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LITERACY PRACTICES AND ENGLISH AS THE LANGUAGE OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN A GRADE NINE CLASSROOM

by

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DECLARATION

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

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ABSTRACT

This research was prompted by the discrepancy between levels of achievement in Grade 9 in a township school and the expectations at Further Education and Training (FET) Grades 10-12 levels. The literacy practices of Grade 9 learners were investigated to establish whether these practices prepared them adequately for Grade10.

This research then sought to describe practices that were carried out in reading and writing in a Grade 9 classroom, with a specific focus on a township school in which the language of teaching and learning was English, which was not the learners' mother-tongue. This research looked at the literacy gaps in reading and writing between the General Education and Training (GET) Phase and the FET Phase that impact on their preparation for the final phase of schooling and entry to tertiary level. Statistics show that in South Africa learners still perform poorly in reading and writing compared to their counterparts in Africa, especially in English.

This is an empirical study using qualitative methods that include personal narratives, interviews and learner portfolios. The purpose was to establish how societal and pedagogical factors impact on literacy practices for effective learning and teaching in order for learners to acquire academic proficiency in English as a First Additional Language.

The findings from this study revealed that the literacy practices that were investigated and the use of English as LoLT did not fully facilitate their preparedness for Grade10. Learners in this study still face challenges of acquiring basic reading and writing skills. Although they view English as an emancipatory and economic tool, it is still a difficult language to learn. Therefore their readiness to proceed to the FET level is minimal.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CAPS	-	Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement
Ed	-	Edition
(eds)	-	editors
ELL	-	English Language Learners
et al	-	And others
FAL	-	First Additional Language
FET	-	Further Educational Training
GET	-	General Educational Training
LiEP	-	Language in Education Policy
LoLT	-	Language of Learning and Teaching
NCS	-	National Curriculum Statement
OBE	-	Outcomes Based Education
RNCS	-	Revised National Curriculum Statement

CHAPTER 1: ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

1.1. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The introduction of the revised National Curriculum Statement (NCS) (2002) in our South African education system was supposed to clarify the misconceptions of outcomes based education (OBE) that underpinned curriculum reform from 1997, and to make the pedagogy of its implementation much more understandable to educators. Now there is another curriculum reform in the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement 2011 (CAPS) The main concern is that the reforms have not yet produced good results for our children in township schools. Children still have language barriers that hinder their progress towards successful completion of Grade 12 and they still lack basic reading and writing skills. This then makes us question the effectiveness of current education policies and also the pedagogy that is applied in our schools.

Due to our constantly changing curriculum, educators face challenges of putting policy into practice in schools that are not well resourced. This study engages in an investigation of the relevance of literacy practices that exist in and outside a school in a township environment, in implementing policy. It looks at their contribution to assisting learners in language learning and in the use of English as the language of learning and teaching (LoLT) in preparation for grades 10-12 of the further education and training phase (FET) of schooling.

Most of the schools in the Western Cape urban areas use English as the language of learning and teaching, despite the language barriers in English that prevail in schools. This trend reveals that English is gaining more ground than the other languages, Afrikaans and IsiXhosa, in the Western Cape. This has created a tremendous challenge amongst the education sectors because children who are in township schools are mostly disadvantaged by the lack of literacy resources that would encourage the development of English as the LoLT, although in most of the schools English is the LoLT. The problem goes back to their primary school acquisition of IsiXhosa as the mother tongue and English as the First Additional Language and the language policies that are not effectively implemented.

We cannot run away from the reality that English is the language of opportunity, and the lingua Franca in South Africa, a multi-cultural society with eleven official languages. English

is not only used for popular communication but also as an official link language by the government, the media and our education sector. It therefore also becomes a language that offers emancipation to our children. A good command of English aids in minimizing socio-economic disadvantage, especially in post-apartheid South Africa (Chetty & Mwepu, 2008). Our children need English as a means to access education and opportunities not only in South Africa but around the world. This access depends on the kind of multi-lingual education that is provided in order that learners be grounded in the multicultural society that makes South Africa.

The data collected by the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) (Hartley et al, 2007:51) on learners' performance in 2007, illustrates that after more than ten years of democratic government, schools in the historically disadvantaged areas are still underperforming. Between 2004 and 2007 the success rate of grade 12 learners in disadvantaged areas was lower than the success rate of those in the former model C schools in the province (WCED, 2008). This has been a continuous trend over the years, where the schools in townships are still under-resourced.

Table 1.1: Statistics on learner numbers by race for Grade 12 in 2007 in WCED schools

	Coloured		Black		White	
Entered in 2007	21311		12030		8747	
% dropout		2,96%		6.37%		0.008%
Wrote final exam	20679		11263		8676	
Passed	16617	80,3%	7369	65.4%	8591	99,02%
Passed with endorsements	3407	16,47%	982	8.71%	5270	60,74%
Failed	4063	19,64%	3894	34,57%	85	0,97%

This table clearly illustrates that there are still critical issues that face our learners in township schools. Language learning becomes the most critical issue which affects the performance of learners. According to the language in education policy (LIEP), bilingual education has to be gradually introduced at a later point of primary schooling which is usually in the fourth grade. This means English is introduced alongside with the mother-tongue from grade three, but this strategy has not yielded successful results in learners having basic literacy skills in both

English and IsiXhosa. Many reasons for this have been explored, ranging from parental choice of their children's' LoLT to the insufficient number of well-trained mother-tongue primary school educators (Hartley & Lewis, 2008: 148).

The Progress in Reading Literacy (PIRLS) summary report (2006) on literacy skills in reading and writing of Grade 5 learners, clearly showed that black children in Township schools are still lagging behind in literacy skills both in their mother-tongue and in English according to international bench marks (Howie et al, 2006). The most recent ANA (Annual National Assessment) results still show that the level of literacy has not improved in reaching international benchmarks. The literacy level nationally for Grade 3 is 35% and for Grade 6 is 28% (DoE, 2010: 20).

When learners move from the General Education and Training (GET) Phase they are supposed to have gained basic reading and writing skills which could be modified in the Further Education and Training (FET) phase. Reading and writing skills are crucial in this phase as we prepare learners for tertiary level. Learners are expected to have a good background in English as it is the LoLT in most of the educational institutions in South Africa. It therefore becomes necessary for learners not only to have proficiency in communicating English but also proficiency for academic purposes.

The learning outcome for reading and writing states that a learner will be able to read and write different kinds of factual and imaginative texts for a wide range of purposes (DoE, 2002:5). Over ten years of teaching and assessing learners I have found that learners still perform lower than required by the further education and training phase (FET) curriculum in reading and writing. This clearly shows that the learners are promoted with limited literacy skills to the FET phase. This study seeks to describe literacy practices in reading and writing for Grade 9, with a special focus on a secondary school in which English is the language of learning and teaching (LoLT). The aim of the study is to explore whether Grade 9 literacy practices in a township school are likely to prepare learners adequately for the FET phase, namely, Grades 10 to 12.

1.2.   THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Literacy is the fundamental part of academic achievement, as all academic achievement depends on the ability to read and write. The ability to read refers not only to just being able to recognise letters and decode words; it includes constructing meaning and being familiar with various forms and functions of written text (Dednam, 2005:124). Our learners in township schools are challenged in having to use English in most of their subjects and not having good literacy skills to construct meaning and to use literacy critically for academic achievement. English is a language that is mostly used as LoLT in these schools, but learners do not achieve up to a level where they have good manipulation of English in order to use it as their LoLT. This reality becomes a barrier to their learning.

The decline in improvement of academic results in township schools is what has prompted this study. Learners' lack of English language skills inhibits their understanding and expression (Du Plessis, 2006:29). This results in poor academic performance which in turn affects the matriculation results of South African Black learners from township schools.

1.2.1.   Background of the school

The site of the research is a township secondary school in Cape Town with an enrolment of 700 learners who come from different townships around Cape Town. Most of the learners in the school speak IsiXhosa as their mother-tongue and the LoLT is English, as it is in most schools in the area. Most of them come from the rural parts of the Eastern Cape. These learners who come from the rural areas of Eastern Cape have many more language barriers than those who are from the urban areas. They are hardly exposed to English outside the classroom and thus the opportunities to acquire the language are limited.

When we look at the history behind the migration of learners from the Eastern Cape to the Western Cape, it is about looking for better social and economic conditions. Their parents come to look for employment and at the same time want to provide better education for their children. In my experience as an educator, we have also seen learners coming to Cape Town on their own to look for better education, leaving parents behind in the rural areas. The reality of the situation is that these children come with nothing; their parents are not employed and

they depend on the government child support grant to sustain themselves. Those that are at the adolescent stage do not qualify for the child support grant; they will often stay with older siblings who are also migrant workers who are not literate. It becomes difficult then for the older siblings to have a sense of responsibility towards the learners as parents do not live with them.

The learners who have done their primary education in the Western Cape, have had better exposure to English as it is the lingua-franca inside and outside school. These learners have a better command of English but they still lack basic reading and writing skills. In their research on building school-based reading practices Winburg & Botes (2005) found that there were minimal reading practices at home; parents did not encourage and assist in reading practices due to their low literacy levels. This makes children struggle at school with literacy development which in turn means that there is lack of motivation in language learning amongst our learners.

The socio-economic background of the learners in the site of the study is characterised by poverty of the highest proportions. The learners come from surrounding squatter camps around the Western Cape, the majority from the Joe Slovo squatter camp in Langa. Unemployment and crime are high in the area. The school itself is situated in the middle of a business area which has two taverns. The learners are often exposed to alcohol and drugs. The school also has a high level of teenage pregnancy especially at the GET level, which often results in learners dropping out from school and coming back after a year or two. The drop-out trend is often associated with those learners who become pregnant or those who commit crime. This trend generates challenges because it becomes difficult to re-integrate those learners who have missed two to three years of school. They end up failing and dropping out from school permanently.

The site of the study is a "no fee-paying school", which means the learners get free education, although it is still a challenge for learners to get all the resources that are needed for effective learning and teaching in the school. For instance; the school does not have a fully functional library. There is only one small library in the township catering for ten schools in the area. There is just one computer lab, which is also not fully functional, for 700 learners. Parents are not fully involved in assisting the school financially as it is a 'no fee-paying school'; there is a

tendency from parents of not being willing to assist in any efforts which involve finances or supplementing resources for learners. For example, learners are supposed to bring their own photocopying paper once a term, but it is difficult for parents to contribute towards that.

The admission policy of the school favours learners from the Eastern Cape in that local learners are admitted on the basis of having a valid performance report from the previous school and they are not admitted if they have failed any grade, whereas only learners from the Eastern Cape are considered for admission if they have failed a grade. Learners' age is also taken into account when they have to be admitted as according to the WCED circular 0240/2003 each learner has to be at a certain age for a grade; grade eight between thirteen and fourteen, grade nine between fourteen and fifteen, grade ten between fifteen and sixteen, grade eleven between sixteen and seventeen and grade 12 between seventeen and eighteen. It is always a challenge then because some of the learners are over age, especially those who come from the Eastern Cape, as they often start school when they are older, and some drop out from school at an early age because they have to tend livestock at home. It also becomes difficult for local learners who drop out from school mostly due to pregnancy or incarceration, to be admitted if they are over age for a grade.

1.2.2.   The Language Profile of the School

In this particular school the LoLT is English in accordance with the language in education policy (LIEP). Although all the learners speak IsiXhosa as their mother-tongue, they are supposed to be instructed in English for most of the subjects, except IsiXhosa. Over the years the academic performance of the school has been decreasing. In 2008 the school managed to achieve a 22% pass rate in grade 12 and for 2009 it achieved a 15% pass rate. This is mainly due to the language barriers that the children come with, bearing in mind that many learners come from the rural parts of the Eastern Cape where their English proficiency is not developed, so that they cannot read and write in the LoLT in Grade 8. It becomes difficult to intervene because educators do not have enough skills and resources to assist those learners. Nel (2005:151) explains that educators are not adequately trained and equipped to cater specifically for the needs of the learners learning in their second, third or even fourth language. The reality is that for our learners English might not necessarily be their second language, because they come from diverse cultural backgrounds. For instance in the rural

parts of the Eastern Cape, some learners who come from Ematatiele speak Sotho, and those who come from Mount Frere speak a combination of IsiXhosa and IsiSwati.

