectangle was drawn over the front of the house covering the bottom half of the front walls, overlapping the left and right sides of the house. The learners were instructed to colour the house in the

background of the page in order to assess their abilities to *complete a figure-ground activity.* They had to colour in all the parts of the house, even those parts that were overlapped by the different shapes.

Only four learners were unable to identify the house in the background of the page. The first learner only coloured in the roof and the top half of the front wall of the house and did not colour in the bottom half of the front wall that was overlapped by the rectangle. The second learner coloured in the front walls of the house as well as those parts of the overlapping shapes that didn't overlap the house, but did not colour in the roof of the house. The third learner almost coloured in all the parts of the house but did not colour the top right part of the wall that was overlapped by the circle. The other learner coloured in the bottom front wall of the house, the windows and partially coloured in the roof as well as those parts of the overlapping shapes that didn't overlap the roof of the house. He did not colour in the top half of the walls and only partially coloured in the part of the roof that was overlapped by the circle. These four learners therefore demonstrated problems with visual figure-ground perception.

Of the four learners who were unable to complete the figure-ground activity, three of them spoke English as home language and one of them spoke Afrikaans. Two of the four learners attended Grade R. Three of them were six years old and one was six-and-a half years old. Three of the learners were males and the other one was a female.

4.3.2.9 Summary of findings in relation to emergent reading

The learners were involved in emergent reading activities so as to assess their abilities to: *recognise words, handle books, interpret pictures, to identify sounds of the alphabet, to complete a puzzle, ability to recall* and to *complete a figure-ground activity*. The skill in which the highest number of learners performed unsatisfactorily was the ability to recall and the skill in which the highest number of learners performed satisfactorily was the ability to recognise words in the environment (logos and the learners' own names).

The data from the results of the emergent reading activities, as organised in the Literacy assessment checklist, in Table 4.2, assisted me in identifying possible barriers with perceptual skills, receptive- and expressive language barriers as well as barriers with motor development.

4.3.3 Emergent Writing

The following emergent writing skills of the learners were assessed: *manipulates writing tools, uses letters to represent writing, directionality, ability to write on a page, ability to use colour* and the *ability to convey a message using a drawing*. A discussion of the assessment of these activities follows.

4.3.3.1 Ability to manipulate writing tools

At the end of Grade R learners are expected to copy short sentences and words written by the teacher (South Africa. Department of Basic Education, 2011: 52). The abilities of the learners to *manipulate their writing tools* were assessed during the written news activities. The learners were instructed to draw themselves and to copy their names from the name tags on their tables. They were also instructed to copy the names of the days of the week. Thereafter, the teacher also wrote one learner's news on the chalkboard each day, during the second week of the baseline assessment, after the news was discussed. The learners were instructed to copy the sentence and to draw a picture of the news. I observed the learners manipulating their writing tools (thick crayons) while they were busy with these activities.

A comfortable writing position is important during written activities. The position of the arms, elbows, hand, wrist, fingers and writing tool must ensure the maximum co-ordination of the moving parts. The way in which the writing tool is held plays an important role in learning to write and developing a good writing style (Joubert, 2013: 188 – 189). The correct writing posture and manipulation of the writing tool will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Ten of the learners were unable to grip their writing tools effectively. Six of them gripped their crayons correctly, but their grips were too tight. These six learners fidgeted with their crayons during the activity, while one of them bent his wrist to the inside and looked very uncomfortable while writing. Four of the ten learners were unable to grip their crayons correctly. One of the four learners alternated between a correct, but tight grip and a fist hold. Another learner gripped his crayon between the middle and index fingers, with the index finger curled around the crayon. Two leaners gripped the crayons between their thumbs and index fingers and curled their index fingers around the crayon.

Twenty-one of the thirty-three learners who participated in the study, did not have the correct posture while they were writing since twenty of them sat with their forearms on their tables but with their non-writing hands slightly away from their pages instead of holding their pages

at the top. One of them sat with the elbow on the table with the chin resting in the non-writing hand. Two of the twenty-one learners rested their heads on the arms of their non-writing hands.

All but one of the learner's pages were tilted at a comfortable angle, approximately sixty degrees from the page orientation that is perpendicular to the edge of the writing surface (Towle, 1978: 375). The learner's page was turned at an uncomfortable angle, almost parallel to the writing surface.

Of the ten learners who were unable to manipulate their crayons effectively, six of them spoke English at home, two of them spoke Xhosa, one spoke Afrikaans and one of them spoke Afrikaans and English at home. Nine of the ten learners attended Grade R. One of them was five-and-a half years old, six learners were six years and three of them were six-and- a half years old. Five of them were females and five were males.

4.3.3.2 Abilities to write the letters of the alphabet

As mentioned in section 4.3.3.1, learners are expected to copy short sentences and words written by the teacher at the end of Grade R (South Africa. Department of Basic Education, 2011: 52). The *written news activities* facilitated the assessment of the learners' abilities to form the letters of the alphabet correctly. Pages were provided to the learners for these activities. The learners sat at their tables and used thick crayons to copy the news that the teacher wrote on the chalk board.

The data indicates that three learners had problems in forming most of the letters of the alphabet correctly in order to represent writing. One of the learners mirror wrote all her letters, while the other two learners scribbled most of their work. One of the two learners who scribbled, only mirror wrote the "s" and scribbled the rest of the letters; whilst the other learner was only able to write the first few letters of his name but wrote from right to left and scribbled all the other letters. Fourteen other learners were able to form most of the letters of the alphabet correctly but confused the following letters: "b" and "d"; "w", "u" and "n".

The three learners who were unable to form most of the letters of the alphabet correctly spoke English as their home language and only one of them attended Grade R. One learner was six years and the other two were six-and-a half years old. One of them was a female and two were males.

4.3.3.3 Directionality

The written news activities also facilitated the assessment of the learners' abilities *to write from left to right.* The learners were observed while they were busy writing the news in order to assess their awareness of directionality in their own writing.

The same three learners who were unable to form most of the letters of the alphabet correctly (4.3.3.2) were also unable to write from left to right.

4.3.3.4 Ability to write on a page

At the end of Grade R learners are expected to write from left to right and from the top to the bottom of a page (South Africa. Department of Basic Education, 2011: 52). The worksheets of the written news activities were also used to assess the abilities of the learners to *write on their pages appropriately.*

The data indicates that the three leaners who were unable to correctly form most of the letters of the alphabet and who were unable to write from left to right, were also not able to write appropriately on their pages. They did not start to write at the top of their pages and in some of their activities they did not start at the left hand sides of their pages. They started to write more towards the middle of their pages in most of their activities. In one of the activities one of the learners wrote in the margins of the page instead of from the top to the bottom.

4.3.3.5 Ability to use colour in drawings

Emergent writing includes activities in all areas of language and other subjects. At the end of Grade R, learners are expected to draw pictures to convey a message about a personal experience and to use it as a starting point for writing (South Africa. Department of Basic Education, 2011: 52). The learners were expected to draw their families and to talk about their family members in the drawing. The drawing activity was an integration with creative arts. According to the Life Skills Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) learners are expected to use colour in their drawings (South Africa. Department of Basic Education, 2011: 25). Learners who start to perceive differences in colour, experiment with different colours in their drawings (Mayesky, 2012:196).

Each learner was provided with a page as well as a container with different colour crayons on the table. The teacher instructed the learners to draw their families with the crayons that were provided. Different colour crayons were available in containers to allow the use of

different colours in their drawings. The pages of the learners' drawings of their families were examined to assess their *abilities to use colour in their drawings.*

Twelve of the learners did not use colours effectively in their drawings despite the availability of a variety of colour crayons. Eight of the twelve learners only used one colour, five of those eight learners used only red, two of them used only blue and one of them used brown only. Two of the remaining four learners used two colours in their drawings, one of them used red and brown and the other learner used brown and black. The other two learners used three colours, one of them used red, blue and brown and the other learner used red, yellow and black.

Seven of the above-mentioned twelve learners spoke English at home, one of them spoke Xhosa, three spoke Afrikaans and one of them spoke both Afrikaans and English at home. Ten of the twelve learners attended Grade R. There ages were as follows: Two of them were five-and-a half years old, four learners were six, five of them were six-and-a half years and one was seven years old. Five of the learners were females and seven were males.

4.3.3.6 Ability to use a drawing to convey a message

As mentioned in section 4.4.3.5, Grade R learners are expected to draw pictures to convey a message about a personal experience and to use it as a starting point for writing (South Africa. Department of Education, 2011: 52). The learners were asked to draw their families and to speak about their family members in their drawings. The learners were observed while they talked about their family members in their drawings in order to assess their abilities to use the drawings to convey a message.

Nine of the learners refused to talk about their family members in their drawings. Some of them just shrugged their shoulders while a few others just smiled and dropped their heads.

Of those nine learners, four of them spoke English as a home language and five learners' home language were Xhosa. Six of them attended Grade R. Three of the learners were six years old, five of them were six-and-a half and one of them was seven years old. Six of the nine learners were females and three were males.

4.3.3.7 Summary of findings in relation to emergent writing

The learners were involved with emergent writing activities in order to assess their abilities: to manipulate their writing tools, to write the letters of the alphabet as well as their abilities to write from left to right and their abilities to write on a page. The abilities to use different

colours in drawings and to use a drawing in order to convey a message were also assessed. The skill in which the highest number of learners performed unsatisfactorily was the ability to use different colours in drawings and the skills in which the highest number of learners performed satisfactorily were the abilities to write the letters of the alphabet, to write from left to right and their abilities to write on a page.

The data from the results of the emergent writing activities as organised in the Literacy assessment checklist (Table 4.2), assisted me in identifying possible barriers with perceptual-motor development, perceptual skills, and expressive language barriers.

4.3.3.8 Patterns emerging from the analysis of the participants' literacy skills

This section provides additional information regarding the patterns of literacy skills of the participants in terms of their listening and speaking, emergent reading and emergent writing skills. Participants' performances were analysed statistically in terms of the sample as a whole, as well as gender, home language, Grade R attendance and age categories. The analysis was conducted by firstly totalling the number of performances for each activity for the sample as a whole and then for each category. Then the total number of barriers for each activity was calculated. Thirdly, the number of barriers were calculated as a percentage of the total number of performance for each activity. In this manner, the percentage frequency of the learning barriers for each activity as well as each category (listening and speaking, emergent reading and emergent writing) were calculated for the different biographical variables and the sample as a whole. Table 4.3 represents the different performance patterns that emerged.

For the sample as a whole, 28% of the total number of performances (693) were unsatisfactory, thus indicating the percentage of barriers for all performances during the baseline assessment literacy programme. The literacy category where the highest percentage of barriers were experienced, was emergent reading (38%) out of 264 performances and the category where the lowest percentage of barriers were experienced, was emergent writing (20%) out of 198 performances. The listening and speaking category had 25% of barriers for all performances (231) in that category. Participants' performances will now be discussed in terms of gender, home language, Grade R attendance and age.

a) Gender

Participants' performances in terms of gender revealed that amongst males the percentage of barriers for the entire assessment (all performances by males) was 31%. In terms of the

three literacy categories, the percentage barriers for male performances were: 22% in the listening and speaking category, 42% in emergent reading and 26% in emergent writing. Male performances were therefore the least satisfactory in the emergent reading category. The percentage female barriers was: 27% for the entire assessment, 26% in the listening and speaking category, 35% in emergent reading and 17% in emergent writing. The males experienced fewer barriers in the listening and speaking category than the females, whilst the females experienced fewer barriers in the emergent- reading and writing categories than the males.

b) Home language

The learners whose home language was English experienced the following percentage barriers: 27% for the entire assessment, 17% in listening and speaking, 38% in emergent reading and 24% in emergent writing. The percentage barriers for Xhosa home language speakers were: 36% for the entire assessment, 48% in the listening and speaking category, 41% in emergent reading and 17% in emergent writing. Afrikaans home language speakers experienced 24% barriers for the entire assessment, 14% barriers in listening and speaking, 40% barriers in emergent reading and 13% barriers in emergent writing. Of the learners whose home language was both English and Afrikaans, 21% experienced barriers for the entire assessment, 21% experienced barriers in listening and speaking, 25% in emergent reading and 17% in emergent writing.