According to the NCS Assessment Guidelines for Grade 9 a learner has to be promoted to Grade 10 if certain requirements are achieved. The requirements are as follows:

- At least a "moderate achievement" in one of the languages offered and mathematics.
- At least an "elementary achievement" in the other language; and
- At least a moderate achievement in four other learning areas (DoE, 2000:22).

These requirements allow a learner to progress to the FET level even if the learners' First Additional Language (FAL) is at elementary level, which means that learners who go to FET are not sufficiently academically prepared for the phase. In our schools learners who go to Grade 10 with limited reading and writing skills is a common trend.

Taylor (2008: 2) highlights that some of the problems in South African Township schools that undermine effective teaching and learning are poor management of schools and insufficient attention paid to training educators in subject knowledge. These problems manifest through having demotivated educators due to the lack of professional support and not having enough resources in schools as the curriculum is constantly changing, which has put educators in the position of being insecure with the delivery of effective teaching and learning. This then affects the overall academic performance of learners in our schools, resulting in low matriculation results.

1.3. RESEARCH QUESTION

The main research question to be addressed in this study is the following:

Do literacy practices in a Grade 9 classroom facilitate the use of English as the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) for Grade 10?

This question guides the research in looking for the kind of literacy practices that exist both at school and at home that could help in acquiring English as the LoLT. Learners have to acquire

basic skills of writing and reading. By the end of the GET phase basic language skills are expected to have been already developed in order to prepare learners for the FET phase. We often assume that when learners move from the GET phase they are prepared for a much higher level of academic competence, having a full command of necessary concepts and academic language proficiency. The research tries to investigate the literacy practices that are effective for the learners' language development, more especially in reading and writing.

This research is guided by these sub-questions:

1.   What kind of literacy practices do the grade 9 learners in the site of this study demonstrate?
2.   Are these literacy practices likely to achieve the intentions of the NCS at FET level?
3.   3. To what extent do the literacy practices prepare learners for the use of English as the LoLT in grade 10?

This research is limited in scale as it will involve one school. The aim is to find out the literacy practices that are effective for teaching and learning at the appropriate level. These practices should help in developing the language proficiency that is imperative for success in the LoLT.

My assumption is that learners acquire a certain amount of English that they are exposed to in their contextual environment through social practices because children are exposed to various kinds of multi-modal literacies that are not preferred in a school environment. Therefore, if literacy is seen as a social practice, acquiring English as a second language would be much easier for our children in the townships than for those coming from rural areas. Du Plessis (2006:35) comments that in order for a child to learn a language, interaction between the child and the contextual environment is important as it involves social activities that a child partakes in. This interaction becomes a learning experience where the child is able to visualise and verbalise experiences that come from the immediate environment.

Thus the objectives of this study are:

- To understand the kind of literacy practices that these children come with from their communities;
- To investigate the relevance of literacy practices that they come with in helping to improve the acquisition of English as LoLT;
- To understand the social environment of the learners in order to have insight into their language exposure and language manipulation; and
- To seek strategies that could help learners to improve their language.

1.4. CONCLUSION

In this chapter the focus was to motivate the study and the orientation behind exploring learners' literacy practices which are an integral part of literacy development. These literacy practices are informed by the social interaction of the learners and other various practices that co–exist within their environment, and which could be outside or inside the school. It is my belief that learners come with different literacy practices that could be harnessed in order to help and improve the acquisition of English as LoLT.

Therefore this study will be informed by the following discussions in chapter two: literacy as a social practice, critical literacy, adolescent literacy, English as the LoLT and multilingualism. These discussions will be the basis of exploring the various kinds of literacy theories that relate to later literacy development of children, with much attention based on looking at them in the light of the expectations of the current curriculum and NCS, and to see if these are likely to be achieved.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1.   INTRODUCTION

The South African Education system has been facing the challenge of implementing the Language in Education Policy (DoE, 1997), which has not been yielding satisfactory results in the improvement of language acquisition of learners. A Western Cape Education Department Annual Survey of 2004 shows the rate of dropout in schools in the Western Cape. It illustrates that 8% of learners leave school before completing the compulsory phase of education, and a further 15% leave school before completing the FET phase (WCED, 2008: 2). The main cause of these school dropouts is failing. It is prevalent in township schools for learners to fail grade nine more than once and this results in learners leaving school. This is attributed to poor proficiency in English of our learners, which in turn becomes of great concern to the educators (Du Plessis, 2006: 28).

When learners go to the FET phase there should be a certain level of language proficiency in English, which prepares them for academic purposes. The failure of learners to acquire English limits their prospects of academic success (Probyn, 2001:250). Therefore we have to seek a way of improving language skills in English. Literacy practices play a pivotal role in creating an understanding of the linguistic and cognitive development of Second Language Learners (SLL). The level of achievement in literacy depends on literacy practices that emerge from school and the community.

This literature review looks at the theories of language acquisition that are premised on the assumption that if literacy is seen as a social practice, then the language acquisition could be improved and properly developed in second language learners.

2.2.   LITERACY AS A SOCIAL PRACTICE

Literacy can be seen as social practice, not only as a technical and neutral skill of decoding and encoding words (Street, 2003:77). This statement implies that literacy is not only embedded in the educational context; it is also rooted in the social context. Literacy practices are shaped by social institutions and are embedded purposefully in cultural practices

(Baynham & Prinsloo, 2001:84). It is important for us as researchers to investigate the kind of contribution that society makes to language acquisition. Socio-cultural theorists have a view that learning does not happen in isolation. It depends on the interaction and shared processes of engaging in discussion and problem solving (Mitchel & Myles, 2004:195). This interaction comes through the practices that are carried out not only in school but in the socio-cultural environment.

Baynham and Prinsloo (2001:86), arguing from a new language studies (NLS) perspective, propose that schooling itself has contributed to a narrow definition of literacy as something that is isolated from a social dialogue. This does not mean however, that NLS practitioners are anti-school; they want literacy to be used to understand children's emerging experiences with literacy in their own cultural environments (Street, 2003:83). Then if literacy practices are recognised both in and outside school, we can begin to address educational challenges of learning literacy.

Canagarajah (2007:925) maintains that not all literacy comes from the mastering of phonics and grammars but emerges from other fluid social interactions across boundaries and communication outside homogenous communities. With the kind of diverse cultures that exist in this country, we have to find the kind of literacy practices that evolve around learners' social and cultural environments. These practices could be in the form of everyday use of literacy. For instance, children who come from the Eastern Cape are good at telling folk tales, composing poetic praises and proxy reading and writing letters for less literate members of the community. We can use these kinds of practices firstly by accepting that they exist and secondly incorporate them in the classroom as a part of practices that induce effective learning. Poetic praises are a part of a cultural heritage which uses words and clan names that define a person and at the same time the praise becomes a song which has a rhyme. It is an everyday Xhosa cultural practice to use clan names or praises when people greet each other. For instance, in the community when someone greets a stranger, clan names are given so that the interlocutors may know if they are related or not. This is an everyday cultural practice that emerges from their social context and is a part of the learners' everyday occurrences. Street (2003:78) reiterates that literacy as a social practice has to be linked with literacy events that take the form of cultural and social activities. In this way it could be seen that literacy is not a

discrete set of skills to be acquired, but is situated within specific contexts and shaped by social interactions (Larson & Marsh, 2005:11).

Learners in the Further Education and Training (FET) band are seen as a media-generation, who have interests in literacy practices that do not include formal reading and writing that take place at school in a formal environment, but they are more inclined to use multi-media text like the internet, text messaging and computer games. These practices are influenced by their social background and interactions and they are not part of the school curriculum. Smith (2005:319) argues that these practices are often devalued and not accepted by educators.

Street (2005:13) comments that we have to begin to use "real literacy materials" that come from everyday environments rather than texts specially written for learning. This becomes especially relevant to our kind of environment which has limited resources like text books and other printed media, which may be regarded as the main and important teaching tools by educators. As literacy is the most important factor affecting progression and achievement in the FET band we need to come up with strategies of incorporating outside practices with practices in the classroom. Learners are using the popular culture of music, communicating with mobile phones and using the internet, and these kinds of practices are at times not incorporated into the classroom. In the study conducted by Alvermann et. al (2001) on using multiple literacies to navigate various forms of popular media and technology with adolescents, it was discovered that learners became independent readers and they were able to use a variety of literacy skills when they had to research about their favourite rap group and share information through communicating with the teacher on the internet.

The problem of low literacy achievement is not only confined to this country but presents in other countries. In the United States of America (U.S.A.) through the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP: 1992), the 'Nation's Report Card', a universal conclusion drawn from the data is that there is a "performance gap" in the elementary schools. Students from low income backgrounds perform at a lower level in reading and writing achievement than students from higher income families (Gambrell & Teale, 2007:728). This is the same case in South Africa; most of the township schools are underachieving in reading and writing (PIRLS Summary Report 2006). This can be due to the inequality that still exists in our education system. It then becomes a challenge for learners who take English as their First

Additional Language in the FET band to be fluent in English and to become academically proficient.

Educators themselves need to be motivated and informed to teach second language learners (SLLs). Gambrell & Teale (2007:728) speak about a lack of adequate teacher preparation in teaching SLLs. This is just one of the factors that also exist in our education system. Smith (2005:327) strongly affirms that both the teacher and the learner have to be supported by being given a stimulating learning environment. Learners are stimulated to learn by things that they are familiar with and that they could easily identify with. These may come from their social context.

LoLT plays an important role in giving learners skills to access opportunities; however it is also vital not to ignore the mother-tongue instruction in developing language skills. Therefore, literacy practices in the mother tongue can play a role in broadening the range of language resources available for learners to be proficient and have confidence in using the LoLT, especially if the practices come as social practices, because literacy would be facilitated by coming from the learners' social environments. Support is then going to be needed by learners to be productive in school settings. Educators could then play a role in enhancing literacy through accepting these social practices in the classroom. Support could be provided through higher learning institutions to further train educators on literacy programmes and also to adopt successful programmes that are implemented in other countries to support learners in their language acquisition. For instance, the National Writing Project (NWP) institutes in the United States of America (USA) have a long history of quality programmes that lead to large scale improvements in the teaching and learning of writing. The NWP institutes help teachers of all grade levels to improve their teaching. These institutes serve between 80,000 - 100,000 teachers annually (St. John & Laura, 2010: 4).

2.3.   CRITICAL LITERACY

Although there is no clear definition of critical literacy, there is a need to understand the scope of the meaning and the purpose of critical literacy. Stribling (2008:34) describes critical literacy as the connection between literacy and liberation. Critical literacy moves beyond ability to recall words and to write them: it is about putting meaning to print, sound and

images (Horning, 2007:81). Critical literacy has no definite boundaries; it is an expansion of literacy practices and its uses. These literacy practices are not only confined to school but they also emerge from societal influences which value the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of students. Janks (2000:7) asserts that critical literacy values diversity as a productive resource to maintain and reproduce creative discourses. The creative discourses would be influenced by the students' environment and access to various kinds of practices that come from their socio-cultural backgrounds. These creative discourses could engage learners in a manner that, by using critical literacy, would help to redress the past inequalities by making a contribution to a discourse of social and environmental justice (DoE, 2003:22). These kinds of creative discussions could be encouraged through activities like staging a play where they are going to be given the freedom of selecting their own theme so as to create a platform for engaging them in issues that are of importance in their communities, and which create these inequalities. From my experience as an educator, these kinds of activities usually become very fruitful because learners are taken out of the formal classroom environment and they are given ownership of a space where they could be creative and be able to address 'sensitive issues' that are not usually accepted in the classroom.

Critical literacy becomes relevant to this study because it does not isolate the learners' cultural and political backgrounds from their schooling. Critical literacy expands beyond the classroom and uses literacy practices as the conduit through which one can examine the complexities of access and equity (Stribling, 2008:34). Critical literacy moves beyond just understanding and producing print text, it constructs meaning and relevance in the text (Xu, 2007:15). Due to changing technological advancement and globalization learners need skills and knowledge to be able to cope in these "new times". Critical literacy then becomes one of the powerful tools to ascertain access to critical language skills, which could help in cognitive development and in improving the level of communication.

Knickerbocker & Rycik (2006:45) point out that the traditional approach where students are guided to recognize literary elements such as plot, theme, and characterization in literature study, seems to limit learners' understanding. Literature study should be expanded through the use of critical literacy strategies that could encourage the recognition of social, political and historical perspectives within the context of the text. Berhman (2006: 491) contends that a critical literacy agenda should provide an understanding of how the texts work, what the text

intends to do to the world and how social relations relevant to the text can be critiqued and reconstructed.

Critical literacy is seen as a theory that fosters education towards social justice, by allowing learners to recognize that the language is not neutral, it is influenced by social relations (Berhman, 2006: 490). This means it has to be constantly applied in the classroom to encourage critical thinking and questioning. Luke (2000) further calls critical literacy education a "theoretical and practical attitude". Comber (2001) in Xu (2007:13) argues that "critical literacy needs to be continually redefined in practice". However the potential of critical literacy to realise the aims of the NCS (Department of Education, 2002) has been weakened by the modes of its implementation as both the learners and educators are constantly bombarded by assessment policies and the assessment tasks of the National Curriculum Statement (NCS). Educators tend to concentrate on these assessments which are prescribed, spending less time engaging learners with texts for the purpose of being critical or inviting learners to explore their everyday world in a different way. Educators need not only share informational texts with learners, they need to teach them how to read for information and simultaneously engage in critical literacy, develop their understanding of the world and teach them how to question it (Fisher & Frey, 2008:11).

The best practices in adolescent literacy incorporate critical literacy in classroom instruction, so as to meet the needs of the marginalised readers (Stribling, 2008:35). In the study conducted by Lesley (2008) of "at risk" high school students, a literacy group was mentored in independent reading and writing, using critical literacy to engage adolescent learners. In the group sessions, literacy material that was used was connected to their experiences. For instance she would use a poem which talks about poverty; there would be a discussion around the word and the students would be able to make personal connections and engage in a dialogue about not only understanding the word but also its social significance in their lives.

Berhman (2006: 490) further comments that critical literacy appears to lack instructional strategies that could be coherent with the curriculum. This clearly means that there is no definite formula of how to use critical literacy in the classroom. Theorists have come up with multiple perspectives on using critical literacy. Beach (2007) in Xu (2007:14) has proposed three critical literacy perspectives: audience, semiotic, and narrative. The audience analysis

would use media texts in the classroom to examine the responses of a target audience. Learners could bring any media text into the classroom to present in front of the class orally and the audience could respond to the text and ask questions. Usually learners are encouraged to bring media articles like newspaper articles that would capture the attention and interest of their audience. Semiotic analysis focuses on social and cultural meanings of media texts constituted by the learners' cultural meaning and identity that they bring to bear on the act of evaluation. The narrative analysis is an approach which involves looking at the narrative structures of genres of text such as comedy, action, mystery or adventure. In the classroom narrative analysis could be used in the form of another genre which is not prescribed for their literature. For instance film study could be used as a part of narrative analysis, the film could be also chosen by the learners themselves so that it focuses on their interest and issues that they could relate to. These perspectives could be infused in classroom lessons as tools to encourage useful discussions and debates.

In their social environment, our learners are constantly exposed to other literacy practices like using the internet, cell phone texting, the media and music. Teachers and learners have to learn to follow an approach of inventing critical literacy events that could encourage critical engagement in the classroom through these media (Berhman, 2006:490). Therefore the classroom should be about transforming the knowledge that the learners have in order to engage in critical literacy practices that are going to be relevant to their experiences and those practices should be able to help them to meet the demands of the outside world. Those demands could be learners being able to use language not only for the purpose of communication but for the purpose of being able to use the language to examine the power relationships that exist in their societies.

Xu (2007:13) argues that words are powerful tools which can promote democratic and emancipatory change. The relevance to our education in South Africa is that literacy should create a platform for producing skills and knowledge that are needed in these "new times''. Critical literacy has to create a space for our learners to explore what exists around them and be able to bridge the gap between being labelled the "marginalised" or "the previously disadvantaged" and fully participate in the economy, taking part in promoting social in justice. One of the expected learning outcomes from the NCS (National Curriculum Statement) is for learners to be able to respond critically to texts (DoE: 2005:96). Also CAPS

prescribes the objective that learners should be able to use English as the First Additional Language (FAL) as a means of being critical and creative in expressing their opinions of values and power relations embedded in text (DoE, 2010:12). It becomes a challenge to achieve this outcome if critical literacy is not put into practice. We have to find ways to include critical literacy in everyday instruction. Lesley (2008:177) argues that critical literacy has to create space for broader uses of literacy beyond what is presented in school settings. Agreeing with this view is Behrman (2006:492) who states that literacy development should not be limited to a single printed text within the content-area of the classroom, but it should involve literacy activities that use multiple texts both in school and out of school.

2.4. ADOLESCENT LITERACY

2.4.1. Concerns

In the United States of America (U.S.A) the National Assessment Educational Progress (NAEP) results of 2005 show that both white and students of colour in 8th and 12th grades scored lower on reading in 2005 as compared with 1992 (Squire, 2007:1). These challenges are not only isolated to the U.S.A, we are facing the same challenges in South Africa. According to the Progress in International Reading Study (PIRLS) Report of 2006, Grade 6 learners did not reach the international benchmark in reading achievement. This means our learners are failing to reach the level of language proficiency that is expected internationally in order to learn. These challenges are not confined to adolescent literacy but also occur in early and middle childhood literacy, where there is still low achievement in reading and writing.

Attention has not been adequately paid to adolescent literacy in South Africa. When literacy policies are formulated and budgets are made, education administrators concentrate on children's early literacy programs and adult literacy programs from which we have not yet seen fruitful results. For instance, in the Western Cape a Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2006-2016 was introduced to address low levels of literacy and numeracy in the province. This focuses on early childhood literacy and numeracy. There have not been any intervention programs which could also help learners to acquire language skills that are needed at intermediate, senior GET and FET levels. This problem is not unique to South Africa but also

manifests in the United States of America (U.S.A). Moje (2002:211) comments that a lack of attention to adolescent literacy makes youth literacy practices invisible and confirms the belief that literacy learning ends in childhood, only to be remediated in adulthood if not learnt correctly in the early years.

2.4.2. Competencies of adolescent literacy

Studying adolescent literacy would not only focus on the problems that are faced by the youth in literacy but would navigate other ways of discovering literacy practices that are relevant to them. If we can learn to pay attention to adolescence and study how they use literacy as a tool to explore their complex and fragmented social world, then we can learn more about literacy (Moje, 2002:212). This could help us to find strategies to support them in making meaning of their own lives. We need to come up with approaches of encouraging learners' beliefs about language and society. These beliefs would then be fused with literacy practices that come with learners from their social contexts. Those literacy practices should broaden their focus to include social, political and historical contexts in which literacy is created and read (Knickerbocker & Rycik, 2006:45).

Taking adolescents as people who make meaning of various texts to present their own constructed identities and subject positions in the world could help us to discover making meaning of literacy (Moje, 2002: 215). These meanings can be presented in various texts that are deemed unacceptable at school. Learners might read and write online, communicating with people around the world using instant messaging, but these activities are not considered legitimate literacy practices (Williams, 2007:180). The technological era that we are living in brings other forms of literacy practices that we have to accept as making adolescents literate. In reality literacy is not only about reading and writing. Literacy is about encompassing reading and writing within social and individual practices. Adolescent literacy should be seen as a voice of constructing identities that can be able to participate in the society with confidence. MacCafferty (2002:282) suggests that adolescents need to know the reason for using a language, so that they could learn and understand what is expected of them in society.

One of the challenges that is often faced in township schools with regard to adolescence is finding ways of helping acquisition of English as a first additional language by learners who

have limited resources. According to the learning outcomes of FAL in grade 10-12; learners must be able to read and view for understanding, to evaluate critically and respond to a wide range of text (DoE, 2003:24). Most of the adolescents in our schools are struggling to read. Educators very often find that learners do not have necessary literacy skills to use reading and writing effectively to achieve learning outcomes. In schools that are under-resourced it becomes difficult to expose learners to a wide range of text, but if we discover other innovative ways of meeting this challenge then we can achieve this outcome. Thus we need to create spaces that could accommodate other literacy practices that are suited to their everyday lives (Moje, et al, 2000:403). Alvermann (2001:12) further argues that being literate no longer means just being able to read and write traditional print text, adolescents need to be sociotechnically literate.

2.4.3.   Best practices in adolescent literacy

Although we more often concentrate on best literacy practices that evolve in formal reading and writing, in adolescent literacy the emphasis is more on how reading and writing relate to the world and the demands that come from the society. One of the demands is the expectation adolescents have to be able to acquire a language for academic purposes and economic purposes. This language does not necessarily have to be acquired only through literacy teaching and learning in a classroom.

Best literacy practices have to accommodate those who are labelled as "marginalized readers". Marginalized readers are those who are not connected to literacy in the classroom, they do not engage in reading and writing in school (Moje et al, 2000:405). These learners have other language and cultural practices that are different from those of school. These practices tend to be devalued by educators. For instance, a young boy at my school in grade 10 is a struggling reader in the classroom; outside school he is a praise singer. Should I then conclude that he is illiterate? In a study done by Alvermann (2001) with "at risk" adolescents who have low reading scores, his findings were that these learners had interests in using other texts like the media and producing their own texts through the use of technology. This is another way of engaging in alternative literacy practices that are chosen by them.

Our literacy practices do not actually address the demands of the diverse groups of learners and the communities they serve (Moje et al, 2000:406). Here in South Africa we have language and cultural practices that are different but we tend to accept those practices that come from a dominant culture. As educators we ignore other literacy practices that come from the learners' cultural backgrounds. Educators have a notion of one-size–fits–all instruction when it comes to effective teaching (Alvermann, 2001:5). This accounts for the failure of educators to accept literacy practices that are already in the possession of learners and are in need of being developed.

Behrman (2006:491) states that best literacy practices may include using multiple texts and dominant cultural discourses to critique and to produce a wide range of text that is relevant to their social relations. We can use situations that are related to their well-being like poverty, teenage pregnancy and gangsterism. These situations could be infused through giving them projects and encouraging independent reading about the topics. Learners can then take possession of their situations through literacy and this would encourage them to bring other texts like videos, magazines, and music related to those topics. Through these practices those who are "at risk" learners would be presented as people who can express their beliefs, values and interests through literacy practices (Lesley, 2008:178).

When we develop best practices for adolescents we do not have to exclude the classroom in totality. We have to examine if our classrooms stimulate any motivation to experience learning (Moje et al, 2000:404). A classroom should provide a suitable learning environment, where learners' best interests are taken into account. This can be hampered by the overcrowded classes that educators have to teach in. In some classes we still have a teacher to pupil ratio of 1:50, compared to the official teacher to pupil ratio of 1:30. In township public schools the official ratio is seldom met. Moore (2000), in Alvermann & Hinchman (2007:27) emphasize that educators must be aware of individual backgrounds and needs of learners to be able to create meaningful experiences in language. In reality, in an overcrowded classroom that atmosphere cannot be created.

According to our language policies the best literacy practices lie in the assessment strategies that are prescribed in the NCS. The reasons given for assessing are: to monitor progress in reading and give feedback, diagnose barriers to learning, support learning and for the purpose

of promotion (DoE, 2003:51). The instruments that are prescribed for assessing learners allow the assessment to take place only in the classroom. For example assessing writing has to be done through a presentation according to a rubric which is prescribed by the policy document. Williams (2007:179) argues that the literacy assessment instruments only assess a limited range of reading and writing skills, meanwhile more comprehensive ways of assessing literacy would include literacy practices that are outside the classroom. Williams implies therefore, that other assessment instruments could be developed to suit literacy practices that come from outside the classroom. One way is to place adolescents at the centre of their learning, to use culturally relevant materials, including multicultural themes in applications to teaching and assessing (MacQuiston, O'Shea & MacCollin, 2008:67).

Adolescents need to be exposed to supplementary texts that may allow them to explore social issues that are avoided by the traditional texts that are prescribed at school (Behrman, 2006:492). This could give them opportunities to develop their reading and writing skills. Educators need to support this development through implementing strategies of best practices. Alvermann (2001:6) speaks of effective literacy instruction for adolescents which involves self-efficacy and engagement. Adolescents need to be motivated and confident in using literacy, be able to question and critique a text without feeling inferior to the educator and to other learners. This effective instruction should be accompanied by giving learners frequent opportunities to write and read independently from texts that they choose and sources from where they can receive feedback (Adolescent literacy resource, 2007:40). This idea could add value in adolescents attaining literacy skills and appreciating their work.