The performances of home language groups: English, Afrikaans as well as those with both English and Afrikaans as home language, were the least satisfactory in the emergent reading category, compared to listening and speaking and emergent writing; whilst the performances of the learners whose home language was Xhosa were the least satisfactory in the listening and speaking category. English home language speakers experienced fewer barriers in the listening and speaking category than the learners whose home language was Xhosa and both Afrikaans and English, whilst Afrikaans home language learners experienced the least barriers (14%) in the listening and speaking category. The learners who spoke both English and Afrikaans at home experienced fewer barriers (25%) in the emergent reading category compared to the other learners. The learners who spoke Afrikaans at home experienced fewer barriers (13%) in the emergent writing category than the other learners.

c) Grade R attendance

Amongst the learners who attended Grade R, 28% experienced barriers for the entire assessment, 26% experienced barriers in the listening and speaking category, 38%percent

in emergent reading and 18% in emergent writing. The percentage barriers of those learners who did not attend Grade R was: 29% for the entire assessment, 20% in listening and speaking category, 38% in emergent reading and 29% percent in emergent writing. The performances of all these learners, those who attended Grade R and those who did not attend, were the least satisfactory in the emergent reading category. The learners who did not attend Grade R experienced fewer barriers in the listening and speaking category than those who attended Grade R, whilst those who attended Grade R experienced fewer barrier in the emergent writing category. The performances of the learners who attended Grade R and those who did not, were the same in the emergent reading category.

d) Age

Participants were also grouped in terms of their ages at the time of the study when analysing the data. The age groupings resulted in two age cohorts, namely five-and-a half to six year-olds and the six-and-a half to seven-and-a half year-olds. The following percentage barriers were experienced by the five-and-a half to six year old learners: 25% for the entire assessment, 21% in the listening and speaking category, 35% in emergent reading and 19% in emergent writing. The six-and-a half to seven-and-a half year old learners experienced the following percentage barriers: 32% for the entire assessment, 30% in the listening and speaking category, 42% in emergent reading and 22% barriers in emergent writing. The performances of all these learners, in both age categories, were the least satisfactory in emergent reading, compared to listening and speaking and emergent writing.

The younger age cohort (five-and-a half to six year olds) experienced fewer barriers for the assessment as a whole as well as for all three emergent literacy categories: listening and speaking, emergent reading and emergent writing than the learners in the six-and-a half to seven-and-a half year old category. It seems as if Grade R attendance played a role in the development of the literacy skills of these learners, since 89% of the five-and-a half to six year old learners attended Grade R compared to 66% of the six-and-a half to seven-and-a half year olds.

e) Other performance patterns that emerged in terms of the different assessment activities

The activities with the highest percentage of successful performances were the ability to: *match colours, use letters to represent writing, directionality when writing* and *to write on a page* (nine percent barriers in each activity). The skill with the highest percentage of unsatisfactory performances was the *ability to recall* (73% barriers).

The results of the baseline assessment, as indicated in the Literacy assessment checklist (Table 4.2) revealed that only one learner was able to satisfactorily complete all the baseline assessment activities. This learner's home language was English, the learner attended Grade R, was five-and-a half years old at the time of the baseline assessment and was a female. The results also revealed that the learner who experienced the most barriers during the baseline assessment, was only able to perform satisfactorily during the following activities: *ability to listen attentively to stories*, *shares information*, to *use language appropriately* (listening and speaking activities), *interpret pictures* (emergent reading) and was able to *manipulate his writing tool*. The home language of this learner was English, the learner attended Grade R, was six years old at the time of the baseline assessment and was a male.

Table 4.3: Frequencies of literacy barriers in terms of gender, home language, age and Grade R attendance

Literacy assessment Skills	Gender		Home language				Grade R attendance		5½ - 6 years	6½ - 7½ years	Total number of assessments and frequency of barriers for the whole sample and per category and total
	Males	Females	English	Xhosa	Afrikaans	Afrikaans & English	Yes	No			
	13	20	18	8	5	2	26	7	18	15	
Listening and speaking (L & S) skills	**91**	**140**	**126**	**56**	**35**	**14**	**182**	**49**	**126**	**105**	**231**
Listens attentively	1	5	3	2	1	0	4	2	1	5	6
Responds appropriately	4	5	3	5	1	0	8	1	4	5	9
Follows Instructions	5	8	6	5	1	1	10	3	7	6	13
Participates confidently	1	4	3	1	0	1	3	2	4	1	5
Matches colours	3	0	3	0	0	0	3	0	3	0	3
Shares information	4	10	3	8	2	1	12	2	5	9	14
Language use	2	5	1	6	0	0	7	0	2	5	7
Total frequency of L & S barriers for participants per category and for the sample as a whole	**20**	**37**	**22**	**27**	**5**	**3**	**47**	**10**	**26**	**31**	**57**
% age of L & S barriers per category and for the sample as a whole	**22%**	**26%**	**17%**	**48%**	**14%**	**21%**	**26%**	**20%**	**21%**	**30%**	**25%**
Emergent reading (E.R.) skills	**104**	**160**	**144**	**64**	**40**	**16**	**208**	**56**	**144**	**120**	**264**
Recognises words	3	3	4	0	1	1	5	1	3	3	6
Book handling skills	7	8	8	3	4	0	11	4	5	10	15
Interprets pictures	4	9	3	8	2	0	11	2	4	9	13
Identifies sounds	6	10	6	6	3	1	13	3	7	9	16
Completes puzzle	8	6	10	1	2	1	12	2	9	5	14

Table 4.3: Frequencies of literacy barriers in terms of gender, home language, age and Grade R attendance

Ability to recall	10	14	14	6	3	1	18	6	13	11	24
Identifies differences	5	3	6	2	0	0	7	1	6	2	8
Completes figure-ground picture	1	3	3	0	1	0	2	2	3	1	4
Total frequency of emergent reading barriers for the participants per category and for the sample as a whole	**44**	**56**	**54**	**26**	**16**	**4**	**79**	**21**	**50**	**50**	**100**
% Emergent reading barriers per category and for the sample as a whole	**42%**	**35%**	**38%**	**41%**	**40%**	**25%**	**38%**	**38%**	**35%**	**42%**	**38%**
Emergent Writing (E.W.) skills	**78**	**120**	**108**	**48**	**30**	**12**	**156**	**42**	**108**	**90**	**198**
Manipulate writing tools	4	6	6	2	1	1	9	1	8	2	10
Uses letters to write	2	1	3	0	0	0	1	2	1	2	3
Directionality	2	1	3	0	0	0	1	2	1	2	3
Ability to use a page	2	1	3	0	0	0	1	2	1	2	3
Ability to use colour	7	5	7	1	3	1	10	2	6	6	12
Convey message using drawing	3	6	4	5	0	0	6	3	3	6	9
Total frequency of emergent writing barriers for the participants per category and for the sample as a whole	**20**	**20**	**26**	**8**	**4**	**2**	**28**	**12**	**20**	**20**	**40**
% Emergent writing barriers per category and for the sample as a whole	**26%**	**17%**	**24%**	**17%**	**13%**	**17%**	**18%**	**29%**	**19%**	**22%**	**20%**
Total performances	**273**	**420**	**378**	**168**	**105**	**42**	**546**	**147**	**378**	**315**	**693**
Total barriers	**84**	**113**	**102**	**61**	**25**	**9**	**154**	**43**	**96**	**101**	**197**
Total % barriers	**31%**	**27%**	**27%**	**36%**	**24%**	**21%**	**28%**	**29%**	**25%**	**32%**	**28%**

Key	Colour code
% barriers	
Total performances	

The participants who were unable to listen attentively to stories during story time were also unable to follow instructions during games and action songs. The data indicates that these learners may have experienced receptive language barriers due to barriers with attention and memory.

The data also revealed that six of the participants who were unable to respond to questions during story time, were also unable to share information during class discussions, use language appropriately and interpret pictures during class activities. The pattern revealed the possibility that these learners were unable to express themselves verbally during the class activities. Three of the six learners were also unable to convey a message using a drawing when asked individually to speak about their drawings. The pattern indicates that these learners experienced possible barriers with expressive language.

Four of the learners who were unable to identify high frequency words in the environment, were also unable to complete puzzles and to recall five items in a picture. This pattern indicates that these four learners experienced possible barriers with visual perception.

The data also indicates that the three learners who were unable to use letters to represent writing, experienced barriers with directionality in their writing, and who were unable to use their pages effectively, were also unable to recognise sounds, complete puzzles and memorise five items in a picture. The pattern that was revealed indicates possible barriers with visual perception, perceptual-motor co-ordination as well as attention and memory.

4.4 What are the Grade one teacher's perceptions about the usefulness of the literacy baseline assessment instrument?

An interview was conducted with the Grade one class teacher, who administered the literacy baseline assessment in order to determine the teacher's opinion regarding the effectiveness of the baseline assessment literacy programme.

4.4.1 Experience of the class teacher

The Grade one teacher of the research site started her second year of teaching at the time of the research and her lack of experience may have impacted on the performances of the learners during the baseline assessment activities, since she admitted that she was unsure and confused at times with the integration of the baseline assessment activities with CAPS as well as the integration of some of the literacy activities with Mathematics and Life Skills. An analysis of the interview with the teacher revealed the following themes:

4.4.2 Duration of the baseline assessment

The teacher felt that the baseline assessment programme was too long, compared to the baseline assessment of the other grades in the primary school, which is only conducted on one day for home language and one day for Mathematics. The following quotes highlights this view by the teacher:

"Personally I think it is way too long and it's… there are too much things that the children have to do."

"There are differences in the types of baseline assessments from Grade R to Grade three. They only have to do this one test and not every day the same, like uh… this whole big programme that we are talking about."

4.4.3 Assessment versus teaching

The teacher also felt that many of the learners did not understand the instructions of most of the activities at first, as she had to first explain the activities again to the learners before many of them were able to start with the activities. She felt more as if she was teaching, instead of giving the learners the instructions of the baseline assessment activities. The following quote succinctly represents the teacher's view in this regard:

"For me especially having to explain, explain, explain... according to what I know, baseline assessment is not about that. It is just about explaining once or twice then the children must go and do it. For me it felt like I was teaching, teaching, teaching all the time."

4.4.4 Confidence of the learners

She felt that the baseline assessment activities required the learners to be self-confident as they were expected to write their own names and to speak in front of a class. The following quote represents this view of the teacher:

> *"The learners need to learn from day one; when they get a lot of self-confidence; how to write their own name, how to talk in front of a class…"*

4.4.5 Adequacy of assessment instrument in assessing emergent literacy skills

The teacher explained that the baseline assessment instrument adequately assessed the emergent literacy skills of the learners because she was able to identify the different abilities of the learners during the writing and phonics activities. The following quote highlights this view of the teacher:

> "Some of the activities, like the writing and the phonics … those were the kind of things that really stood out for me with regards to observing the learners' abilities."

4.4.6 Repetition of baseline assessment activities

She felt that although the baseline assessment activities assisted her in identifying the emergent literacy skills of the learners, there were just too much repetition with regards to some of the activities. The following quote highlights this view of the teacher:

> "There was a lot of cutting and pasting, which I understand it is good for their hand-eye co-ordination and stuff, but some of the other things like the body and family and those things were a bit repetitive."

4.4.7 Participants' home language versus language of learning and teaching (LOLT)

The teacher identified that most of the learners whose home language was not the same as the LOLT, had problems in understanding her instructions. The following quote emphasises the teacher's concern regarding this issue:

> "Because I have a lot of second language learners in my class, I'm talking specifically about the Xhosa speaking learners, for them you must always have the pictures and the words and you must always show the actions."

4.4.8 Grade R attendance

She also identified that many of the learners who did not attend Grade R experienced barriers during the phonics and writing activities. This view of the teacher is highlighted in the following quote:

> "I find that learners who were in Grade R, their literacy levels are much higher than the ones that just came from home."

4.4.9 Support for learners with literacy barriers

The teacher explained that she needed to support the learners who experienced literacy barriers, by using pictures which were labelled that facilitated the exposure of the learners to different words and that she also needed to demonstrate the action words. She emphasized the importance of teaching rhymes to learners to support them with their literacy skills. In addition, the teacher explained that she needed to read stories regularly and that she needed to show the learners the pictures. She also mentioned that she would have to appeal to the parents of the learners who experienced literacy barriers to support their children at home and by reading stories to them.

In order to cater for the different ability groups that were identified during the baseline assessment activities, the teacher planned to provide differentiated activities that would include intervention activities for the learners who experienced barriers and more advanced activities for the learners who were able to do the baseline assessment activities. The quotes that follow represent these views:

> "*There's different ways how children learn to read*…with the pictures, the words, with actions and with rhymes."

> "*Extra activities… intervention for the ones that are a bit slow and then obviously, advanced activities.*"

> "*I try to speak to the parents as well… reading, reading, reading to them, all the time.*"

4.4.10 Interpretation of policy guidelines in implementing the baseline assessment

The teacher felt that the baseline assessment guidelines were too broad. She explained that although the WCED provided the lesson plans and an explanation of the activities, the baseline assessment was unclear in its implementation since it was left up to the interpretation of the individual teacher. The following quotes represent the view of the teacher:

> "*I think it is way too broad, they give you a certain, uhm, the lesson but obviously it is gonna be different from teacher to teacher.*"

> "*I will do uhm… say day one this way and another teacher will do it that way*"

The teacher also felt that the WCED circular that advised teachers that it was unnecessary to work through the entire Western Cape Education Department (2007) baseline assessment programme and that teachers could adapt the programme in order to integrate the programme with the teaching of CAPS confused her. She also felt that the circular in question created confusion amongst teachers and that it impacted on the uniformity regarding the implementation of the baseline assessment activities as teachers might have had different interpretations of the circular content. She also felt that there was a lack of support regarding the explanation of the integration of the baseline assessment activities with CAPS. She explained that she tried to deviate from the baseline assessment with some of the activities but she did not really understand what the WCED meant when they advised teachers via a circular to integrate the baseline assessment programme with CAPS.