2.5.   THE LANGUAGE OF LEARNING AND TEACHING (LoLT)

2.5.1.   Multilingualism

The Language Policy in Education (DoE, 1997) promotes multilingualism. Therefore learners have to master two languages, their mother-tongue and a first additional language, which for the majority black South African learners is English. The main reason for this policy is to maintain the home languages while providing access to other additional languages (DoE, 1997). The Department of Education has taken an additive approach in promoting multilingualism. Children have to be taught in their mother tongue from Grades R-4, and then

the first additional language has to be gradually introduced. That this policy is not benefiting Black English second language speakers is evident because South African education is currently producing poor matriculation results of Black learners. The major reason for this is the poor proficiency in English of second language learners (Du Plessis, 2006: 29).

Heugh (2002:18) argues that both the curriculum and the language policy have been kept as separate processes. She goes on to comment that English has been viewed as a separate subject rather than as the language of learning. In teaching English as the second language, learners find it challenging to apply what they learn from the language class and integrate it with another subject or learning area. This could be attributed to the phenomenon that the language in the classroom is very often not English but a mixture of mother-tongue and English. Learners themselves are not willing to engage in meaningful discussions in English in order to acquire productive language skills (Probyn, 2001:251). This could be due to learners not being encouraged to communicate in English in other learning areas; it then builds reluctance in speaking English. Chimbganda (2005: 27) comments that our schools need to take advantage of the accommodative nature of English by accepting the local language variations that come with learners as English is for global communication. To concur with Chimbganda, really if we accept the English that is spoken outside which we consider as 'broken English', we could actually create a ground for improving language skills by correcting and modifying what they have.

The language in Education Policy has also given parents the right to choose the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) in schools, based on a few factors like the language preference of parents and learners, and the ability of educators to teach in a particular language. De Klerk (1999:321) observed that parents who prefer the anglicised language for their children are those who are better educated and wealthier. These parents unfortunately appear to be unaware of the importance of cognitive development in mother-tongue for the acquisition of a second language (Lemmer in Du Plessis & Louw, 2008:54).

The Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) that is mostly preferred in urban schools is English. Parents and learners believe that English is the language that would open working and learning opportunities. Kamwangamalu (2000:120) maintains that English serves as a lingua franca in communication and is the language of power and privilege. English is also a

global language which is used around the world; it becomes a tool of communication, education and economy across the world. English is also described as the "neutral" language where other South African languages can meet (Mati et al, 2002:13). In the study conducted by Pluddermann, Braam, Broeder, Extra & October (2004) on the language preference of children who lived in the urban Cape Town region, their findings were that there was a preference for English to be used as the LoLT in urban schools. This would suggest that there is a need for proficiency in English by learners as they perceive it as a language that would create employment and education opportunities.

2.5.2.   Language Policies not working in our education system.

The Language in Education Policy (LiEP) prescribes that the School Governing Body (SGB) has the right to stipulate how the school will promote multilingualism through using more than one language of learning and teaching. Also, the parent exercises the minor learner's language rights on behalf of the minor learner by choosing the LoLT for them (DoE, 1997:32). Most of the parents choose English as LoLT, which then becomes a challenge in its implementation. The situation of language acquisition in Township schools is different from the former model C schools. Black township schools have a majority of learners who speak IsiXhosa; half of these learners come from the Eastern Cape where the LoLT is their mother-tongue. When they go to high school, the level of their proficiency in English is at the lowest level. These learners have not been exposed to enough reading and written text in English. Learners who become proficient readers are able to access written resources and have an environment which is rich in print of that particular language. This would result in improving their vocabulary and their language skills (Pretorius & Machet, 2000: 20).

According to Cummins (1979, in Cărdenas-Hagan, Carlson & Pollard-Durodala 2007:250), the learners' proficiency in the Second Language depends on skills acquired in the mother-tongue language. This means that our learners need to have a high level of proficiency in Isixhosa in order to acquire good language skills in English. It becomes a challenge to measure or determine how well they are proficient in their mother-tongue when it comes to academic proficiency.

The mother-tongue debate is not isolated to South Africa, but is also world-wide. In other African countries there is still an existing challenge of English being a dominant language. In Africa, a black child generally experiences mother-tongue instruction for the first four years of primary education, then a foreign language is introduced abruptly as a medium of instruction (Kamwangamalu, 2000:122). These children have not been exposed to a foreign language outside the classroom. This will result in a high rate of failure and school dropouts. Bamgbose (2004:5) asserts that the use of an official foreign language as a medium of instruction does not ensure success in using that language and achieving academic proficiency.

Most of the language policies in Africa have experienced a policy shift and a challenge of policy maintenance. When the official language of instruction at a secondary level is English, the reality is that in African schools, teachers are aware of the limitations of their learners, so they often switch between the medium of instruction and mother-tongue in order to make teaching meaningful (Bamgbose, 2000:5). The observations that were done by Probyn (2001) found that most of the learners spoke IsiXhosa and the LoLT was English. Educators were actually using their mother-tongue to teach eight content subjects. They would often switch between English and IsiXhosa to explain concepts. The reason behind this was to be able to accommodate learners with their mother-tongue proficiencies in understanding concepts. Although code switching is often viewed negatively by educators, it does help in creating a responsive learning atmosphere in the classroom (Arthur, 2001:354).

The bilingual language policies have not been successful in most of the African countries. In Tanzania with the promotion of Swahili as the LoLT in secondary school (Web, 1999:353), learners were taught in Kiswahili but teachers would provide notes in English, national examinations were conducted in English, and at tertiary level English was the medium of instruction (Ngonyani, 1997:413). This resulted in a low level of English language proficiency both at secondary school and at tertiary level. Also educators were not properly trained in using Kiswahili as LoLT; learning and teaching material in Kiswahili was not developed enough for learners and educators. This resulted in school dropouts at primary levels and a small percentage of secondary learners remaining in the schools (Arthur, 2001:352). In Somalia the implementation of Somali as LoLT in secondary schools has not been successful, although in other African countries like Mali and Niger, the attention to

African languages has increased. In Mali in particular the use of African languages has been taken to the higher institutions: an African language is the prerequisite for completion of a degree in Humanities (Bamgbose, 2004: 7).

2.5.3.   The Language Preference

International research indicates that children need at least twelve years of learning their mother tongue (Huegh, 2000:29) and more than seven years of LoLT in order to be academically proficient (Hakuta, Butler & Wit, 2000: 1). Those who support mother tongue instruction maintain that effective literacy acquisition and second language proficiency depend on well developed first language proficiency (Kanwangamalu, 2000: 122). This view is also supported by Mati, Townsend & Versveld (2002:14) who assert that learners have to be proficient in their mother tongue first before being introduced to a second language.

The Western Cape Education Department (WCED) has begun to implement a Language in Education Plan (LiEP) which supports mother tongue instruction from Grade R to Grade 6. This plan is implemented with the main objective of improving literacy and numeracy results in the province, although some of the parents still prefer English as the LoLT in the primary level of schooling for their children. De Klerk (2000, in Du Plessis 2006: 31) investigated why Isixhosa learners were sent to English schools in the Grahamstown area in the Eastern Cape from their preschool and primary school years. The responses that came from parents and care givers were:

- English is an international language
- English will open the door of opportunities
- English is important for the success of their children
- They want their children to be able to speak English fluently
- They believed that these schools provided quality education and a more stable environment (Du Plessis, 2006:32).

The reality of the use of English in South Africa is that it has a dominant role to play in the lives of learners. Banda (2000:57) comments that Blacks' preference for English as the medium of instruction could be due to their quest to attain personal achievement in formal and

professional spheres, so as to have attributes of status and power denied them during apartheid.

This quest for English as LoLT in most schools, especially in high schools, has not produced significant results, where we could expect to see that learners become proficient in the language and they were able to use it for academic purposes. Huegh (2000:21) refutes the study conducted by De Klerk (2000) by saying that she actually explored beyond superficial evidence and further comments that it is a myth that the majority of parents want English as the only language of Learning and Teaching in schools. She maintains that there is not yet scientific evidence which actually confirms that. Black learners however, are still failing Grade 12 examinations; this is probably because of their lack of English language skills. Even at tertiary level the students' performance is influenced by their poor command of English (Du Plessis, 2006:29). Academic language proficiency skills are needed for learners to be able to cope at tertiary level. These language skills need to be acquired from early childhood in developing both the mother-tongue language and English on an equal basis. Genesse (1994:1) comments that when children learn two languages at an early age, they become adept at using them and acquire proficiency in phonological and grammatical aspects of the two languages. This then becomes an advantage for children at an early age to be able to manipulate two languages, especially if they have regular exposure to these languages.

The main problem for second language learners worldwide is to be able to use English not only in primary and high school, but also for academic purposes. Critical language skills coupled with proficiency are needed for the academic level. Lemmer & Squelch (1993) in Du Plessis (2006:29) suggest that since English as a language is crucial in gaining access to higher levels of education, its proficiency should be addressed at preschool level and not postponed to a later stage when tertiary institutions have to intervene. Multilingual education has to be promoted from the early childhood years. Mother tongue and the second language need to be developed by encouraging a multilingual approach, which will maintain 50% mother tongue and 50% of English a day alongside the mother tongue (Heugh, 2000:32). According to Chimbganda (2005: 22), in order for a person to have a status of a native speaker of English, language acquisition has to take place during a 'critical period' of one's development which is between the age of two to puberty. He further comments that during these young ages, the brain shows plasticity and facilitates rapid language learning.

In a study conducted by Desai (2001) at a primary school in Khayelitsha in Cape Town, the school introduced English as a medium of instruction earlier than Grade 4; children were expected to learn all the subjects in English except during Isixhosa lessons. She found that educators were instructing them in their mother tongue and they were expected to write in English. It clearly showed that the Language in Education Policy (DoE: 1997) was not put into practice. Children could not write in English and could not even express themselves in English orally; probably this was due to the lack of using the language more significantly in the classroom rather than the lack of being exposed to English in their home environment.

Heugh (2000:25) maintains that the early switch to English does not work in the majority of South African schools. Of course in reality it would be difficult to teach a language that the children are not exposed to. These children have not yet reached proficiency in their mother tongue. For instance in the township schools, some of our learners come from the Eastern Cape. These learners have not been exposed to English as LoLT or as the language of communication; the mother-tongue dominates in their environment, so that English becomes a barrier for learning from primary school to tertiary level.

According to Cummin's (1979, in Cǎrdenas-Hagan & Carlson, 2007:250) developmental hypothesis the acquisition of a second language is mediated by the level of mother-tongue proficiency that children have at the time they begin to acquire the second language. This means that the acquisition of a second language depends on how children have mastered their mother-tongue. Children master simple aspects of another language during the first years of life, by the age of five their command of a language is relatively sophisticated and develops further when a child enters school and learns to read Ely (2003, in Howie, Van Staden & Venter, 2006:4) .

It is clearly a reality in South Africa that if children need to develop skills for academic proficiency in a language, it has to be simultaneous acquisition and development in mother-tongue and second language. Children need the same skills in both languages. In order develop English as LoLT in South Africa, mother tongue has to be maintained and promoted to ensure that acquisition of English becomes an additive rather than a subtractive process (Du Plessis & Louw, 2008:54). This process has to be also encouraged by parents; they have to be

informed of the dangers of rejecting mother tongue instruction. Du Plessis (2006:47) states that proficiency in English as a Second Language should be equal to the proficiency needed in the mother-tongue language. Learners also need cognitive and critical skills in English, which have to be developed the same as in the mother- tongue instruction

The PIRLS summary report (2006) shows that none of the Grade 4 and 5 African language learners were able to reach the high international benchmark either in Grade 4 or Grade 5 levels when tested in their mother-tongue (Archer, Howie et al, 2007:37). These results raise a question of why learners are performing badly in mother-tongue instruction. There is a need to determine how appropriate are the literacy practices that come from school as opposed to those that emerge from the learners' social context in encouraging language acquisition.

2.6.   THE LEVEL OF ENGLISH PROFICIENCY REQUIRED

The demand for proficiency in English is not isolated to South Africa. Around the world there is demand for English proficiency as it is an international language. English then is not only needed for interpersonal communication and for social interaction, it is also needed for academic and economic purposes. According to Hakuta, Butler & Witt (2000: 1), for a learner to have oral language proficiency it takes 3-4 years to develop and English academic proficiency could take 4-7 years. Then the learner's ability to use language as a critical tool, there has to be a development in acquiring the language. According to the LiEP, English becomes an additive language which is gradually introduced from Grade 4 as the second language. So far there has not been any success in reaching oral language proficiency in the second language acquisition in most schools. There is evidence that learners who transfer from L1 to L2 in Grade 4, often show poorer academic performance until Grade 12 than learners who continue learning in their mother tongue (Huegh, 2000:21).

Our learners are exposed to English at school and outside school, but there is a lack of development towards improving proficiency both in mother-tongue and the second language. Du Plessis (2006:36) asserts that in order to acquire English as LoLT, a holistic approach has to be taken, where learners are continually interacting with the environment through their learning experience by verbalising and providing input in the language acquisition activities. Learners could be encouraged at a classroom level to engage in activities that would be

learner centred, the emphasis being on creating dialogue and discussion on relevant issues that affect their livelihoods (Beck, 2005:394). For example, in a literature lesson, learners could be encouraged to discuss and debate issues that come from genres of texts that are deemed to be relevant to their lives, but this should be done by leading them with open ended questions. These activities could help in language acquisition through critical literacy, which could facilitate cognitive development and empower learners to be agents of social change.

Cummins (in Shoebottom, 2007: 3) believes that when children learn their first language (L1), they acquire certain metalinguistic skills that can help with the acquisition of L2. This is called Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP). It provides a base for the development of both the first language and the second language. Shoebottom (2007:2) further asserts that learners have to be encouraged to continue L1 development, through reading extensively in their mother–tongue. This would have an input in learning the other language as the child would understand concepts in her own language, and then it becomes easy to transfer concepts in English. By reinforcing learner's conceptual bases in their L1, a foundation will be provided for long-term growth in English skills (Du Plessis, 2006:38).

In the South African context the CUP has not been successfully implemented in township schools because L1 has not been developed and supported in a way that learners take pride in becoming highly proficient in L1. English as LoLT has caused L1 not to be regarded as an important basis of acquiring L2. English language acquisition should be seen as additive and not a subtractive learning process; mother tongue instruction should be used as a springboard for teaching the second language (Chimbganda, 2005:28).

The starting point of looking at language proficiency would be in the classroom, because language acquisition is not only about communication. Learners need academic language proficiency in order to cope with the curriculum. Academic language proficiency takes longer to develop and second language learners have to first learn the fundamentals of English before they are able to catch up with the native English speakers (Hakuta et al, 2000:11). These fundamentals could be in a form of critical thinking skills, negotiating meaning from various texts and using the language in a more sophisticated command. Academic language proficiency is needed to perform complex academic tasks within the school; therefore

learners' acquisition depends on the understandable input that comes from appropriate teaching techniques (Mora, 2006:2).

Teachers have to be well trained to teach in order to enhance the level of language competence in the classroom. Also teachers need to develop their competences in L1 so that instruction in L1 should not be ignored as it may help them with code switching to enhance understanding and encourage engagement in the classroom. For instance when teaching poetry to second language learners, you could allow learners to identify and analyse the poem using the poetic devices from their L1. Then as a teacher you would be helping second language learners to transfer skills from L1 to L2 which would help to create interesting discussions and debates in the classroom. Chimbganda (2005:28) comments that the use of mother-tongue in the classroom preserves cultural diversity in the classroom. Learners would find it easy to relate and associate common language skills that emerge from both languages. Learners would take pride in learning the second language as it would create a space where they could use first language resources to interpret and attribute information critically in the second language.

Within the South African learning context there are some limitations with regard to educators and parents having competent language skills to help second language learners. In black townships in the Western Cape, teachers who teach English as a second language are not proficient enough in the mother-tongue of the learners, which is IsiXhosa. It then becomes a challenge to support mother-tongue at school. Learners will have only the support of L1 at home, and the learners who are supported are those who have literate parents. Again socio–economic factors limit language acquisition: learners who lag behind are mostly those who are poor and whose level of parent education is low (Hakuta et al, 2000:12). The unfortunate part is that some teachers, learners and parents appear to be unaware of the importance of L1 in cognitive development and the acquisition of L2 (Du Plessis & Louw, 2008:54). This results in most black learners choosing to receive their education in English. This mindset then makes it unrealistic for learners to reach the highest level of English proficiency (Du Plessis, 2006:40). Learners need to be encouraged to maintain their L1 at home and in their communities in order to avoid subtractive multilingualism.

2.7.   IDEAL PRACTICES FOR SOUTH AFRICAN LEARNERS

One of the main concerns of most educators in language acquisition is the reality of learners achieving academic language proficiency within 4-7 years of their education at school. Within the South African education system, there are no formal programmes that are prescribed by the government to help learners who are lagging behind to improve their language skills in order to cope with English as LoLT. In the U.S.A. there have been numerous programmes like, Proposition 227 Sheltered Immersion, Two-Way Immersion Bilingual Programmes and Dual Language Programmes (Collier & Thomas, 2004; Gilroy, 2002; Lee, 2006 & Stritikus & Garcia, 2000) that have been put in place to help those learners who are lagging behind. Some of these programmes have been successful and others have failed. The reason for discussing these programmes is to look for literacy practices that are ideal for the acquisition of English as a second language and try to place these practices within the South African Context.

2.7.1.   Sheltered Immersion vs. Dual Bilingual Experience

2.7.1.1.   Sheltered Immersion

Sheltered immersion (SI) aims at instructing English Language Learners (ELLs) in all-English environments, with a goal of English proficiency and academic achievement in English only (Tong et al, 2008:1013). Sheltered immersion's program objective is proficiency in English based on a subtractive model, were L1 literacy is not developed. Usually L1 is a minority language and L2 is the majority language which has an inferior status in which English is considered valid and important (Mora, 2006: 2). In this model, English is used for all subjects and ELLs are expected to master grade level academic skills within 2-3 years (Tong et al, 2008: 1018). This program is designed for children who are learning the language which is English. All the learning resources are in English and the subject matter is taught in English.

There was a perception that bilingual education programs in the United States failed to support the linguistic needs of language-minority students to develop high levels of proficiency in English (Lee, 2006:108). Learners who participated in this program were mostly those who represented the minority languages in the U.S.A., which are Hispanic and

Spanish. These learners received their learning in English for one year, or longer with parental consent, in the expectation of gaining proficient language skills without any L1 instruction, (Mora, 2002:2). This model has been seen as less successful for ELLs' long term academic achievement than those with more significant L1 support (Gándara, 2000; Lara- Alecio, Galloway, Irby, Rodriguez & Gómez, 2004). Gilroy (2002:52) also maintains that SI has caused a high rate of school dropouts and the students are trapped in low-skilled, low paying jobs.

Mora (2006) makes a comparison of sheltered immersion with Canadian L2 immersion, which clearly differentiates the goals of both immersions. From the comparison, he draws some significant practices which are not beneficial for the ELLs' reaching a high level of proficiency in English. He asserts that in Sheltered Immersion:

- Mother tongue or L1 is given an inferior status, thus conveying that English only is valid;
- the objective is proficiency in English based on a subtractive model of L1; and
- in one year students would not attain academic achievement equivalent to native speakers.

The sheltered Immersion program has disadvantages which are stated above, but it does not mean that we have to reject it. The sheltered immersion program is based on subtractive bilingualism as the development of mother-tongue is ignored but in some ways it could provide benefits which could provide assistance in the South Africa Education System. The reality in Black Township schools is that learners who are in the GET band, need a stage were they could be immersed in English. Learners who come from primary schools lack basic language skills. A Sheltered Immersion Program could provide transitional short term assistance in providing some basic communication skills. With the kind of learners we have in black township schools, this model could help learners in Grade 9 as they could be prepared for the FET band. Although it could be a short term solution, learning of few English skills could be better than not acquiring any skills in preparation for the FET band. In most of the schools in the townships where English is the LoLT, learners would have to take on the responsibility of communicating in English and educators would have to use strategies of instructing in English (Schlebusch & Thobedi, 2004:36).

2.7.1.2.   Bilingual Experience

Bilingual education is an instructional approach that uses the child's native language to make instruction meaningful. The instruction could be transitional or maintain the native language (López & Tashakkori, 2006:123).The main purpose of the bilingual model is the acquisition of English skills by SLLs (Second Language Learners) who have limited English language proficiency to be able to succeed in mainstream English-only classrooms (Alecio et al, 2004:37). The main objective of bilingual education is biliteracy based on an additive model of bilingualism. Mora (2007:5) further comments that both the native language and the second language should hold a position of equal prestige and importance.

There are various models of bilingual programs, for example, One-way and Dual Language Education which are two of the models that have shown success in closing the academic achievement gap in both the second language and the mother-tongue language. Collier and Thomas (2004) reported on the success of an enrichment dual language program which was able to close the academic achievement gap for students who were below grade average. Collier and Thomas reiterate that success was based on stretching the program from one to four years, although they found out that even four years was not enough to fully close the gap (Collier & Thomas, 2004:2). According to Hakuta, Butler & Witt (2000:1) it takes four to seven years to reach academic English proficiency. Therefore we could conclude that other bilingual programs which are short-term are not realistic in terms of closing the academic achievement gap.

In South Africa, learners who acquire English as LoLT face the challenge of developing both oral proficiency and academic proficiency as it is demanding for learners to master academic content in the language that they have not acquired enough skills in to use effectively (Du Plessis, 2006:48). However, we have to analyse the situation that we have in South Africa according to the multilingual environments that these children come from. In the Black communities of South Africa children grow up in multilingual communities where they may develop language proficiency in all the languages they are exposed to from birth (Du Plessis, 2006:54). These languages they develop are other indigenous African languages that are used in that particular community. Chimbganda (2005:20) makes a clear example that in intercultural African marriages where the mother or father comes from a different language

community, the children of such intercultural marriages usually speak the dominant local language, which might not necessarily be the language of the parents. In Black communities the local language might not also necessarily be English. Therefore English becomes the third language which is mostly used as the LoLT in schools, and that is where we find great challenges. Learners themselves in the township schools are not fully exposed to English as an academic and a communicating tool. We then have to use successful models that could help learners to acquire a good command in English, encompassing it with valuing and appreciating African languages. Bilingual Education could be extended throughout the schooling years of learners in order to bridge the language gap and to prepare them for tertiary level, as they need academic proficiency.

According to the South African context as a multicultural society, we need a curriculum that will ensure that there is equal access to mother tongue development and English (De Klerk, 2002:2). The LiEP (DoE, 1997:3) prescribes that the right to choose the Language of learning and teaching is vested in the individual, this right has to be exercised within the obligation of promoting multilingualism. The Organisation for Economic Co- Operation and Development (OECD) Report (2008:180) reveals that most parents choose to have their children taught in English, which is seen as the language of social and economic mobility, whether or not there is the right supportive environment for teaching and learning in it.

Therefore the LiEP has to prescribe a motive of equal quality access to all the official languages of South Africa. This equality depends on significant practical deliverables that are still a challenge in our education system. For instance, the availability of books in African languages in schools is still a challenge because there is no demand for them; schools buy those that are prescribed for those certain grades. Table 2.5.1.1 clearly shows the rate of the devaluing of African languages as a basis of acquiring the second language by the low percentages of book sales in official African languages.

Table 2.1: Local education book sales per language group, 2006 (in ZAR)

Language	Book Sale	Percentage
English	848 734 941	75.01%
Afrikaans	123 964 264	10.96%
African Languages (combined)	158 725 598	14.03%
Total	**1 131 424 803**	**100%**
Per African Language		
Isizulu	56 577 289	35.64%
Isixhosa	42 018 886	26.47%
Sepedi	17 430 849	10.98%
Setswana	15 277 500	9.63%
Sesotho	10 358 871	6.53%
Siswathi	7 548 549	4.76%
Xsitsonga	4 999 257	3.15%
Ndebele	2 548 959	1.61%
Tsivenda	1 965 438	1.24%
Total	**158 725 598**	**100%**

Note: Excludes learning materials other than books. Stationery is supplied free to schools in the poorest quintiles; in some provinces, stationery and books come out of the same budget, in others they are separate.