The following quote represents the teachers' uncertainty in implementing the baseline assessment:

> *"I think there should be more uniformity and they should actually tell us exactly… let us do this and this."*

> *"I didn't understand what they mean… In what sense, in what sense do I deviate?"*

4.4.11 Challenges with the implementation of the baseline assessment activities

The teacher felt that the baseline assessment programme was challenging as there were too many assessment activities that had to be conducted. The teacher's confusion regarding the implementation of the baseline assessment activities as well as the confusion of the learners in understanding the instructions of the teacher, contributed to challenges with the implementation of the baseline assessment activities. The following quotes highlight this view of the teacher:

> *"There are too much things that the children have to do."*

> *"When you have so much activities, the way the kids are… the way they grasp things are obviously different and you as teacher explain it this way and the other one explain it that way. So there is also that confusion as well with the learners."*

4.4.12 Integration of the literacy baseline assessment activities with other subjects

The teacher explained that the literacy baseline assessment was also broad in terms of the integration with Mathematics and Life Skills as she was not always sure whether she was busy with just one subject or whether she was busy integrating the other subjects. The following activities are examples of baseline assessment activities that have been integrated with other subjects:

- Class discussions about family, friends and the school is an integration with Life Skills (beginning knowledge).
- Participation in games and action songs integrates with Life Skills (creative arts).
- Figure-ground activity and matching colours according to the teacher's instructions are activities that integrate with Mathematics (Patterns, functions and algebra) (South Africa. Department of Basic Education, 2011: 15 – 16, 26).

The confusion felt by the teacher in implementing the baseline assessment is represented by the following quote:

> *"It is just quite broad because you don't really know if we are touching on just one thing or are we integrating…because as far as I know you must integrate everything, even Maths lessons must be integrated with Numeracy… I mean Literacy and Life Skills."*

4.4.13 Appropriateness of scheduling of the Grade one baseline assessment

The teacher felt that the baseline assessment should rather be conducted at the end of the Grade R year as it is time consuming to conduct it at the beginning of Grade one and tiring for the learners as well as the teacher. This will inform the Grade one teacher what the abilities of the learners are at the beginning of the year. It will also allow the teacher to place the learners in their ability groups and to carry on from there. The following quotes highlight her views regarding the scheduling of the Grade one baseline assessment:

> *"They should rather do it the previous year or at the end of the year so that when the kids come to the next grade then we know what level they will be falling in or what group and then we can carry on from there."*

4.4.14 Links of the baseline assessment concepts with CAPS

The teacher explained that she enjoyed implementing the baseline activities since the concepts that were assessed were essential literacy skills and they link with the programme that must be implemented throughout the year. Identification of the sound symbols of single sounds and copying learner-generated news sentences from the chalkboard are examples of baseline assessment activities that are linked with the Grade one literacy criteria of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (South Africa. Department of Basic Education, 2011: 56, 59). The quote below succinctly represents the teacher's view that the baseline assessment activities were useful in relation to curriculum delivery:

> *"Some of the activities…or most of them were quite good because it links with the things that we have to do throughout the year."*

4.4.14 Summary of findings in relation to the interview with the teacher

The following themes were discussed regarding the interview that was conducted with the Grade one teacher: the experience of the teacher, the duration of the baseline assessment, assessment versus teaching, confidence of learners, adequacy of the assessment instrument in assessing emergent literacy skills, repetition of the baseline assessment activities, participant home language versus LOLT, Grade R attendance, support for learners, interpretation of policy guidelines in implementing the baseline assessment, challenges with the implementation of the baseline assessment activities, integration of the literacy baseline assessment activities with other subjects, appropriateness of scheduling of the Grade one baseline assessment, links of the baseline assessment concepts with CAPS.

The data that was collected during the interview with the teacher indicate that the teacher was an inexperienced Grade one teacher, who only started her second year of teaching when the research was conducted. There is a possibility that her inexperience may have impacted on the manner in which the baseline assessment has been conducted. Her confusion regarding the integration of some of the literacy activities with Mathematics and Life Skills may have also influenced the manner in which she introduced the baseline assessment activities as many of the learners, whose home languages were not the same as the LOLT, were unable to start with the activities after the first instructions. She had to explain the activities several time to many of the learners before they were able to start with the activities.

4.5 What learning support strategies can be recommended to address the literacy barriers (if any) identified by the baseline assessment?

The data from the results of the literacy baseline assessment activities assisted me to identify the following literacy barriers: receptive- and expressive language barriers, perceptual barriers as well as barriers with perceptual motor development. Support strategies to improve the receptive- and expressive language of the learners, their perceptual skills as well as their perceptual-motor co-ordination, will be discussed in Chapter 5.2.3.

4.6 Conclusion

I have presented information regarding the research participants as well as a checklist that indicate the literacy barriers that the learners experienced during the baseline assessment activities. I also provided an analysis of the learners' literacy skills for the sample as a whole and in terms of the variables: gender, home language, Grade R attendance and age. In addition I presented the findings of the interview that was conducted with the Grade one teacher who administered the literacy baseline assessment. The next chapter discusses the findings of the research study.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

My analysis and interpretation of the data will be discussed in this section. The discussion focuses on the major themes that emerged from the results of the data. Attention is given to the literacy barriers that learners may have experienced with the baseline assessment activities as well as the possible factors that could have contributed to these barriers. Consideration is also given to the usefulness of the WCED literacy baseline assessment instrument, which will be reflected in the discussion of my findings of the observation of learners as well the interview that I conducted with the Grade one teacher who administered the baseline assessment. Learning support strategies that might improve the literacy skills of the learners will also be discussed. A conclusion of the discussion will follow, as well as reflections on the potential value of the research, limitations of the study and recommendations for further research.

5.2 Discussion of study findings

The purpose of this study was to observe the implementation of the Grade one literacy baseline assessment programme in order to collect data regarding the literacy skills of the learners. I wanted to determine what the Grade one learners baseline assessment performances indicated about their emergent literacy skills; how effective the WCED Grade one baseline assessment literacy programme was and what learning support strategies could be recommended to address the literacy barriers of the learners with diverse needs in order to improve their literacy skills.

5.2.1 What do the Grade one learners' literacy baseline assessment performances indicate about their emergent literacy skills?

Participants' overall performances in the literacy baseline assessment activities suggested that barriers were experienced in about a third (28%) of the performances. The baseline assessment activities identified possible barriers to literacy which will be discussed in this section.

The emergent literacy skills of the learners in listening and speaking, emergent reading and emergent writing were assessed. Their receptive and expressive language skills were

important in order for them to successfully participate in the listening and speaking categories, since listening and oral comprehension activities assist to develop learners' receptive and expressive language as well as their reasoning (Center, 2005: 16). Their perceptual skills were important for the successful completion of the activities in the emergent reading categories. For example, visual discrimination enables learners to differentiate between words that almost look alike and auditory discrimination assists learners to distinguish between sounds such as "b" and **"d"**, **"m"** and **"n"** and words like "brown" and **"drown"** Dednam (2005: 370 - 371). Perceptual-motor skills were important during the emergent reading and writing activities. For example, the book handling activity (emergent reading) required fine motor co-ordination that involves movements that are executed by using the hands, fingers and wrist muscles (Joubert, 2013: 186). Fine motor co-ordination assists the learners with the correct pencil grip and the correct movement when writing the letters (Laszlo & Bairstow, 1985: 173). A discussion of the identified barriers follows.

5.2.1.1 Receptive language barriers

The findings suggest that the learners who were unable to: *listen attentively to stories, answer questions on the stories, follow instructions in order to participate effectively in action songs and games, match colours* and *identify the sounds of the letters of the alphabet*; may have experienced barriers with receptive language. Receptive language is the ability to understand the spoken language and involves the learners' listening skills. This includes the ability to understand the directions, instructions and explanations of the teacher. In addition, receptive language enables learners to remember details of stories and to understand words, and sentences in stories (Levey, 2011: 4). Receptive language abilities also enable learners to listen to stories with understanding and to respond to the questions on the stories. Research conducted by Florit, Roch, Altoè and Levorato (2009: 947), found that receptive language skills are powerful predictors of listening comprehension. The development of listening comprehension during story time is important as it helps learners to connect speech and print (Center, 2005: 21).

The following proficiencies were important in order for the learners to respond to the questions on the stories: the ability to understand the explanations and questions of the teacher and to remember the details of the stories. Both comprehension and memory skills were important for the activities that required learners to follow the instructions of the teacher in order to participate effectively in action songs and games, and to match colours in the drawings according to the instructions of the teacher.

The listening skills of the learners, their abilities to understand the spoken language as well as attention and memory skills were also important in all the activities of the emergent reading and writing categories, since they needed to listen attentively to the instructions of the teacher, understand and remember the instructions in order to successfully complete the activities. The emergent reading activity that required learners to identify sounds of the letters of the alphabet required them to listen attentively to the different sounds of the letters and to remember the different sound names.

The learners who experienced possible receptive language problems may have been unable to direct their attention during the above-mentioned activities. Attention is a person's conscious skill to focus his or her attention on a specific issue, ignoring all internal and external disturbances (Erbay, 2013: 423). The inabilities of some of the learners to direct their attention during storytelling may have played a role in their inabilities to listen to important information during storytelling. This may have contributed to the reason why some of these learners were unable to answer questions on the stories. The abilities of learners to pay attention in order to listen to class discussions are important skills as class discussions may give learners access to vocabulary and opportunities to improve listening comprehension (Wise, Sevcik & Morris, 2007: 311).

Levey (2011:6) states that learners with receptive language difficulties often forget the earlier portion of directions, especially when directions are lengthy. My observations during the games and action songs may be consistent with Levy's statement. The learners who were unable to follow the instructions given by the teacher, may not have remembered all the instructions and/or the sequence of instructions given by the teacher. Consequently they were unable to execute all the actions in sequence, in the games and action songs. Many of these learners were therefore not confident to participate in these activities. In addition, many of the learners who had not performed satisfactorily in the games and action songs and were also unable to match the colours of the objects in the picture; another activity that required them to follow the instructions given by the teacher.

5.2.1.2 Expressive language barriers

Expressive language is the ability of the learners to express themselves in meaningful ways. It involves the sequencing of words when constructing sentences and involves the ability of learners to speak about certain topics when communicating with others (Levey, 2011:6). The following activities in the listening and speaking category: *respond to questions on stories*

and *to share information during class discussions* required learners to have vocabulary knowledge so that they could appropriately construct sentences in English (LOLT).

The involvement of learners in the interpretation of pictures (emergent reading category) and their abilities to convey a message using a drawing (emergent writing category) also required learners to construct sentences in order to competently participate in the activities. In addition, the social skills of the learners played an important role in their successful participation in the above-mentioned activities since the learners needed to be confident to talk during whole class and group activities.

The learners who were not confident to: respond to questions, share information during class discussions, to use language appropriately (listening and speaking category), speak in order to interpret pictures (emergent reading category) and use a drawing to convey a message (emergent writing category) (South Africa. Department of Basic Education, 2011: 48, 50, 52), may have expressive language barriers. Expressive language is the ability of the learners to express themselves in meaningful ways. It involves the sequencing of words when constructing sentences in conversations and stories and the ability of the speaker to speak about certain topics when communicating with others. Spoken language competence involves a desire to communicate with others, respect for others, to get along with others and to take turns to speak. (Byrnes & Wasik, 2009: 39). The stages that children go through in their early development of speech and language are important for the establishment of their interpersonal communication skills (Whitehead, 2011: 52). Byrnes and Wasik (2009: 39) explain that spoken language competence connects language abilities to social competence. Social competence is the ability of the school going child to relate to the authority of the teacher, follow school rules, make new friends, learn to get along with others as well as to develop an interest in the acquisition of knowledge in a formal and structured manner (Mwamwenda, 2004: 53).

5.2.1.3 Perceptual barriers

The following underlying skills were required for the learners to satisfactorily complete the literacy baseline assessment activities: receptive and expressive language, perceptual as well as motor co-ordination skills. When analysing learner performances in the literacy baseline assessment in terms of the afore-mentioned skills, it seems as if the skills that were the most under-developed amongst learners with barriers were perceptual skills.

The term perception refers to the reception, interpretation and integration of visual, auditory, tactual and kinaesthetic stimuli (Carter & Diaz, 1971: 43). Perception involves a sequence of

99

interrelated events that mutually influence each other (Sekuler & Blake, 2002: 15). Learners gain knowledge by extracting information from the environment when their senses are stimulated. Learning, memory and thinking play an important role in perceptual development and enables the learner to extract more information from the environment (Forgus & Melamed, 1976: 1 - 3) which may support adequate scholastic performance (Dednam, 2005: 370).

The inabilities of some of the learners to: *match colours* according to instructions (listening and speaking category); *recognise words in the environment*, *identify sounds symbols*, *interpret pictures*, *complete puzzles, ability to recall, identify differences in pictures, identify a background picture* (emergent reading category), *use letters to represent writing, write on a page and use colours appropriately* (emergent writing category), indicate that the learners possibly experienced perceptual barriers. The learners had to demonstrate the following perceptual skills in order to satisfactorily complete these activities: distinguish between different colour crayons as well as the sounds of the letters of the alphabet. They were also required to distinguish between pictures and words in the environment. In addition, the ability to identify the sequence of the letters was important in order to recognise words in the environment. The abilities of the learners to remember the sounds and words they had heard and to associate the sounds with the symbols of the letters of the alphabet were also important perceptual skills. During the puzzle activity the learners had to cut the picture of the teddy-bear into different parts (analyse) and paste the different parts on a page to form a whole picture (synthesise). They were also required to remember the five items on a chart (a glass, drum, flag, present [gift] and a frog) that they previously viewed, in order to recall the items soon after the chart was turned face-down. Learners also had to focus on an important item (house) in a drawing that was overlapped by other shapes (figure-ground) and focus on individual words that they had to copy from the chalkboard within a group of words.

Learners who did not perform satisfactorily in the above-mentioned activities, in which perceptual skills play an important role, could have experienced the following perceptual barriers: visual discrimination barriers, visual sequencing, visual analysis and synthesis, visual memory, visual figure-ground perception, auditory memory, sound-symbol association and auditory discrimination.

a) Visual discrimination

One of the perceptual barriers that some of the learners may have experienced is visual discrimination because they could not select the correct colour crayons amongst the different colours in the container in order to colour the drawing of the boy with the ball according to the

instructions of the teacher. Furthermore, some of them were unable to identify their own name tags, identify the correct logos of supermarkets and department stores and to interpret pictures. Some of the learners also experienced difficulties in differentiating visually between the different letters of the alphabet on the alphabet chart, completing puzzles and identifying differences in two similar pictures. Visual discrimination is the ability to see details that make one object or symbol different from the other for example "I" and "j" or "come" and "came" (Cosford, 1982: 43).

Visual discrimination is an important skill since a learner who struggles with visual discrimination will find it difficult to distinguish between different forms and will consequently find it difficult to read, since form perception is the basis of reading (Grové & Hauptfleish, 1981: 2). A study conducted by Woodrome and Johnson (2007: 128) found a relationship between visual discrimination and letter identification. As mentioned above, visual discrimination assists learners to interpret pictures. The ability to interpret pictures is an important skill since it assists learners to develop reading skills (Carter and Diaz, 1971:43). Reading, in turn, involves the following two processes: learning to decode print and the understanding of the meaning of print (Center, 2005: 7, 16).

b) Visual sequencing

The inabilities of some of the learners to identify words in the environment (own names and logos of supermarkets and department stores) and to copy the news (sentence) indicate that they possibly experienced barriers with visual sequencing. Visual sequencing is the ability to see the order of objects or letters in words for example "saw" and "was". Learners with poor visual sequencing will have a problem with spelling because the learners will not be able to remember the correct order of the letters in words (Cosford, 1982: 44). These learners also struggle to copy work from the chalkboard.

c) Visual memory

Some of the learners possibly experienced barriers with visual memory. This was evident in their unsatisfactory performances in activities such as recalling items they had previously viewed on a chart (a glass, drum, flag, gift and a frog) and copying a sentence from the chalkboard. Visual memory is the ability to remember exactly what something looks like even though it is not visible to you. It is an important skill as learners with poor visual memory will have difficulty in learning to write because they cannot remember what the letters look like. These learners may need a reference point to check for letter shape, such as a having a page with the letters of the alphabet, to use as a reference when writing. Thus, the process

101

of writing may become a tedious, slow process at this stage of development. Constant checking (using the reference point) may also disrupt focus on the activity of writing which may lead to feelings of frustration. Additionally, they may also have problems with spelling because they cannot remember what the words look like (Cosford, 1982: 43).

d) Visual figure-ground perception

The learners who were unable to identify the house in the visual figure-ground activity could have experienced barriers with visual figure-ground perception. Visual figure-ground perception is the ability of the learners to isolate the pictures, letters and words that they are supposed to attend to from the surrounding pictures, letters and words on the page. Visual figure-ground perception is an important skill as it enables learners to read a book without losing their place (Dednam, 2005: 370). Learners who experience barriers with visual figure-ground perception will often lose their place when reading. In later years, this problem may be compounded when the learner has to read aloud to an audience and is expected to make intermittent eye-contact with the audience in an effort to maintain engagement. Reading fluency will therefore be disrupted during the reading process. In addition these learners will have difficulty copying work from the chalkboard since, in an attempt to focus on the word that must be copied, the learner becomes distracted by the surrounding words he/she is attempting to copy. Copying work from the chalkboard will consequently be a slow and tedious process (Cosford, 1982: 45 – 46). Visual figure-ground perception is also an important skill when decoding, being able to find words on a page, and to find an object in a picture.

e) Auditory memory

Barriers with auditory memory may have contributed to the inability of some of the learners to remember all the teacher's instructions, which consequently led to learners becoming confused when they had to execute the instructions, react to the games and action songs and answer questions on the stories that had been read to them. Auditory memory is the ability to remember what the ears have heard (Grové & Hauptfleish, 1981: 6). Inadequate auditory memory might cause learners to experience learning barriers, since learners with auditory memory barriers find it difficult to carry out instructions, retell a story they have heard, and to answer questions on stories (Grové & Hauptfleish, 1981: 6).) Auditory perception skills impact the abilities of the learners to benefit from instructions, follow directions and participate in class discussions (Priyadarshi, Goswami & Sen, 2012: 168).

f) Sound symbol association

Some of the learners possibly experienced barriers with sound symbol association since they were unable to identify words in the environment. Some of them also had problems in identifying the symbols of the letters of the alphabet according to the initial sounds of the objects on the alphabet chart. Sound symbol association is the ability to remember the sounds that belong to the letters of the alphabet and is an important skill in both reading and spelling (Cosford, 1982: 23).

g) Auditory discrimination

The inability of the learners to identify the initial sounds of words that they had heard suggests that they may have experienced barriers with auditory discrimination. Auditory discrimination enables learners to hear similarities and differences between sounds and words. Poor auditory perception results in reading problems due to difficulties with phonological awareness (Zhang & McBride-Chang, 2010: 332). Learners who experience poor auditory discrimination barriers find it difficult to discriminate between sounds and words that are more or less similar, for example "k" and "t", "m" and "n", "b" and "h", "was" and "vase" as well as "back" and "bag". These learners may also experience problems in breaking up words into syllables (Grové & Hauptfleish, 1981: 5).

5.2.1.4 Barriers related to perceptual-motor development

Barriers related to perceptual motor development possibly account for the reason why some of the learners were unable to identify the symbols of the letters of the alphabet, according to the initial sounds of words and write appropriately on a page. The following perceptual-motor barriers will be discussed in this sub-section: gross- and fine motor co-ordination, hand-eye co-ordination and body image. Perceptual-motor skills refer to movement activities that involve the perceptual skills of the learners (Cosford, 1982: 71). Accurate movement and control over the muscles are necessary for all intellectual functions (Grové & Hauptfleisch, 1981: 26) and involve the gross- and fine motor skills of the learners. The gross and fine motor skills are the most important skills in the perceptual-motor development of the learners (Mwamwenda, 2004: 45) and include the development of hand-eye co-ordination and body image (Joubert, 2013: 187). The way in which the eyes, hands and fingers move together is vital for the development of reading and writing (Bruce & Spratt, 2011: 18).

a) Gross motor co-ordination

The gross motor muscles refer to the muscles that develop within the arms and legs and develop ahead of the fine motor muscles (Mwamwenda, 2004: 45). Body movement activities will support the development of the gross motor muscles and may influence intellectual, social and emotional development because it promotes the skilful execution of movement activities. These abilities in turn may enhance the development of the self-concept and self-confidence of the learners (Laszlo & Bairstow, 1985: 5).

Learners who experience writing problems, should be involved in large muscle exercises (Joubert, 2013: 182) because it may improve motor control and assist learners to develop the correct posture to support written activities (Laszlo & Bairstow, 1985: 5). A possible reason why some of the learners experienced problems with writing posture may have been due (at least partially) to the unsatisfactory development of their gross motor muscles. The teaching of a comfortable writing position is important for effective handwriting skills. A learner must sit on a comfortable chair and the table height must also be comfortable. The feet must be flat on the floor, the forearms must rest on the table surface with the non-writing hand holding the page at the top. The page should be tilted at an angle approximately sixty degrees from the page orientation that is perpendicular to the edge of the writing surface; to the left for right-handed learners and to the right for left-handed learners (Towle, 1978: 375). The development of the muscles in the arms and legs will support learners during written activities and will enhance the development of the correct writing posture.

b) Fine motor co-ordination

Fine motor co-ordination involves finer and more complex movements that are executed by using the hands, fingers and wrist muscles (Joubert, 2013: 186). There is a possibility that unsatisfactory development in fine motor co-ordination contributed to some learners struggling to hold their books and to turn the pages of their books during role-play reading. Book handling is an important skill and it includes the ability of the learner to hold a book properly (Irwin, Moore, Tornator & Fowler 2012: 20). Those who experienced problems in using a pair of scissors possibly experienced barriers with fine motor co-ordination, since the effective use of a pair of scissors requires learners to use their hands, fingers and wrist muscles. The data also indicates that the learners who were unable to manipulate and grip their crayons effectively and to form the letters of the alphabet correctly during the emergent writing activities, could have also experienced barriers with their fine motor co-ordination. A dynamic, tripod pencil grip is an optimal grip for handwriting because it allows the learner to

write quickly and fluently and it requires tiny movements of the hand muscles (Annandale, 2013: 1).

c) Hand-eye co-ordination

The learners who were unable to write the letters of the alphabet correctly may have experienced barriers with hand-eye co-ordination. Hand-eye co-ordination is the ability to execute movements with the hands that are led by the eyes (Joubert, 2013: 187). The development of the visual perceptual skills of the learners as well as their gross- and fine motor muscles are important in the development of hand-eye co-ordination. Learners with poor hand-eye co-ordination will also find it difficult to copy words from the chalkboard and will struggle to write properly (Grové & Hauptfleish, 1981: 6).

d) Body image

Barriers with body-image may have been a possible reason why some of the learners were unable to write from left to right and from top to bottom. Body image refers to the self-awareness of a person's body and the movement of the body (Cosford, 1982: 74). Learners who experience problems with body image, are often clumsy, confuse certain letters of the alphabet such as "b" and "d" as well as words such as "tap" and "pat" and tend to write the letters and words back to front (mirror writing). These learners may also experience reading problems since an inner awareness of left and right (laterality) enables a learner to detect left and right outside his/her body. This ability, as well as eye movements from left to right support reading. These learners will also find it difficult to cross the midline during written activities. Thus, a right-handed learner experiencing problems with body image may write only on the right side of the page or move the page to the right and work only from the midline. Left-handed learners experiencing the same barriers may twist their bodies into a position that will enable them to continue from the midline to the right side. An awareness of body image will assist learners to distinguish between left and right and to understand the concepts: in, out, top, bottom, front, back, as well as left and right (Grové & Hauptfleish, 1981: 18). This may enable them to write appropriately on a page. In addition it may improve their abilities to identify sound symbols and the correct words when reading. Body image awareness also contributes to effective participation in activities involving games and action songs.

5.2.1.5 Comparison of the participants' literacy skills in terms of certain biographical and environmental variables

The frequency of the literacy barriers that the participants experienced in terms of gender, home language, Grade R education and age, will be discussed in this sub-section.

a) Gender

Research suggests that development of emergent literacy skills may be influenced by gender differences. Boys seem to be better at listening and speaking activities while girls are better with emergent reading and writing activities (Browne, 1996: 169, 172 -173). Both biological and environmental factors play a role in gender differences (Mwamwenda, 2004: 261). Children's perceptions of themselves are determined by the expectations, treatment and interactions with the world outside and inside the school. Children become aware of what is expected of them as boys and girls (gender identity) through these expectations, treatment and interactions (Browne, 1996: 167, 168). Browne (1996:169), postulates the following differences between oral language of boys and girls: boys are more outspoken, assertive and confident and interrupts more than girls.