Source: PASA (2007), PASA Annual Industry Survey 2006, University of Pretoria: Publishers Association of South Africa with the School of Information Technology, Department of Information Science and Publishing Studies, Pretoria, p. 30. In Reviews of Policies for Education: South Africa COECD (2008:180.)

2.8.   REQUIREMENTS FOR SUCCESS IN GRADE 10

One of the expectations from the NCS is that a learner in the GET Band has to develop a thorough knowledge of the home language in order to have a sound base for learning additional languages (DoE, 2003:9). This probably means that a learner in Grade 9 has to have good language skills that are suppose to strengthen the use of additional languages for

learning. Furthermore, a learner has to move through to FET level with the extension of increased fluency, proficiency and accuracy in an additional language (DoE, 2003:9). Du Plessis (2006:31) argues that the overall response of the majority of Black South Africans to multilingualism is the acceptance of English as LoLT and the rejection of home language as a medium of instruction. This then results in having expectations that are not feasible for the majority of our learners.

FET level requirements of the Critical and Developmental Outcomes include the following objectives (DoE, 2003:10):

- Broadening and deepening language competencies, which include abstract language skills for academic learning, the appreciation and enjoyment of text, so that the learner is able to show confidence.
- Use of language as a tool for critical and creative thinking. This recognises that the language is socially constructed through the interaction between language and thinking.
- Express and justify their own views and ideas confidently in order to become independent analytical thinkers.
- Use the language to access and manage information for learning across the curriculum and also in a wide range of context.

2.9.   CONCLUSION

This literature review has tried to cover theories that exist within second language acquisition and most importantly, the discussion covered aspects that are clearly prescribed in the National Curriculum Statement (NCS). For example, critical literacy is one of the underpinning principles of the NCS that inform language learning and acquisition. Critical literacy is supposed to be promoted at a higher level so as to try and redress past inequalities and it should be rooted in the contextual environment of the learner (DoE, 2003:23). It then becomes an important aspect in learners acquiring skills of critical thinking and being able to construct meaning of their own environment. Critical literacy for every learner will open minds towards promoting cognitive thinking and acquiring skills of academic proficiency.

In order to understand learners themselves, it is paramount for educators to place themselves within the developmental stages of learners. Adolescent literacy creates an understanding of the individually constructed identities of learners. The interest lies in how they relate to themselves and to their world, in creating meaningful literacies that they could be able to use for motivation and emancipatory change.

Multilingualism also forms an important theoretical framework as it is promoted by the language policies, but the challenge lies in their proper implementation to the advantage of every learner in South Africa especially learners from Township schools. The LoLT has been dominated by English because of its economic advantage and the agency that its use affords new entrants into tertiary education and the economy, but it has come with the challenge that instead of English becoming an additive language, mother tongue becomes a subtractive language.

All the topics explored in this chapter, represent ideal skills that need to be acquired by learners in the GET Phase and they are then supposed to be refined in the FET Phase to prepare for tertiary level. They will then be the indicators of my data analysis as they will be presented in the form of an analytical framework. The intention is to draw out of the data the kind of literacy practices that exist at a classroom level and outside the classroom. These literacy practices would also inform a determination of whether the current use of English as LoLT does promote effective language acquisition in preparation for the FET phase.

The following themes emerged from this chapter; they will form categories of the analytical framework in this study: framework using these themes will be able to focus precisely on the 'ideal literacy practices' that are prescribed by the RNCS and the practices that exist both in the classroom and outside the classroom in a township school.

- Adolescent literacy
- Literacy as asocial practice
- Critical literacy
- Multilingualism
- English as LoLT

The main reason to use these themes is that they are the ideal part of the outcomes in the RNCS. They form the objectives of its success. Therefore, an analytical

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the methodology used to answer the research question.

The purpose of this study was to find out what kind of literacy practices were present and likely to facilitate English as the language of learning and teaching in a grade nine classroom, and the extent to which the learners were being prepared to use English as LoLT, in order to progress. When learners progress to the FET level they are expected to have gained reading, writing and critical language skills in English according to the outcomes of the NCS language assessment guidelines (DoE, 2003: 5). This competency has to be at the level where they are ready to acquire academic proficiency, so that they are prepared for the tertiary level. Therefore the methodology that should be used would seek to discover the kind of activities that make it possible for learners to acquire the expected level of skills that are required for them to progress to the FET level.

This chapter discusses the following issues;

- research design;
- the approach to the research;
- site of data collection;
- sample of respondents;
- instruments and data collection;
- framework for analysis;
- ethical considerations; and
- Limitations of the research.

3.2. RESEARCH DESIGN

The qualitative strategies I used to collect data in this study were based on using narratives, interviews and document analysis drawn from the learners' portfolio books. These three main sources of data were used as methods for achieving triangulation of perspectives. The

intention was to analyse my data interpretatively in order to have an in-depth understanding of literacy practices in the classroom.

The data from these strategies were to create an understanding of the research context and to provide findings that would be a product of real world settings (Golafshani, 2003:600). Question prompts were given to learners to help them to construct narratives of their literacy histories. The group interviews were conducted with learners who were randomly selected from the sample that completed the narrative questionnaires, and a semi-structured interview was conducted with one Grade 9 educator. The educator was selected because she was the only one who had been teaching Grade 9 English First Additional Language (FAL) for more than five years at the school. Her experience was likely to enhance the data she provided in the interview.

With the aid of the above instruments, I was able to inquire about literacy practices that learners used to acquire the English language, and also to look at the challenges which learners faced in their school environment with regard to reading and writing strategies. A detailed description of the data collection follows in the paragraphs below.

The purpose of document analysis was to see what kind of literacy practices were privileged in assessment. The portfolios were going to provide data on the kind of writing that the learners are assessed in to progress to FET level. Also they were going to see if the NCS Assessment Guidelines were followed as prescribed, especially looking at the requirements in the level of using them as an authentic tool to determine the achievable outcomes versus the actual level of learners' acquisition of English in grade nine.

3.3.   APPROACH TO THE RESEARCH

The approach to the project was qualitative and interpretivist. The data that was collected came in the form of words which expressed views, experiences and opinions, which further was going to enable my research to be constructed within an epistemological framework of literacy as a social phenomenon.

3.3.1.   Qualitative research

Qualitative inquiry is descriptive, it tries to present the reality of participants from their points of view and as the researcher you get some insight into the participants' accounts of their lived experiences (Henning, 2004:9). Through the use of narratives, interviews and document analysis, the intention is to capture the learners' and educators' experiences with English and the reality of the use of language in their immediate environment. Henning (2004: 21) further comments that the aim of qualitative inquiry is to develop an understanding of individual cases rather than universal laws or predictive generalizations. Bogdan & Biklen (2007:36) argue that a qualitative research process concerns itself not with the question of whether the findings are generalizable, but rather with the question of to which setting and subjects they are generalizable. Therefore qualitative research methods help in giving detailed descriptions from the participants of the events that happen in school and outside school which contribute to the use of English in helping learners to use it as a language of agency. English is used as the LoLT at school, which makes it the language that is vital for their learning and the future.

Qualitative research is broadly defined as research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures. Instead the findings derive from real-world settings (Golafshani, 2003:600). In qualitative research there is always an interaction between the participants and the researcher, where as the researcher you are allowed to explore and observe in order to have an understanding of the phenomenon of your interest.

Qualitative research that is interpretative, is guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000:26). The methodological framework that was used in this study was interpretative. The framework helped to establish how literacy was embedded in a social reality. The fundamental assumption of my research was that literacy practices are acquired in social contexts and are effective in enhancing language development when they are transferred to learning and teaching.

Qualitative research is associated with an interpretive approach which tries to further our understanding of the social interaction that exists in human systems (Lowe, 2007: 14). This broadly implies the kind of interpretation that seeks to find an analysis that understands a

social environment and its connection to the experiences or practices that are relevant to literacy and its acquisition. Henning (2004:21) posits that interpretative analysis seeks to produce descriptive analysis that emphasises deep understanding of social phenomena. Interpretative theory will inform the framework to analyse the data I have gathered through the qualitative strategies I have used.

The foundational assumption of interpretivists is that most of our knowledge is gained through social constructions such as language, shared meanings and documents (Trauth 2001, in Henning, 2004:21). These social constructs will then broaden my understanding of social realities that exist in acquiring and using English as LoLT and as a "social" language.

3.3.2.   Qualitative data collection

In interpretative research, varieties of data from different sources are encouraged in order to strive for validity (Henning, 2004:20). We use different methods of collecting data not only for validity or triangulation, but also to analyse data with an open mind both to prove our assumptions, and also to disprove other assumptions and theory. The interpretative paradigm allows the researcher the freedom to create a discourse which will be based on people's experiences and their stand-points on their contextual environment.

3.3.2.1.   Narratives

As narratives are meant to be representations of everyday experiences, we then often assume that in these narratives the participants would be able to give representations of their lives. Flick (2006:179) argues that we must not assume that all the narratives are capable of giving narrative representations that portray narrators' lives. This could be due to not being familiar with writing in an expressive form and also the participants were asked to write the narratives in English, therefore the language could be a barrier to providing fully representational data.

3.3.2.2.   Interviews

Interviews represent a classic qualitative method that is directly interactive (Savenye and Robinson, 1999:1056). Henning (2004:52) comments that the main aim of the interview is to

bring to attention what individuals think, feel and do. The semi-structured interviews served the purpose of allowing the educator and learners free expression of opinions. As the researcher I had to form a continuous discussion that guided the interview and to allow flexibility in any topics that might have come up. The questions formed a guideline for several topic areas, and these were explored through the use of open questions like "What do you think?" (Flick, 2006:156).

In qualitative research, interviews are used to collect descriptive data in the subjects' own words so that the researcher can develop insight into how the subject interprets experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007:102).

3.3.2.3.   Document analysis

Documents are a valuable source of information, which are not to be neglected in qualitative research especially if they relate to the research question (Henning, 2004:99). In this research, document analysis relates to a research question, which looks at the learner portfolios as a part of determining their success in Grade10. Atkinson & Coffey (2004:73) assert that although documents cannot be portrayed as accurate, rather they construct their own kind of reality. The reality that is analysed in the portfolios looks at the kind of literacy practices that are prescribed in the NCS for assessment if they are relevant in determining the success of learners to grade ten.

The advantage in using documentary material is its stability, which does not alter what is being studied (Sharan, 2009:155). The portfolios will provide data that is presented by learners themselves; this will then provide authentic data of the kind of assessment activities that are administered throughout the year.

3.4.   SITE OF DATA COLLECTION

The school is situated in a Township in the Western Cape. It is located near an informal settlement, where most of the learners came from. Some of the learners come from the Eastern Cape for better education, leaving their parents behind and settling in the informal settlements. Isixhosa is the mother-tongue for most of the learners. Therefore, they came with

different levels of language skills. Those from the rural areas of the Eastern Cape are used to mother-tongue instruction. It then became difficult for them to learn in a school where English was the LoLT. Those who had been in the urban areas in the Western Cape from their primary years were much more familiar with English as it is the lingua-franca of the city.

This school is a no-fee paying school due to socio- economic factors. There is also a feeding-scheme in the school, due to a high level of poverty. The resources in the school are not enough to reach each learner. For instance learners are still sharing textbooks, there is not enough furniture and the library is not well resourced and as a result it is not used.

The school has forty five educators. The majority of the educators speak IsiXhosa as their mother-tongue, and some speak Afrikaans as their mother-tongue. Therefore English is used as the second language by the majority of educators, so that the language barriers that exist in the school are not only from learners' side but also from the educators' side. The school is a Dinaledi School (Mathematics and Science focus school), but for the past four years the school has not been producing good results in Grade 12. The challenges that are faced by the school are similar to those faced by other schools in the township, so it represents a whole spectrum of Township schools in the Western Cape.

3.5.   RESEARCH SAMPLE

The participants in this study were thirty two grade nine learners from one classroom who submitted narratives based on prompts to find out their literacy histories. Five learners where randomly selected for group interviews. These learners were the same learners who also wrote the narratives as the main aim was to clarify and probe their responses in the narratives. Five learners' portfolios were randomly chosen from the same group of learners for the document analysis.

One educator participated in the semi-structured interview as she was the only educator who taught English in Grade 9. The educator had more than five years teaching experience in the same grade. I believed that her extensive experience would provide valuable responses and constructive information with regard to the implementing of the NCS language assessment policies.