According to Mwamwenda (2004: 262), studies have shown that girls perform better than boys in reading, spelling and languages. Browne (1996: 172) states that girls seem to find books more interesting than boys and learn to read more quickly than boys. Browne adds that girls' and boys' interest in reading are affected by the models of adult readers they see and that women read more fiction while men tend to read more information texts. Research has also revealed that boys and girls hold very different attitudes towards writing. Girls often enjoy writing, while boys feel less competent at writing and prefer factual technical writing (Browne, 1996: 173). Research studies conducted on a comparison of school readiness scores by de Lemos (2008: 88), that covered learners from four years old (preschool) to seven years old and on gender differences by Below, Skinner, Fearrington and Sorrel (2010: 251) found that girls enter school with stronger emergent reading skills than boys. Below, Skinner, Fearrington and Sorrel's study included learners from kindergarten to fifth grade.

This study's findings support Mwamwenda's and Browne's contentions, as well as the research findings of de Lemos and of Below, Skinner, Fearrington and Sorrel, since more females (26%) experienced barriers to listening and speaking activities than males (22%). Male participants in this study, experienced more barriers in both the emergent reading and writing activities than females. In fact, 42% of males in comparison to 35% females

experienced barriers with emergent reading activities while 26% males and 17% females experienced barriers with the emergent writing activities.

Gender differences in emergent literacy skills may be addressed by carefully selecting themes, resources and activities for oral activities that do not reinforce gender differences. A greater balance between fiction and non-fiction and information books to cater for different reading preferences, may enhance the reading achievements of both boys and girls. The involvement of learners in mixed ability group activities and allocating non-stereotype roles to the learners, for example allocating the role of group leader to a girl and the role of the scribe to a boy; establishing rules to allow equal access to resources may enhance a gender-fair literacy programme (Browne, 1996: 170 - 173).

b) The home language of the learners

Many learners who are taught through the medium of English, which is not their home language, are limited in their English language proficiency (Nel, 2005: 150). These learners will consequently experience receptive and expressive language barriers since they will find it difficult to use language adequately.

Second and third language learners in the English medium may experience challenges with the meaning of words and sentences (Cameron, 2003: 107) and may consequently find it difficult to understand what others are saying. A language backlog may lead to social difficulties, since they may not be able to use language adequately and may find it difficult to understand what others are saying. This in turn, may lead to anxiety, emotional insecurity and a lack of motivation. In addition, these learners may: seem shy when they have to communicate in class, develop a low self-esteem and distance themselves from the learning situation, the teacher and their peers, which further hampers their language use and development (Dednam, 2005:129-131). Furthermore their inability to use the language skills that they have acquired during class activities, may result in the use of non-verbal communication strategies. For example a learner will shrug or shake his/her head (Nel, 2005: 151-152).

This study's findings partially indicate that learners whose mother tongue was not the same as the language of learning and teaching (LOLT), experienced overall more barriers than those whose mother tongue (English) was also the LOLT. When analysing the listening and speaking category of the literacy baseline assessment performance profile, Xhosa home language speakers and those who speak both English and Afrikaans at home experienced more barriers (48 % and 21 % respectively) than the English home language speakers

(17%), and learners who spoke Afrikaans (14%) at home. In the emergent reading category, the learners who speak Xhosa as well as the Afrikaans speakers experienced more barriers (41% and 40% respectively) than those learners whose mother tongue, is English (38%). The learners with both English and Afrikaans as home language experienced the least barriers (25%) in the emergent reading category. English home language speakers experienced the most barriers (24%) in the emergent writing category compared to the other language groups: Xhosa home language speakers as well as those whose home language was both English and Afrikaans speakers (17% for both groups) and the Afrikaans home language speakers (13%).

Language barriers could have been a possible reason why some of the learners were unable to direct their attention during story-telling sessions because they may have experienced barriers in understanding the vocabulary used in the stories that were read as well as the explanations and questions on the stories. Those who were not confident to share information during class discussions and to answer questions on stories could have also experienced language barriers.

The learners who experienced barriers during the above-mentioned activities may have had a language backlog because their home languages differed from the LOLT (Dednam, 2011: 130). This possibly accounts for the reason why some of these learners just shrugged or dropped their heads when they were asked to respond to questions and to contribute to class discussion. My observations are consistent with Nel's (2005: 151) statement that learners who experience difficulty in using the LOLT, develop non-verbal communication strategies (shrug or drop their heads) when they are asked to respond to questions and to contribute to class discussion (Nel, 2005: 151-152).

Language barriers may have played a major role in some learners not seemingly understanding the instructions of the teacher during most of the literacy baseline assessment activities. Center (2005:19) advises that the teacher should involve learners in activities that will improve their listening skills and vocabulary in order to promote literacy development. The teacher should also shorten and repeat instructions of activities, allow learners to repeat the instructions and make sure that learners understand the instructions in order to support them (Levey, 2011: 6-7).

c) The role of Grade R attendance

Although only about 21% of the participants had not attended Grade R, I still considered Grade R attendance in the analysis of data since there is a growing emphasis on the

importance of Grade R attendance in establishing a solid foundation for learning in the early years (Harty & Alant, 2011: 88 - 89). School readiness is important since children's capabilities at school entry correlate significantly with later skills (Prior, Bavin & Ong, 2011: 4). A growing body of research categorised the elements of school readiness into the following readiness areas: cognitive, social-emotional and behavioural as well as physical. Cognitive readiness has been found to be a predictor of later academic achievement, whilst emotional regulation abilities support learning in the classroom environment. Physical readiness refers to the general health and well-being of a learner at school entry and strongly affects a learner's cognitive, social-emotional and behavioural readiness (Quirk, Furlong, Lilles, Felix & Chin, 2011: 80 - 81).

The Grade R daily programme provides opportunities for learners to develop perceptual-motor skills, which may promote the development of their gross- and fine motor co-ordination skills. These skills are important for activities such as the use of a pair of scissors, manipulating a writing tool and using a page appropriately. Furthermore, the Grade R daily programme promotes the incidental development of the learners' literacy skills through sound and word games (e.g. "I spy with my little eye"). These games may also support the development of learners' social skills. Grade R education assists learners in becoming familiar with classroom routines and maintaining attention during educational activities for reasonable periods, thus supporting learners educational growth, including the development of their required literacy skills at the end of Grade R (South Africa. Department of Basic Education, 2011: 20 – 21).

Learners are expected to acquire the following literacy skills at the end of Grade R: *talk about common experiences in pictures, participate in action songs and rhymes, recognise initial consonants and vowels of common words, copy short sentences and words written by the teacher, write from left to right and from the top to the bottom of a page and to draw pictures to convey a message about a personal experience* and to *use it as starting point for writing* (South Africa. Department of Basic Education, 2011: 49 – 52). There is a possibility that some of the learners in this study, who did not attend Grade R, did not have the opportunities to master the skills that are required to successfully participate in the baseline assessment activities. Early childhood education can play a crucial role in addressing issues that will prevent learners at risk from developing learning barriers (Harty & Alant, 2011: 83).

The findings in this study support the importance of early childhood education (Harty & Alant, 2011: 89). Overall more barriers (29%) were indicated for participants who had not attended Grade R compared to 28% for those who did. Additionally an analysis of participants' performances indicated that there was a higher frequency of barriers for the group who had

not attended Grade R than those who did in the emergent writing category (29% vs 18%]). The frequency of barriers for emergent reading activities was the same for both groups (38%). The participants who did not attend Grade R, however, experienced fewer barriers in the listening and speaking category than those who did not attend Grade R (20% vs 26%).

d) The ages of the learners

School maturity refers to a biological growing process in the development of children when certain aptitudes appear before the start of formal schooling. This involves physical and mental security and is a biological process that cannot be hastened. Maturation for formal schooling is the stage when children are ready for formal instruction in reading, writing and mathematics and is usually reached by children at about the age of six years. This kind of maturity, however, is not a guarantee for success at school, because children who are intellectually mature may not be school ready if they do not feel secure. There is a possibility that these children may not be able to realize their potential (Grové & Hauptfleisch, 1981: 9 – 10). School readiness influences learners' responses to academic instruction, mastery of skills and performance relative to classmates (Crone & Whitehurst, 1999: 604).

Research conducted on school and reading readiness found that age at school entry is one of the indicators of school readiness. The policy on the admission age of learners to schools results in a group of learners being almost a year younger than their classmates. Studies conducted on differences between the youngest and oldest learners in a grade, found that the younger learners are more likely to experience emotional difficulties, be labelled with a learning disability or be retained in a grade (Crone & Whitehurst, 1999: 604). In addition, Crone and Whitehurst (1999: 608 – 609) found that older children outperformed their younger classmates in emergent literacy skills at the end of Kindergarten. By the end of the first grade, the differences in literacy skills between the oldest and the youngest learners disappeared statistically and reversed in direction. A study conducted by de Lemos, which included learners from four years old to seven years old (2008: 88), found that differences in the school readiness scores are higher at the younger age levels than the older age levels. Younger learners, however, outperformed the older group in Hong Kong and indicated that schooling overcame the effect of age (de Lemos, 2008: 88).

The results of the present study are inconsistent with the findings of Crone and Whitehurst (1999: 608 – 609), when analysing the results in terms of the two age categories. Unlike the findings of Crone and Whitehurst; in this study the older group fared worse. Overall more learners in the six-and-a half to seven-and-a half year age group (32%) experienced barriers in the emergent literacy activities compared to the learners in the five-and-a half to six year

age group (25%). The learners in the six-and-a half to seven-and-a half year old age group also experience more barriers than the learners in the five-and-a half to six year old age group in the listening and speaking category (30% vs 21%), emergent reading category (42% vs 35%) and in the emergent writing category (22% vs 19%). Grade R attendance (school readiness) could have played a role in the younger learners outperforming the older learners in their listening and speaking and emergent reading skills because 89% of the learners in the five-and-a half to six year old group attended Grade R versus 67% of the learners in the six-and-a half to seven-and-a half year old group. This finding once more emphasizes the importance of Grade R education in building the foundational skills required for learning

5.2.1.6 The socio-economic environment of the participants

The environment of the learners is an important factor in language development, which in turn will enhance their literacy skills, since language is learnt through interaction with others (Mwamwenda, 2004: 149). Learners use language to learn, communicate and to share their experiences with others (Tompkins, 2010:8). The socio-economic background of the learners, the role of the teacher and the classroom environment will be discussed in this sub-section. The socio-economic status of the family plays an important role in supporting learners' development of their literacy skills (Tompkins, 2010: 29). Social deprivation delays children's development of both language and literacy skills (Nancollis, Lawrie & Dodd, 2005: 325). An understanding relationship between the teacher and learners as well as a stimulating classroom environment will also enhance literacy development (Landsberg, 2005: 69 - 70).

a) The socio-economic background of the learners

This study focused on a Grade one class at a school in a low socio-economic community on the Cape Flats located in the Cape Town Metropole. Education in low socio-economic communities of South Africa is hampered due to a non-stimulating environment outside school, insecurity, language deficiencies and poor orientation towards school (Prinsloo, 2005: 28). A lack of parental support for engaging their children in home-literacy activities such as story-telling and reading of stories in low socio-economic communities (Tompkins, 2010: 29) may [partially] account for the reason why some of these learners enter school with limited knowledge of vocabulary. Vocabulary knowledge is an important skill, since learners with limited language proficiency will experience problems with the identification of words when reading (Irwin, Moore, Lauren, Tornatore & Fowler, 2012: 21 -22). Furthermore, these learners may be unable to contribute to class discussions (Nel, 2005: 152) and could possibly experience challenges with comprehension skills (Dednam, 2011: 151).

Young children begin to read by recognising logos on fast-food restaurants, shops in the environment and commonly used household products (Tompkins, 2010: 114). In this study most of the learners were able to identify words in the environment. There is a possibility that the learners who were unable to identify the logos of the supermarkets and department stores, may not have been exposed to the logos at home and in their environment. Some of the learners who displayed a lack of interest in the pictures of the story books, may not have been exposed to books at home. Socio-economic challenges at home may therefore have limited learner exposure to cultural objects such as logos and books. Consequently, their book handling skills and concepts about print may not have been developed properly yet (Irwin, Moore, Tornator & Fowler, 2012: 20).

Parents play a crucial role in developing the reading abilities of their children by participating actively in reading aloud activities and by modelling reading behaviour. Home literacy activities are important as they promote academic success (Tompkins, 2010: 29). Emergent literacy skills are vital, since they precede formal reading and support the development of decoding skills (breaking up words into syllables) and reading comprehension (Girard & Girolametto, 2013: 46), which may contribute to success in reading (Irwin, Moore, Tornator & Fowler, 2012: 20).

b) The role of the teacher

It is the responsibility of the teacher to acquire and implement teaching and learning strategies and methods in order to realise the outcomes of the classroom activities (Joubert, 2013: 22).