3.6.   INSTRUMENTS AND DATA COLLECTION

The figure below represents a summary of data collection methods.

INSTRUMENT	SAMPLE	DATA TYPE	DATA COLLECTION	VENUE
Narratives – based on question prompts	32 - Learners	Qualitative	Researcher	classroom
Interview	1- educator	Qualitative	Researcher	School's Library
Group- Interviews	5- Learners	Qualitative	Researcher	School's library
Learner's portfolios	5- portfolios	Qualitative	Researcher	Home

Figure 3.1: SUMMARY OF DATA COLLECTION METHODS

3.6.1.   Narratives

The objective of the narratives was to address the first research question: What kind of literacy practices do Grade 9 learners in the site of this study demonstrate? The narratives were divided into two sections. In the first section, six question prompts were based on their encounters with English as a language of learning and teaching (LoLT). The second section consisted of seven question prompts which were based on the learners' personal histories in reading and writing at school and at home.

Learners were asked to write personal narratives in response to a set of question prompts. "Narratives are useful in that they open up a deeper view of life in uncovering the truth" (Clough, 2002:8). The main purpose was to uncover learners' literacy histories and to further establish their writing abilities as demonstrated in the literacy narratives.

When the learners were given the narratives, my main objective as a researcher was to let them tell real stories about their exposure to books and reading. Given the limited exposure of learners to the language, question prompts served the purpose of guiding their story line and also to make it much simpler for the participants to understand what was required of them. (For question examples refer to appendices).

The narratives were going to trace how their literacy practices developed from a young age both at school and outside school and whether these practices contributed to their acquisition of English as a First Additional Language at the GET level. Catherine Riessman (2002, in Henning, 2004:122) relates that, "…personal narratives are, at core, meaning-making units of discourse. They are of interest precisely because narrators interpret the past stories rather than reproduce the past as it was." The aim was not only to recount their past experiences, but also to form a discussion about the function of the use of English and its significance in their everyday lives from their point of view.

The narratives were written in the classroom; the researcher administered them. I chose to conduct the narratives in their classroom as it provided a relaxed and a familiar environment. I firstly explained to them what they were supposed to do but I did not set a time limit for them because I wanted them to write as much as they could. Permission was asked to conduct the narratives during their English period which took fifty minutes. The learners were not able to finish writing in fifty minutes, so the narratives were collected and finished the following day.

In the narratives, it was intended that learners had to write about their experience with English and their experiences in reading books. These narratives were based on question prompts which guided the learners in their writing. The narratives were presented in the form of a booklet which was divided into two sections. The first section was based on their experiences with English, and how they learned the language. The second section was about their reading histories and the kind of language practices they used in their social environment.

3.6.2.   Interviews

The purpose of interviews was to inquire about the kind of literacy practices that were recognized in the classroom and how learners incorporated these practices to advance effective learning. The conversations were audio taped and transcribed so as to provide a rich source of data for analysis.

3.6.2.1.   Group Interviews

The purpose of group interviews was to probe further into their narratives to elaborate on the information that was given. The same question prompts from the narratives were used for these interviews (see appendix no.2). One group was randomly selected for interviews, the group had five participants. Learners were randomly selected from the same group that participated in writing the narratives. The interviews provided rich data as the participants had an opportunity to explain further on what they had written in narratives. The interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher.

Group interviews were used to probe further into narratives and to get much richer data as the narratives were not fully written. There were gaps, some of the questions were not answered and learners tended to respond by giving a YES/NO answer without substantiation. The same question prompts were used for the narratives and the interviews. These interviews ended up being the dominant strategy of collecting my data. The interviews were used to get more descriptive data in the participants' own words so that as the researcher I could develop an insight into how learners interpreted their experiences (Bogdan &Biklen, 2007: 103).

I chose semi-structured interviews with the intention of providing flexibility and not to be rigid in controlling the participant. Bogdan & Biklen (2007:104) comment that in semi-structured interviews participants tend to lose the opportunity to understand the topic at hand. As the researcher I had to guide the discussion, and made sure it was flowing in the right direction.

Before I started with the interviews I clearly explained the purpose of interviews in my study and that the information that I was collecting was only for academic purposes. The interviews were audio taped as I clearly explained that they would be transcribed and analysed. I also took some notes on the responses of the participants to be able to correlate my data. I also asked permission to take notes as they were responding to the questions. The participants were interviewed by me individually in the library of the school. Each interview took approximately an hour, so as to get as much information as I could and further be able to probe some of the responses that needed clarity.

3.6.2.2.   Semi- structured educator interview

The educator interview addressed the third research question which seeks to discover literacy practices that are likely to achieve the intentions of the NCS at FET level. The interviewee was a Grade 9 educator who had a number of years teaching English First Additional Language in the school. The educator taught four Grade 9 classes and two Grade 11 classes. The maximum number in each class was 45.

  The questions were piloted with an educator who was not involved in the study and who did not teach Grade 9. The purpose of piloting the questions was important to see if the instruments were addressing the relevant issues, were free of any bias and were understandable to the participant. There were no changes on the questions and the data collection was done according to the time schedule which had to be arranged with the participants.

A semi- structured interview was conducted with the educator. The purpose of this strategy was to gather information about the kind of environment that the educator worked in, the challenges that she faced on a daily basis and the kind of literacy practices that were recognized in the classroom for effective learning and teaching. These are some of the main questions that were asked:

1.   What is your understanding of literacy practices?

2.   Could you give me a brief description of your classroom?

3.   Do you have any learning and teaching strategies that work for you in reading and writing?

4.   What are the challenges that you face in a Grade 9 classroom, with regard to teaching English as a First Additional Language?

5.   Do you always follow the subject guidelines? Why?

Specific questions came up in the process of the interview to probe more. The participant was asked to explain further or give examples; this was to get more data on the participant's experience and feelings and to get a much broader understanding as a researcher. Another strategy used by the researcher was to summarise and paraphrase responses just to get more clarity from the respondent.

3.6.3.   Document Analysis: Learners Portfolio Books

The main objective of analysing learner portfolios was to address the second research question, which sought to find to what extent literacy practices prepared learners for the use of English as the LoLT in Grade 10.

Five learners' portfolio books were randomly selected from the same group of learners. The portfolios were analysed in order to find out the learners' readiness with regard to writing in order to progress to grade ten. The intention was to look at the kind of writing that is used to assess their success to progress to Grade 10, as the portfolios have all the continuous assessments for the year.

3.7.   ANALYSIS OF DATA

The data was prepared for analysis by carefully transcribing the interviews myself, as this helped me to understand how the data was going to be coded and categorised and how to make meaning out of my data in order for the interpretation to be clear. Henning (2004:105) remarks that it is better for the researcher to be responsible for transcribing data. The better the researcher knows the data, the more competent she will be in categorising and labelling the data. The data was read and listened to for a second time to ensure that the researcher was clear about the given responses.

The data from narratives was categorized according to the question prompts that were framed from the knowledge of the conceptual framework which had been established from the literature review. Therefore the questions became categories that form the discussion in chapter five. The data and responses were categorised as follows:

- Adolescent literacy

- Literacy as a social practice

- Critical literacy

- Multilingualism

- English as LoLT

These themes were set in a broad context as the data was refined as other themes came up and other sub-themes were also categorised. This placed the researcher in a position where there could be objectivity and an open mind in order not to have any preconceived judgements.

3.8. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

A written letter of permission from the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) was sought and given to the school principal and the School Governing Body. A written letter of consent was obtained from the interviewees after explaining clearly that the responses would be only used for the purpose of the research. Due to the sensitive nature of tape-recorded interviews, confidentiality and anonymity were fully guaranteed. The learners could request a letter of consent addressed to the parents clearly explaining the nature of the research and that it was not for the purpose of assessment. No personal particulars of any the participants were used in the study and the findings would be made available to the school. Prior arrangement for the writing of narratives and conducting interviews were made with the principal and the educators, so as to not interfere with the normal running of the school.

3.9. LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The first limitation of this study is that it is confined to only one school. Although we cannot then generalise the findings as the situations are different in other schools. But this study represents other schools that have the same challenges especially township schools. Another limitation is language, as learners were asked to respond in English which is their second language. The responses were not precise, especially in writing the narratives; there were few narratives that were completed. To try and overcome these challenges I had to use group interviews for the purpose of getting clarity. This actually showed that learners had a language limitation. It was also a challenge to go according to the interview schedule, especially with

the educator as she was always in the classroom with learners. The educator had forty five periods in a seven day cycle; there was little time for her to be able to sit for interviews. The interviews had to be scheduled after school when the educator had little time to sit down for interviews.

3.10. CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed the methodology that was used to address the research question. The discussion focused on the approach to research which was qualitative; research design; site of data collection; instruments and data collection and the framework for analysing data. The analytical framework emerged from the themes of the literature review in chapter two will be discussed in chapter five. The next chapter is the discussion of the findings from the data that was collected through using narratives, interviews and the analysis of learners' portfolios.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1.   INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on presenting the findings from the data collected from the narratives, then the focus group interviews which were to probe the narratives further, the findings from learners' portfolios and finally, responses from the educator interview.

4.2.   FINDINGS FROM THE LEARNERS' NARRATIVES AND INTERVIEWS

4.2.1.   Learners' Personal Encounters with English

Question 1: When did English come into your life?

Narratives

Most of the respondents gave the same response, namely, that English came into their lives in Grade 1. Some of the respondents indicated that their first experience with English was in Grade 4, which is the prescribed grade for introducing English as a First Additional Language according to the Language in Education Policy of South Africa (DoE,1997)). There were also indications from two of the respondents that they first encountered English in Grade 1 at the former model C (former white) schools, explaining further that they had been immersed in the language because everyone spoke English at school and as a result they had to speak English at home, where their parents were employed, although their mother-tongue was IsiXhosa.

Most responses were presented in a single full sentence and some in a paragraph. Those who presented responses in a paragraph were able to give information about the school, the name of the school and their ages. The meaning was conveyed clearly in most of the sentences although there were a few faulty responses in incomplete and ambiguous sentences.

Interviews

All learners agreed that they still remembered when English came into their lives. Two learners indicated that they were exposed to English from Grade 1 and at home; four of the

learners mentioned Grade 3 and Grade 4. Two learners indicated that they were introduced to English in Grade 6 when they came to study in Cape Town from the Eastern Cape.

Discussion: From the findings it is clear that the majority of the learners met English when they started school, but it was not the language that was used as LoLT at school. Their mother tongue was used as LoLT. Exceptions were a few learners who were exposed to English at a young age because they went to former model C schools from Grade 1. They had to speak English at home because it was their LoLT at school. These learners were immersed in English both at home and at school. They explained that they had lived with their parents at the employer's house as their mothers were domestic workers for English speaking people. When compared with other learners who just gave one sentence in the narratives and one word answers in the interviews, these learners spoke fluently with confidence and they were able to write paragraphs in the narratives.

In the interviews a few learners said they were exposed to English in Grade 6, when they came to study in Cape Town. These learners came from the rural parts of the Eastern Cape, where they were not exposed to English either at school or at home. Compared to other learners in the group they were the ones who kept quiet; they would speak only if I directed the question to them. They showed no confidence in speaking English.

Question 2: What kind of things do you come in contact with which are in English at school and at home?

Narratives

There were different responses that came from the learners. There were a few learners who responded in full sentences, giving explanations to show that they understood the question. One learner said,

> "At home from magazines, newspapers and gloseries [sic] papers [grocery lists]. Here at school I get it from text books and from the teacher".

There were also responses that indicated their encounters with English during their sporting activities; two learners said that they came in contact with English when they played with other teams where they had to speak English with other children who did not speak IsiXhosa.

Four other learners interpreted the question by referring to the literacy activities that were done in the classroom. The responses from other learners gave the type of texts that they came in contact with, for instance there was one response that actually mentioned the type of magazines and an example of multimedia like the movies and the television.

Interviews

Some of the learners referred to activities that were only done at school. One learner said that the things that she came in contact with were books at school and at the library. Two learners indicated that they came in contact with English resources only at school. Two other learners did not attempt to answer the question.