In this study the class teacher who conducted the baseline assessment of emergent literacy, may have, inadvertently, contributed to the literacy barriers that the learners experienced. The discussion that follows will include: the organisation of learners during class activities, management of learners during class activities, taking initiative in modifying the schedule and the content of the baseline assessment activities.

(i) Organisation of learners during class activities

Learners' dynamic experience in the classroom is characterised by the quality of teacher-learner interactions as well as the interactions amongst learners. The psychological literacy environment refers to how the teacher interacts with learners to support their literacy development during classroom activities. The teacher should provide a positive and supportive learning environment, characterised by frequent conversations, modelling of

complex concepts and explicit discussions of literacy terms and uses in order to create a psychologically rich literacy environment (Guo, Justice, Kaderavek & McGinty, 2012: 310). The organisation of learners is an important aspect in ensuring the participation of all the learners during class activities.

In this study some of the learners who sat at the back on the mat during the storytelling sessions became distracted and did not participate in the class discussions. The arrangements of learners on the mat could have been done differently to minimise the possibility of learners becoming inattentive during story-telling. Classroom arrangements should make provision for appropriate space for learners during whole class activities, small groups and individual activities. The teacher should encourage productive learner involvement by arranging learners in class activities that promote effective teacher- learner interactions (Denver Public Schools Division of Teaching and Learning, 2013: 2).

Another observation during the assessment activities was that some of the learners did not understand the instructions of the teacher and were unable to commence with many of the activities immediately after the given instructions. The teacher had to explain the instructions several times before some of the learners were able to start with the activities. The instructions of the teacher were possibly unclear, which contributed to learners' inabilities to complete the puzzles and to identify the differences in two similar pictures. She gave the instructions of the games and action songs to the whole class and involved smaller groups in the execution of the activities. There is a possibility that some of the learners became distracted during the whole class instructions. The teacher is responsible for the creation of a classroom environment which is rich in opportunities for the learners in order to attribute meaning to what they learn (Landsberg, 2005: 69 - 70). The teacher should therefore ensure that all the learners understand what is expected of them before they start the activities.

The physical literacy environment refers to the design, arrangements and display of various literature material. It includes the availability of a classroom library with a variety of genres, dramatic play area, block centre, the science table as well as a print-rich classroom. A print-rich classroom includes posters, signs as well as teacher and learner writing samples that are related to the classroom theme (Guo, Justice, Kaderavek & McGinty, 2012: 310).

In this study the class size may have impacted on the performances of the learners. There were forty learners in the class at the time of the baseline assessment. The whole class sat on the mat when most of the instructions of the activities were given. The Western Cape Education Department (2007: 32) advised teachers to gather the learners on the floor during whole class assessment activities. All the learners sat very close to each other on the mat.

Many of the learners who sat at the back of the class became distracted and may not have heard the instructions of the teacher. As mentioned above, classroom arrangements should make provision for appropriate space for learners during whole class activities (Denver Public Schools Division of Teaching and Learning, 2013: 2).

The learners who were unable to contribute to the class discussion could have been shy to speak in a big group. These learners may have been more confident to contribute to discussions in smaller groups, as group work can create an environment which promotes learner participation in the learning situation (Pelech & Pieper, 2010: 50 - 54). The involvement of learners in small group activities will be discussed in sub-section 5.2.3.

(ii) Management of learners during class activities

Effective classroom management is an important aspect in a literacy rich classroom. Research demonstrates that effective literacy teachers make their behavioural expectations clear for all literacy activities by teaching, facilitating and strengthening appropriate classroom behaviour through consistent reinforcement and feedback (Ball & Gettinger, 2009: 193).

The findings of this study indicated that the activities that required learners to respond to questions might have been challenging, as some of the learners were eager to shout out the answers to questions that were posed to other learners. The teacher had to constantly remind the learners not to shout out the answers. The teacher should explain to learners what is expected of them when she introduces class activities and how they should behave during activities (Ball & Gettinger, 2009: 193). It is important for the teacher to call some learners to attention in order to ensure that overeager learners give the other learners a chance to participate (Joubert, 2013: 25). Good classroom management skills are important for the successful implementation of teaching and learning strategies. It is essential to ensure that all learners are paying attention at all times during whole class activities. Smaller learners as well as those who are easily distracted could be allowed to sit in front during these activities in order to address this problem.

(iii) Taking initiative in modifying the schedule and content of the baseline assessment activities

More learners could have been able to complete their puzzles if the pictures were already cut into the different pieces and if each learner was also given a copy of the picture of the teddy-

bear that they could have used as a reference when completing the puzzle, instead of just the one picture that was displayed in the class.

During the interview the teacher complained that it was tiring and time consuming to conduct the baseline assessment at the beginning of the year. The teacher could have used a resource file for the baseline assessment activity sheets in order to improve efficiency during the baseline assessment. A teacher's choice of literacy tools and activities influences the way in which learners learn (Ball & Gettinger, 2009: 192). The Grade one teacher should therefore relook at the choice of activities to ensure the effective assessment of all the literacy concepts for example the activity that assessed the ability to identify sound symbols could have been more effective in smaller groups or as an individual assessment. During this activity the teacher asked learners to identify five to six sounds on a big picture, alphabet chart by pointing to the pictures during whole class activities. The learners had to identify the initial sounds of the objects in the pictures. The manner in which these activities were conducted, didn't create opportunities for learners to identify the sound symbols that they might have known. The use of A4 size picture, alphabet charts for each learner could have given them the opportunity to identify the six to eight sounds that they might have known instead of the educator selecting the sounds that they had to identify. According to the Home language CAPS document, learners should at least recognise some initial consonants and vowels the end of Grade R. The first term requirement for Grade one states that learners should be able to identify at least two vowels and six consonants (South Africa. Department of Basic Education, 51, 56).

5.2.2 What are the Grade on teacher's perceptions about the usefulness of the literacy baseline assessment instrument?

Early assessment of learners is important for the identification of learning barriers in order to plan intervention programmes for the learners (Western Cape Education Department, 2007: 1 - 3). The data from the interview that was conducted with the teacher, suggest that the teacher felt that baseline assessment activities were generally useful in assessing the essential emergent literacy skills of the learners that is required at the beginning of Grade one. The array of literacy activities adequately assessed learners' literacy skillsets required for satisfactory progress in Grade one. However, the teacher highlighted a few shortcomings of the WCED literacy baseline assessment tool and process. These shortcomings are: the absence of assessment activity worksheets, scheduling of assessment and consideration for learners who did not attend Grade R, which are briefly discussed below.

The fact that the WCED does not provide the baseline assessment activity worksheets for the paper-based activities was challenging for the teacher. She felt that even though the WCED baseline assessment programme provides a description of suggested activities for the assessment of the learners' literacy skills (Western Cape Education Department, 2007: 30 - 66), teachers still have to design or look for their own activities in order to assess the different skills. There is also a possibility that the quality of the activities may vary in different classrooms, since it allows the teachers to use their own initiative regarding the suitability of the activity sheets for the assessment of the different concepts. The teacher, however, felt that the suggested baseline assessment activities are not very specific and that each teacher will implement it differently, since each teacher will interpret the explanation of the assessment activities in a different manner. The implementation of the assessment activities will therefore be different in each class.

The teacher was of the view that the baseline assessment should rather be conducted at the end of Grade R. However, her suggestion does not take into account the many learners who do not attend Grade R since it is not compulsory to do so. In terms of the Education White Paper 5 on early childhood development (South Africa. Department of Education, 2001: 27 - 28), reception year education have been universalised. The Department of Education explains that provision of reception year education changed from a system that was seventy-five percent privately funded to a system that is seventy-five percent publicly funded. Thus, many of these learners might experience literacy barriers, since they were not exposed to sufficient opportunities (e.g. Grade R attendance) in acquiring emergent literacy skills.

The teacher expressed her concern that some of the baseline assessment activities may have been too difficult for those learners who had not attended Grade R, since these learners may not have acquired the necessary skills to successfully complete the activities of the baseline assessment. As mentioned above (sub-section 5.2.1.5), Grade R education assists with the development of the learner's literacy skills (South Africa. Department of Basic Education, 2011: 20). She (the teacher) explained that she needs to support these learners by using labelled pictures in order to expose them to different words, by demonstrating action words, the teaching of rhymes and reading of stories in order to improve their literacy skills.

When considering the teacher participant's views, it can be concluded that the literacy baseline assessment provides crucial information on the literacy skills of the learners. It also provides invaluable insight and informs the planning of Grade one literacy lessons in providing appropriate learning support to learners with literacy barriers.

5.2.3 What learning support strategies can be recommended to address the literacy barriers (if any) identified by the baseline assessment instrument?

The Western Cape Education Department (WCED) Grade one baseline assessment was developed to determine the prior knowledge and skills of learners in terms of the Grade R Home language (literacy), Mathematics and Life Skills criteria, in order to provide differentiated learning experiences to learners (Western Cape Education Department, 2007: 1 - 3).

Learning support in the mainstream schools, must form part of the day to day classroom practice (Landsberg, 2005: 66). Literacy is the ability to read, write, speak, listen and think. These abilities are interrelated and it should be developed in an integrated manner to ensure effective literacy development (Diehl, 2011: 186).

A constructivist framework is recommended to address the identified literacy barriers as it focusses on the existing knowledge of the learners in order to assist them to construct new knowledge. A constructivist framework will allow the teacher to focus on the individual needs of the learner to learn at his or her own pace (Powell & Kalina, 2009: 242 – 243). The discussions of key constructivist concepts will be integrated, where relevant, in the discussions of recommended learning support strategies that follow. The recommended learning support strategies are based on the findings of this study.

5.2.3.1 Strategies to improve receptive and expressive language skills

Receptive language skills are important for the successful completion of all the activities in the listening and speaking as well as the emergent reading and writing categories. Expressive language skills are required to respond to questions, share information, to interpret pictures (emergent reading category) and to convey a message using a drawing (emergent writing category). Strategies that may improve the learners' listening skills, vocabulary and abilities to participate in class discussion will be discussed in this section. These skills may be developed by means of an inter-active approach to literacy (Center, 2005: 19), since it could facilitate the creation of an effective constructivist classroom environment.

An inter-active balanced language approach will support learners who experienced literacy barriers during the baseline assessment. In addition, it is included in the constructivist framework of teaching, since it incorporates social interaction, collaboration and language development (Powel & Kalina, 2009: 243).

Strategies that can be used to scaffold the receptive and expressive language skills of the learners will be discussed.

a) Homogenous ability groups

The receptive and expressive language barriers that the learners experienced can be addressed by adopting a balanced approach to reading. It involves the skills approach, such as the explicit instruction of sound and symbol association, as well as the comprehension of the written word (Center, 2005: 7 - 8). This approach will improve the language use of the learners, which is an important process in a social constructivist setting (Powel & Kalina, 2009: 243). The teacher should teach literacy strategies and skills in small homogenous (same ability) groups. Learners can be involved in activities that involve them with the matching of pictures and the sound symbols of the alphabet as well as picture and word cards. This support is referred to as collaboration in the constructivist framework of teaching. Collaboration requires a partnership between a learner and the teacher or a more competent learner. This will allow the opportunity for learners to be assisted, by the teacher, with a learning concept in the zone of proximal development (ZPD). This will enable the teacher to focus on the individual needs of the learners to work at their own pace and to support the learners while they are actively engaged in the reading activity, which creates opportunities for learners to be scaffolded in the zone of proximal development (Lindfors, 2008, 53). This may develop the abilities of the learners to read independently. Vygotsky (1978: 87) in Lindfors (2008, 53) states:

> *"What a child can do with assistance today she will be able to do by herself tomorrow."*

b) Heterogeneous ability groups whole class activities

Heterogeneous (mixed abilities) group activities provide opportunities for learners to share their knowledge while busy with a task (Pelech & Pieper, 2010: 50). Mixed ability group activities will provide opportunities for learners to work together and to learn from each other (Joubert, 2010: 26). In addition, the involvement of learners in the dramatization of stories and role-play activities, facilitate their active participation and could result in effective relationship building (Joubert, 2013: 81, 84). The involvement of learners in heterogeneous group activities enables the creation of a constructivist environment and is referred to as co-operative learning (Pelech & Pieper, 2010: 50). Furthermore both learners can benefit from

mixed ability group activities, since the weaker learner may be supported in understanding the task, while it may have a positive effect on the stronger learner.

Heterogeneous group activities promote social interaction, which is an important component in the teaching and learning and process, according to the constructivist framework of teaching. Learners should be involved in telling stories to each other, since it creates opportunities for language use. Research indicates that learners engaged in story-telling, show improvements in their cognitive abilities and are able to enhance their vocabulary and oral skills through sharing stories (Lockett & Jones, 2009: 177). Learners who frequently listen to stories display greater attention spans and listening skills and have stronger writing skills.

c) Whole class activities

(i) Reading of stories

The reading of stories with large print and big pictures (Irwin, Moore, Tornatore & Fowler, 2012: 22) could capture the attention of the learners. The reading of stories can takes place during the shared reading component of the reading and writing focus time and is conducted as a whole class activity (South Africa. Department of Basic Education, 2011: 11). An improvement in the abilities of the learners to direct their attention may contribute to their knowledge levels and may promote concept development (Vygotsky, 1978:33). Reading of stories in an inter-active manner may improve the listening comprehension skills of the learners and may help the learners to connect speech and print (Center, 2005: 19 - 21). Furthermore, the involvement of the learners in the discussion of pictures of the stories as well as questions during and after story time (Erbay, 2012: 427) could also improve the participation of learners in class discussions (Center, 2005: 19 - 21).

It is important for the teacher to select books for storytelling with large print and pictures and that allow for repetition of words, since it supports the learners in developing concepts about print which includes the ability to differentiate between letters, numbers, word and pictures. The learners can act out the verbs in the stories and should also be encouraged to relate the new words to situations in their lives in order to assist learners in developing a rich expressive vocabulary (Irwin, Moore, Tornatore & Fowler, 2012: 21 - 22). The constructivist framework of teaching promotes the use of language in order to develop the critical thinking skills of the learners (Powel & Kalina, 2009: 243).

Reading-aloud sessions should be included in the literacy programme and could take place during the shared reading sessions. The teacher should model fluent reading and reading with expression in order to capture the attention of the learners (Tompkins, 2010: 20). The vocabulary of learners could be improved during the shared reading lessons that involve learners in thematic activities with a focus on word-directed activities which could assist learners in acquiring basic sight vocabulary (Centre, 2005: 19). The teacher should plan the stories in advance in order to focus on specific vocabulary when reading the stories. The books should also be interesting, accessible and accommodate the diversity of all the learners, in order to facilitate the reading of favourite stories.

(ii) Speaking activities

The involvement of the learners in speaking activities such as conversations, describing objects or pictures, conveying a message as well as the reciting of rhymes and singing of songs create opportunities for them to use language which may improve their expressive language (Joubert, 2013: 75, 79). The ability of the learners to express themselves verbally, is supported by the constructivist framework of teaching since it could improve their social interaction skills. In addition, the use of language is an important aspect in the development of critical thinking (Powel & Kalina, 2009: 243).

(iii) Drawing activities

The learners can be encouraged to draw their experiences or to draw a story that they have listened to, since drawing is an important emergent literacy skill and it allows learners to express their ideas and concepts about the world (Levey, 2011: 9). These activities will assist the teacher to create a constructivist environment through visual literacy. Visual literacy is the ability to interpret, decode, understand and appreciate visual messages (Pelech & Pieper, 2010: 89 – 90). The teacher should also encourage the learners to talk about their drawings as it serves to scaffold oral communication. The teacher should also provide a scaffold as learners talk about their drawings by asking questions and by expanding on what the learners are saying (Owocki, 1999: 21 – 22). In this manner, learners are supported in expressing their ideas and formulating their thinking patterns (Pelech & Pieper, 2010: 47). Bruner's learning theory refers to this approach as discovery learning, whereby a simple object (picture) is used to ask questions in order to elicit responses from learners, enabling them to discover new information or insight (Mwamwenda, 2004: 192).

d) Parent involvement

Support at school and support at home are important for the development of the receptive and expressive language of the learners. The amount of money, time, and energy that parents spend on educational resources are considered investments that have the potential to enhance children's cognitive and language skills (Hartas, 2011: 894). In addition, a research conducted by Hartas (2011: 907) found that the educational qualifications of parents are important aspects in the literacy skills of three year old and five year old children. Children with educated parents were on average six months ahead with literacy compared to their peers whose parents did not have any educational qualifications. The findings of a study conducted by Parsons and Schoon (2011: 212) suggest that children with poor language development grew up in a family environment characterised by reduced levels of material and human resources. In addition the findings suggest that parents of poor readers may be less likely to have an extended education.

In line with what has been stated above, the parents of the learners in this study, who experienced barriers during the literacy assessment, should be encouraged to support their children with literacy activities at home. These parents could support their children by participating actively in reading-aloud activities and by modelling reading behaviour. In addition, the teacher should provide clear guidance in how the parents should read aloud to their children and how to respond to their children's writing.

Many parents in low socio-economic communities, however, feel inadequate to help their children due to their own unsuccessful school experiences, cultural differences or their limited ability to read and write in English. The teacher can reach out to parents by giving opportunities for them to share their insights about their children and to ask questions about their children's progress, during quarterly parent-teacher meetings. It is important to involve parents in the progress of their learners by encouraging them to become enthusiastic about their children's literacy activities, since home literacy activities promote academic success (Tompkins, 2010: 29 - 31). The involvement of parents in family learning programmes may encourage them to be interested in their child's education, as well as their own educational development (Parsons & Schoon, 2011: 212). The school can organise parent support groups since the support group could provide opportunities for parents to discuss common problems. Workshops, for example on parenting skills should also be included in parent involvement programmes. Furthermore, the school should arrange meetings with a psychologist for parents who need support in dealing with issues (Harty & Alant, 2011: 94).

5.2.3.2 Strategies to improve perceptual skills

The following strategies that may improve the visual- and auditory perception of the learners will be discussed in this section: visual discrimination strategies, visual sequencing, visual memory, visual figure-ground discrimination, auditory discrimination, auditory memory and sound symbol association strategies.

a) Strategies to improve visual perceptual skills

Visual perception skills are important for the successful completion of the activities in the emergent reading and writing categories as well as the ability to match colours according to the oral instructions of the teacher (listening and speaking category). Visual perceptual development strategies will be suggested in this sub-section in order to improve the following skills: visual discrimination, visual sequencing, visual memory and visual figure-ground perception. Visual perception development activities should be included in the literacy programme in order to support the learners to identify, organise and interpret observed objects (Dednam, 2005:370). The following activities may improve the visual perception of the learners:

- The teacher should guide learners to use their senses optimally in order to ensure that the information that was extracted from the environment is interpreted correctly (Joubert, 2013: 140). For example questions relating to pictures that were viewed, can be used to teach learners to make distinctions between the different objects in the pictures (Joubert, 2013: 187).

- Differentiated teaching strategies should be employed, since it integrates constructivist learning theory, learning styles and brain development, in order to meet the unique needs of each learner (Pelech and Pieper, 2010: 13). Integration refers to a set of strategies that the teacher employs during classroom activities. Activities that stimulate multiple senses of the learners should therefore be included in the literacy programme (Pelech & Pieper, 2010: 35). The teacher should also guide learners to develop those learning styles they do not normally prefer (Joubert, 2013: 140).

- Learners should be involved in activities that allow them the opportunities to compare objects in a picture, match pictures, identify similarities and differences in pictures and to differentiate between different objects (Joubert, 140 – 143). Visual discrimination development may enable the learners to identify different words in the environment (Dednam, 2005: 370).

- Activities that involve the sequencing of pictures of a story, after learners had listened to the story, could help in developing their visual sequencing skills. These activities may enhance their abilities to sequence letters in words in the correct order (Dednam, 2011: 140 - 141) which will improve their abilities to write words from memory (Cosford, 1982: 44). Picture card games will also assist in developing the visual memory of the learners. Visual memory will assist the learners to remember letters and words. For example, the matching of picture and word cards may support learners in memorising the words of the objects in the pictures (Dednam, 2005:370).

- The discriminatory approach of colouring in pictures by using different colours to identify and highlight different shapes in a picture of overlapping shapes will assist learners in distinguishing the important information from the unimportant information (figure-ground visual discrimination) (Sekuler & Blake, 2002: 303). The teacher can scaffold learners' development in figure-ground visual discrimination by posing well-considered questions relating to the colouring in of pictures (Joubert, 2013: 187).

- The inclusion of listening games in the education programme, may promote the development of the listening skills of the learners and will enable learners to learn in a playful manner (Joubert, 2013: 44, 59). Listening games may improve the abilities of the learners to carry out instructions and to convey a message (Grové & Hauptfleish, 1981: 6). In addition, learners learn the rules of the games at the same time, which support the development of self-control (Vygotsky, 1978: 99). This may also assist in developing acceptable social behaviour since it will encourage learners to interact with others, understand the feelings of others and to establish open communication with others. Furthermore, it may assist the learner to feel happy and to develop self-confidence (Mwamwenda, 2004: 53).

a) **Strategies to improve auditory perceptual skills**

Strategies to improve the auditory discrimination, auditory memory and the sound symbol association of the learners should be included in the literacy programme in order to improve their listening skills. The following strategies may support the development of their auditory perceptual skills:

- Listening to stories is important for the development of the listening skills of the learners. The teacher should use intonation when reading stories in order to assist learners to distinguish between loud and soft sounds. The learners' attention must also be drawn to

the different tones of voices of the different characters. This could enable them to retell a story they have heard, and to answer questions on stories, which may improve their listening comprehension skills (Grové & Hauptfleish, 1978: 6). The inclusion of listening games in the education programme, may promote the development of the listening skills of the learners and will enable learners to learn in a playful manner (Joubert, 2013: 59, 44). Listening games may improve the abilities of the learners to carry out instructions and to convey a message (Grové & Hauptfleish, 1978: 6). In addition, learners learn the rules of the games at the same time, which support the development of self-control (Vygotsky, 1978: 99).

- Providing opportunities for the learners to respond to questions that they have listened to, will encourage learners to listen to others and will assist them to remember important information. In addition the teacher should involve the learners by encouraging them to predict the rest of the story. The involvement of the learners in the story may support learners to direct their attention and may assist to develop their concepts about stories (Vygotsky, 1978: 33 – 36).

- Reciting of rhymes will assist learners in developing the auditory memory of the learners, since it provides opportunities for them to listen to and identify rhyming words. This strategy is included in the constructivist learning framework (Pelech & Pieper, 2010: 49), since it creates opportunities for them to demonstrate their abilities to memorise rhymes and to identify rhyming words. Furthermore learners should also be encouraged to listen to words with alliteration and to repeat the words and identify the beginning sounds of the words they have heard (Dednam, 2005: 371).

- A picture grid with three or four pictures in each rows, will allow learners the opportunities to identify the objects in the pictures and to say which objects in the pictures have similar sounds. The use of pictures in activities promotes a constructivist environment through the visual mode of teaching which supports knowledge retention (Pelech & Pieper, 2010: 95). These activities may support the development of phonemic awareness (the ability to distinguish between different sounds) and may improve sound symbol association (Grové & Hauptfleisch, 1981: 104).

5.2.3.3 Strategies to improve perceptual-motor skills

Strategies to improve the gross- and fine-motor co-ordination of the learners will be discussed and will include the development of hand-eye co-ordination and body image. The inclusion of body movement activities cater for the development of motor control. Motor

control influences intellectual, social and emotional development, which in turn enhances the development of the self-concept and self-confidence (Laszlo & Bairstow, 1985:5, 173). Strategies to improve perceptual-motor skills are important to support the learners who experienced barriers with book handling skills and the writing activities. Activities that promote the development of the hand-eye co-ordination may assist the learners with the formation of the letters of the alphabet during written activities. Body movement activities support the development of the awareness of body image of the learners and may assist learners in differentiating between different directions. The ability to differentiate between different directions may support the correct use of a page when writing and will address directionality, since it may enable learners to write from left to write and from the top to the bottom (Joubert, 2013: 187) which is important in the successful completion of written activities.

a) Strategies to develop gross-motor co-ordination skills

The integration of the following Physical education activities in the literacy programme can promote the gross motor co-ordination of learners (Laszlo & Bairstow, 1985: 173). The teacher should involve learners in activities that requires them to use their gross motor muscles such as throwing a ball into a basket, hitting a suspended ball with a bat and balancing by standing on preferred leg. Movement activities should also be included such as walking forward on a balancing beam and jumping up and down as well as crawling over and under apparatus. Activities that involve body movement will improve motor development and control and will assist learners to develop the correct posture to support written activities and will assist learners to concentrate (Laszlo & Bairstow, 1985: 5, 173).

b) Strategies to develop fine motor co-ordination skills

The development of the fine motor muscles is important since the fine motor co-ordination involves finer and more complex movements that are executed by using the hands, fingers and wrist (Joubert, 2013: 186) and may improve the book handling skills of the learners. It will also assist learners with the correct pencil grip and the correct movement when writing the letters of the alphabet (Laszlo & Bairstow, 1985: 173) and may support the effective use of a pair of scissors (Grové & Hauptfleisch, 1981: 68).

- The involvement of learners in activities that require them to manipulate objects which involves the use of their hands, fingers and wrists, may nurture the development of their fine motor co-ordination skills (Grové & Hauptfleisch, 1981: 68 – 69; Laszlo & Bairstow, 1985: 180 – 183). The following activities should be included in the literacy programme

to develop fine motor co-ordination: pegboard tasks that involve the placing of round, square or hexagonal pegs in holes; connecting dots with straight lines; handling of nuts and bolts (Laszlo & Bairstow, 1985: 180 – 183), threading of beads, tracing, modelling with clay or dough, finger painting as well as cutting out pictures from old magazines (Grové & Hauptfleisch, 1981: 68 – 69). Powell and Kalina (2009: 243) state that the manipulation of objects, falls within the constructivist framework of learning, since the use of concrete objects, in the concrete operational phase, provides evidence of the logical thinking process of the learners. The concrete operational phase is and important stage of development according to Piaget's cognitive theory.

c) Strategies to develop hand-eye co-ordination

The improvement of the hand-eye co-ordination of the learners may assist them to copy written work from the chalkboard, improve their writing skills and could improve their reading ability. In addition, it will enhance cutting and pasting as well as puzzle activities (Grové & Hauptfleisch, 1981, 6). The learners should be involved in activities that require them to use their hands and their eyes such as catching a ball, drawing patterns and tracing, since it may assist the development of their hand-eye co-ordination skills. An improvement in the hand-eye coordination of learners enhances their abilities to perform daily tasks such as getting dressed, participating in sport and catching or throwing a ball (Grové & Hauptfleisch, 1981: 60 – 63).

d) Strategies to develop awareness of body image

Body movement activities support the development of the awareness of body image of the learners and may assist learners in differentiating between different directions (Grové & Hauptfleish, 1981: 18). The inclusion of the activities that involve the use of different body parts, identifying body parts on dolls and movements in different directions, can promote the development of the awareness of the body image of the learners. The learners should be involved in activities that allow them to touch different parts of their bodies with closed eyes, for example the toes and feet; touching one part of the body with another for example, touching the ear with the shoulder and the knee with the foot and indicating body parts on dolls. Activities such as tracing the outline of each other's bodies while one learner is lying on a sheet of paper, joining parts of a (puzzle) human figure, and following instructions, for example "hop on your left foot", "walk backwards" and "look to the right" (Grové & Hauptfleish, 1981: 21 - 22). The ability to differentiate between different directions may support the correct use of a page when writing and will address directionality, since it may

enable learners to write from left to write and from the top to the bottom. (Joubert, 2013: 187).

The Department of Education requires districts to establish district-based support teams (DBST) in order to provide support to teachers with the implementation of inclusive education. Mainstream schools are also required to establish Institutional Level Support Teams (ILST) that will be responsible to support teachers to address the learning barriers of specific learners. The teacher should therefore refer those learners, who continue to experience literacy barriers after classroom intervention, to the ILST in order to address their literacy barriers. The ILST should also refer learners with special educational needs to the district-based support team, for example the speech therapist, occupational therapist or psychologist in order to support those learners (Landsberg, 2005: 66-67). The DBST can also be approached to present workshops at school to enhance the knowledge and skills of the teachers in addressing literacy barriers.

5.2.3.4 Developing a common understanding of baseline assessment implementation

The views shared by the teacher participant in this study suggest that there may be a need to review the manner in which the baseline assessment is conducted. The issue of standardisation is contentious, because novice teachers may need to follow a "recipe" in order to implement the baseline assessment effectively. Strategies to improve the implementation of the literacy baseline assessment, the interpretation of assessment guidelines and the standardisation of the assessment tool at school will be discussed.

a) Improving the efficiency of the literacy baseline assessment implementation

Some of the baseline assessment literacy activities have been integrated with the Mathematics and Life Skills lesson plans. During the interview the teacher explained that she became confused with the integration of the activities and that she was not always sure whether she was busy with one subject. Literacy skills are taught in the Home language CAPS programme. The Home language curriculum is integrated into all other subject areas. Language is used across the curriculum in all oral work, reading and writing. Many of the listening and speaking skills will also be developed in the Mathematics and Life Skills subjects and themes from the Life Skills programme can be selected to provide a context for the teaching of language skills (South Africa. Department of Basic Education, 2011, 8). The baseline assessment lesson plans provide assessment criteria for each activity (Western Cape Education Department, 2007: 30-66). It is important for the teacher to have clarity with regards to the assessment criteria for each activity before the assessment activity is

administered. The teacher should focus on the assessment criteria of the activities while she observes the learners and when she examines their paper based assessment activities in order to prevent her from getting confused with the integration of the activities.

b) Standardisation of assessment tools at school

The inexperience of the teacher could have contributed to the confusion that she experienced regarding the WCED circular that was sent to schools, advising teachers to integrate the baseline assessment activities with the Home language CAPS programme. Although she mentioned that she was confused by the circular, she admitted that many of the baseline assessment activities were linked to CAPS. The fact the teacher wants the WCED to be more prescriptive regarding the baseline assessment activities possibly reflects her inexperience as a teacher. Class discussions about family, friends and the school is an integration with Life Skills (beginning knowledge):

- Participation in games and action songs integrates with Life Skills (creative arts)
- Figure-ground activity and matching colours according to the educator's instructions are activities that integrate with Mathematics (Patterns, functions and algebra) (South Africa. Department of Basic Education, 2011: 15 – 16, 26).

Prior to conducting the baseline assessment, the Grade one teachers should have consulted with her colleagues how the baseline assessment must be administered in order to avoid confusion. The Grade one teachers should discuss the implementation of the baseline assessment activities as well as the resources that will be used, in a grade meeting. The Foundation Phase Head of Department should also assist in clarifying any confusions regarding the implementation of the baseline assessment activities, as well as the WCED officials. These discussions may ensure that all the Grade one teachers understand what is expected of them when they administer the baseline assessment.

5.3 Conclusion

The emergent literacy skills of the Grade one learners that I observed during the literacy baseline programme were discussed in this chapter. The literacy barriers that they may have experienced during the assessment of their literacy skills as well as the factors that could have contributed to the literacy barriers were also discussed This study found that the WCED literacy baseline assessment instrument provides a valuable means of identifying literacy barriers of learners at the beginning of Grade one. The study also highlighted certain challenges in the implementation of the instrument. Learning support strategies were

recommended to address the identified literacy barriers. Factors to consider in the future implementations of the literacy baseline assessment were also highlighted.

5.4 Potential value of the research

The research highlighted the importance of the Grade one baseline assessment literacy programme in order to determine the emergent literacy skills of the learners on entering Grade one and to identify literacy barriers, in order to recommend literacy support strategies that will benefit the Grade one learners and the teacher. This study will hopefully enhance how the Grade one literacy baseline assessment results can be used in order to support the learners who experienced literacy barriers.

The Literacy Checklist that I used to record the literacy results of the learners was of great benefit because it assisted me in identifying the following literacy barriers:

- Receptive language barriers
- Expressive language barriers
- Perceptual development barriers
- Perceptual-motor co-ordination barriers

The constructivist framework of learning guided me to recommend literacy support strategies to address the above-mentioned barriers, which may be of use to the Grade one teacher at the research site as well as in other classes with similar situations.

5.5 Limitations of the research

The limitations of the research is that it focusses only on one Grade one class, one teacher and one school in a low socio-economic community on the Cape Flats. The data that was obtained from the literacy baseline assessment and from the interview with the teacher, who conducted the literacy baseline assessment, is only relevant to the research site. Consequently the results cannot be considered as a valid representation of the baseline assessment at all WCED schools.

Bias could have occurred during the data collection and data analysis of the interview with the teacher, because of my own experiences and beliefs as a grade one teacher. My own limitations as a researcher in terms of my knowledge base, could have also influenced my observations, in the oftentimes complex nature of teaching and learning. Thus, my findings

are approximations of the phenomena under study and may not have always satisfactorily reflected the complexity in the study. However, I tried to be as rigorous as possible as discussed in section 3.6.

5.6 Recommendations for further research

I would like to recommend that the following areas be considered for further research:

- Similar research should be conducted at other schools and in different socio-economic communities, to gauge the views of Grade one teachers provincially regarding the usefulness of the Grade one literacy baseline assessment.
- Different studies involving different research designs (qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods) may provide more insight into patterns related to Grade one learners' emergent literacy skills, and contextual factors that influence the development of their literacy skills in different social settings (e.g. within and between schools, districts).
- The role of parents, especially in low socio-economic communities in supporting emergent literacy development needs further exploration through research, since literature highlights the importance of parental involvement in developing emerging literacy skills in young learners (Hartas, 2011: 894) and the associated challenges faced by parents in low socio-economic settings (Tompkins, 2010: 29).

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REFERENCE: 20121119-0103
ENQUIRIES: Dr A T Wyngaard

Mrs Zelda Wildschut
Silverstream Primary
Jordaan Street
Manenberg
7764

Dear Mrs Zelda Wildschut

RESEARCH PROPOSAL: THE USE OF GRADE ONE BASELINE ASSESSMENT LITERACY PROGRAMME OF THE WESTERN-CAPE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Your application to conduct the above-mentioned research in schools in the Western Cape has been approved subject to the following conditions:
1. Principals, educators and learners are under no obligation to assist you in your investigation.
2. Principals, educators, learners and schools should not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation.
3. You make all the arrangements concerning your investigation.
4. Approval for projects should be conveyed to the District Director of the schools where the project will be conducted.
5. Educators' programmes are not to be interrupted.
6. The Study is to be conducted from **21 January 2013 till 30 March 2013**
7. No research can be conducted during the fourth term as schools are preparing and finalizing syllabi for examinations (October to December).
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey, please contact Dr A.T Wyngaard at the contact numbers above quoting the reference number?
9. A photocopy of this letter is submitted to the principal where the intended research is to be conducted.
10. Your research will be limited to the list of schools as forwarded to the Western Cape Education Department.
11. A brief summary of the content, findings and recommendations is provided to the Director: Research Services.
12. The Department receives a copy of the completed report/dissertation/thesis addressed to:
    The Director: Research Services
    Western Cape Education Department
    Private Bag X9114
    CAPE TOWN
    8000
We wish you success in your research.

Kind regards.
Signed: Dr Audrey T Wyngaard
for: **HEAD: EDUCATION**
DATE: 19 November 2012

Research Project for the Master of Education Degree

Researcher: Zelda Margaret Wildschut

CONSENT FORM

I have read the Information Sheet and have had details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I understand I have the right to withdraw my child from the study at any time.

I understand that the identity of my child will be protected. *The information will only be used for this research and for publications that might arise from this research project.*

I grant permission for my child, _____, to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signed………………………………………………………………………

Name……………………………………………………………………….

Date…………………………………………………………………………

INFORMATION SHEET FOR THE PARENTS OF PARTICIPANTS

Research Project for the Master of Education Degree

Research Title: The use of the Grade one baseline assessment literacy programme of the Western Cape Education Department.

Researcher: Zelda Wildschut

Contact details: 021 633 8886 (home)

                 021 637 4460 (work)

                 082 461 7519 (Cell.)

Participant involvement: Learners of the Grade 1A class will be observed during the implementation of the WCED Grade 1 baseline assessment literacy programme. The duration of the baseline Assessment is ten days. The names of the participants have been obtained from the Grade 1A class list of 2013.

The assessment scripts of the learners will also be examined in order to assist the researcher to determine what the learners are able to do and to achieve an in-depth understanding of the literacy barriers that the learners experienced.

The information that will be obtained from the research study will be used to describe the literacy barriers that the learners experienced during the baseline assessment activities.

The confidentiality of the learners that will be participating in the research study will be protected, as learners' names will not be used when discussing the research findings. The data will be organised in a check list according to predetermined categories. Categories will assist in identifying patterns regarding the literacy barriers that the learners experienced during the baseline assessment activities. The patterns will be used as a framework to describe the identified literacy barriers. The data will be summarised and the information will be used to recommend literacy, learning support strategies that can be used in other Grade one classes with similar situations.

Parents have the right to withdraw their children from the study at any time during the research.

APPENDIX 4

Interview questions – Grade one teacher

1. How did the WCED Grade one baseline assessment literacy programme assist you in identifying the literacy skills of the learners in your class?

2. What types of literacy barriers did you identify during the literacy baseline assessment activities?

3. How will you support the learners that experienced literacy barriers during the baseline assessment activities?

4. What support are you able to provide learners that experienced literacy problems due to language barriers?

5. How do you feel about the WCED Grade one baseline assessment literacy programme?

6. How did you feel about the letter that was sent by the WCED informing the teachers that they could deviate from the baseline assessment and integrate it with CAPS?

7. Do you think that it is a good idea to conduct the baseline assessment at the beginning of the year?

8. In what ways is the results of literacy baseline assessment useful to assist with the implementation of the CAPS literacy programme?

9. Do you feel confident that the literacy baseline assessment instrument adequately assessed the literacy concepts?