Discussion: From the findings, it is clear that learners were exposed to English resources both from school and outside school. There is also an indication that English is mostly used as a language for communication and sometimes they are compelled to speak the language when they are outside their communities. Some learners are exposed to resources that are popular according to their age group, namely, magazines and newspapers. There is some indication from a few learners that they came into contact with English resources only at school. This could be due to socio-economic challenges that they lived under. Most of these learners lived in squatter camps that are far from the township. Others lived outside the township; they used buses which were supplied by the government free of charge. It then became difficult for them to have the means to go to the library or gain access to other learning resources outside school. At the same time the school does not have a fully equipped library and the computer laboratory is not functional.

Question 3: Why do you think you need to learn English?

Narratives

This question was well answered by fourteen learners. In general, they felt that they needed English to study for their careers and that it was the language that was used at work, for example, when you looked for a job, English was a prerequisite. Others felt that English was a common language that was used for communication in South Africa. One learner indicated that English was needed in order to communicate with other people from other countries.

Interviews

Most of the learners said they needed English in order to get a job, two indicated that it was a national language and they needed it in order to learn at school. One learner indicated that English was needed when you communicated with a white person and when you went to the Mall.

Discussion: In the interviews learners were able to express themselves on this question. Although some were not fluent, they understood the question. They further explained the importance of English at home and at school. In the narratives most of the learners wrote incomplete sentences, with general answers. There were only three learners who wrote more than two sentences. Nevertheless, their responses conveyed meaning and expressed a personal purpose in their lives. For example, one learner explained that she needed English so that she could be able to get a job and support her family in the Eastern Cape.

The findings from this question give a clear indication that most of the learners considered English as an important language for economic and social emancipation. They also regarded English as an important tool for communication and accessing information.

Question 4: Do you want to learn it? Why?

Narratives

Twenty learners wanted to learn English and provided a reason for learning English, although some of the responses were not elaborated in more than two sentences. Most reasons that were given were the same as those given in the previous question. Three of the learners said that they wanted to learn English because they wanted to speak and write it so that people could understand them and in order to pass at school.

Most of the learners answered in single sentences. Some of the sentences were incomplete and a few learners just responded by writing 'Yes'. Five learners wrote more than two sentences explaining that learning English would help them in choosing their careers and to use the language as a communication tool in the global world. For example one learner said,

> "Yes, I do, because I'm going to need it in future and I will meet people from other countries who will not understand my home language, and the career I will choose requires English as a first additional language".

This learner was able to express personal meaning on how English becomes a communication tool globally and a language providing emancipation.

Interviews

Most of the learners gave the same response as given in the previous question, namely, that they wanted to learn English in order to get jobs. They gave their responses in a sentence; others just repeated the same answers they gave in the previous question. Only one learner responded to this question by explaining that he would like to learn to speak English because it was an important language.

Discussion: Almost all the participants felt that English played a significant role in their lives. There is a clear indication that to most of the learners English is a prerequisite for getting employment and it seemed that there were a few learners who wanted to learn English for the purpose of pursuing their education.

Question 5: What kind of problems do you encounter in learning or using English?

Narratives

Eight learners were able to give elaborated responses. They felt that the problems that they encountered in using English were when they were in the classroom and they were supposed to read or speak with their classmates or amongst them. They felt that their classmates would laugh at them because they could not speak English. Some expressed their challenges in understanding English when the teacher was teaching and when they were given tests. For example one learner said,

> "When the teacher teaches it he/she talk (sic.) English so I can't understand it.

Although the sentences had language mistakes, some of the learners tried to respond in full sentences. Another learner said,

"The kind of problems I encounter in learning I'm not bright I try to listen in English but this time I try better."

Interviews

There were quite a number of different responses to this question. Two learners indicated that English had difficult words that were hard to understand. The majority of the learners said they found it hard to understand English, especially when the teacher used English all the time. Other learners indicated that they encountered problems when they were supposed to speak English as they are not fluent. One learner outlined that she preferred to write her 'broken' English than to speak because no one was going to laugh at her. Most of the learners agreed, that they preferred writing rather than speaking**.**

Discussion: The majority of learners showed a lack of motivation and low- self esteem in communicating in English amongst their peers and they also expressed that most of the time they encountered challenges in communicating in English at school. Although in the interviews they preferred writing more than speaking, in the narratives their writing was unclear with limited vocabulary. Eight learners constructed no sentences and only few learners were able to respond clearly in fluent full sentences.

Despite other challenges that were mentioned, there was an element of learners not being able to understand the language if the educator used English for the rest of the lesson. This shows the importance of code switching to support levels of language acquisition and to help learners to have more understanding and be able to associate their mother tongue with the First Additional Language.

Question 6: Where and when do you use English?

Narratives

Sixteen of the learners associated the use of English with school. They gave responses that pointed to the school as a place where they used English, mostly in the classroom. Two of the learners responded by giving explanations of using English in music, using multimedia texts and communicating with their friends at home. One learner said that English was used when she/he talked to the doctor at the clinic. Other responses were obscure and the meaning was

unintelligible, sentences were faulty and could not be understood. For example, one learner responded by saying,

"When I finding work and when asking a word of English."

There were a few responses written in more than two sentences with examples and reasons provided. For example one response said,

"I use a lot of English at school to speak with teachers and other learners and at home when I speak to other people and reading".

Another one said,

"I use English at school in English period or at home when me and my mother make a gossip with a young person."

Interviews

All Learners indicated that they used English at home and also at school. One learner said that he used English when he was sent to the Mall, others when they spoke to tourists that came to visit their communities. One learner said that she used English when she spoke to strangers because where she lived other people did not speak IsiXhosa. Most of the learners indicated that they used English at school during the English period and when they spoke with "white teachers" [coloured educators].

Discussion: Learners appeared to use English socially as well as in the classroom at school. There was a perception from most learners that the significance of using English is based in classroom activities. Although there is an indication that they used English at home for various purposes, the focus of this use was more in communication activities outside home. It is quite surprising to find that they used English at school mostly during the English period whereas the LoLT at the school was English. It is reasonable therefore to expect it to be used in all the learning areas as learners need competence in the language that they will be assessed in. In Township schools, we often experience that a school will use English officially as LoLT but in reality this is not the case. In this school it is clear that mother-tongue instruction is frequently used for most of the subjects, except English and some other subjects that are taught by teachers who do not speak the majority of learners' mother tongue, IsiXhosa.

4.2.2. Learners' reading histories

Question 1: What was the name of the first book you ever read and in which language was the book written?

Narratives

All the learners responded to the question by giving the title of a book.

Most of the learners responded by naming a book that had been read in class that year, namely, the prescribed text *I am David* by Anne Holm. A few of them gave names of other books, the most popular being *Cinderella*. Only one learner gave a title of a Xhosa book.

There was not much elaboration about the books; most of the responses were short sentences and others just wrote the name of the book. The books were written in English in most of the responses, except one which was in IsiXhosa. All the learners answered this question; 10 learners responded in fluent sentences, despite 12 others giving one word answers.

Interviews

Not all the learners remembered their first books. As reported in the narratives, those who remembered made references to the set-work books and reported that the books were written in English. There was only one learner who said the first book she ever read was written in IsiXhosa.

Discussion: From most of the accounts it seemed that learners' reading backgrounds and exposure to reading texts were limited, as most of them in the narratives made a reference to their prescribed reading book. Those few learners, who were able to remember their early experience of books, reported that they were written in English, which could imply that their reading ability in the LoLT was developed at a young age. Books that were mostly mentioned were English books; there was one exception of a learner who remembered the book which was in IsiXhosa. This reveals the devaluing of the mother-tongue language. It might be that learners do not take into cognisance the importance of mother-tongue and due to the lack of available texts that are in IsiXhosa.

Question 2: Do you still remember what the book was about?

Narratives

Most of the learners understood the question and gave a brief summary of the book. Those who responded by naming Holm's (1963*) I* am *David,* had more difficulty in giving a brief summary about the book than those who gave titles of books that were not prescribed at school. Five learners who chose 'Cinderella' wrote fluently, their summaries were understandable, and were written in a few sentences. One learner who gave the title of a book in Isixhosa was able to give a clear summary of the story.

Interviews

Two learners were able to tell the story of the first book that they had read. One told the story about the 'Golden Goose'. She was able to summarise the story in an understandable way, and although her language was not fluent she attempted to tell the motive of the story and she indicated that it was her favourite childhood book. It was written in English. Another learner told a story of the first book that she ever read which was in IsiXhosa, about children who were orphaned at a young age, and their big sister who was 15 years old when she had to leave school and take care of her siblings. The learner was able to tell the story confidently and she also made gestures when telling the story, while the other learners listened attentively with interest. She felt that the story related to what she was experiencing in her community and she was able to give reasons why she loved the story. She said that she loved the story because it had a happy ending because most of the stories that she often heard about orphans, did not have happy endings. Although the book was in IsiXhosa she was able to tell the story in English, not very fluently, but she was understood.

Discussion: In the interviews the responses were much better as two learners were able to give a detailed summary of the book; compared to narratives in which the responses were short and not detailed. The observation I made was that although the one learner had read an IsiXhosa book and she was not fluent in English, her story was interesting because she was confident and she made gestures. The learners were listening attentively to her. Other learners were reluctant to tell their stories. They seemed shy and lacked confidence in expressing themselves.

4.2.3.   Learners' literacy activities in the classroom and at home

Question 3: What kind of things do you choose to read during the English period?

Narratives

Fourteen learners identified newspapers and magazines as their choice of reading material. One learner said 'I like to read something that has pictures', giving a reason why magazines were preferred to books. Four learners preferred school books, two learners preferred poetry and discussing issues that affected them. Others gave obscure responses showing that they did not understand the question. Most of the learners responded in short phrases, few were able to expatiate and give reasons.

Interviews

All learners responded to this question. Most learners indicated that they would choose to read poetry. Three learners preferred magazines and newspapers because they talked about things that were happening in their lives and they were interesting because they had pictures. Two learners said that they would like to read books that were interesting not those that were read at school (meaning '*I am David*' – which was the prescribed book).

Discussion: The learners' responses highlighted that they preferred literacy activities that were of interest to them and that addressed their issues of concern that affected their well-being in school and outside school. It seemed that learners were more inclined to literacy activities that were able to give them opportunities to freely express their interests and concerns.

Question 4: Why do you need reading in your life?

Narratives

Most of the responses were about the learners' futures, their chances of succeeding and reading as the key to further their education. One learner said, "It's because tomorrow I'll be a president". Some of the learners were specific about the language which they preferred to read in, which was English. Other learners identified the need for reading with getting a job as a T.V. presenter or a news reporter.

Interviews

Most of the learners responded by saying they needed reading because they could learn more and know English words. One learner said that she needed reading so that she could understand things that were in English. One learner highlighted that she could improve her English by reading English books with her friends first and they could correct each others' mistakes, so that when she read in class she wouldn't be afraid to be laughed at. All learners agreed with the latter statement by nodding their heads and saying 'Yes'.

Discussion: The general feeling from most of the participants was that reading played a major role in acquiring the language and improving their reading skills. They appeared to take reading as an important tool for giving them self- confidence, because they had a perception that if you could not read properly then you did not know English. Reading to them brought social and economic emancipation because they associated their success in reading with their future aspirations.

Question 5: What kind of literacy activities would you like to have during the English period?

Narratives

There were different responses to this question. Eight of the learners' responses were about oral activities such as reading poetry, discussing and debating. In these responses, some of them indicated that they would like to write poems and recite them in the classroom. Four learners identified activities such as writing their own stories about life and their families. Other learners identified activities that involved leisure reading and choosing their own texts, for instance, reading newspapers and magazines. One learner felt that activities should include learning to write job application letters and talking about careers. Two learners indicated that they would like to do puzzles.

Interviews

Three learners indicated that they would like to write about themselves and write music. Others said that they would like to write their own poems and read them in class. One learner indicated that she would like to read interesting books from the library.

Discussion: Most of the learners showed that the English period should involve literacy activities that were interesting to them. Leisure reading and writing was also preferred. There was also a suggestion that they would like activities that involved communicating and discussing. There was an indication also of learners wanting to write their own stories and not be limited in what was prescribed for them with regard to learning. It is clearly highlighted from the responses that learners wanted to be involved in literacy practices that were relevant to their well-being in order for them to be successful.

Question 6: What kind of things do you read /write at home?

Narratives

15 learners preferred reading magazines and newspapers; some were specific about the types of magazines that were read at home, for example, a soccer magazine: *Laduma*. One learner said that she read because her sister worked for a local newspaper, and she brought reading resources home. Another learner said that she read *Soul City* booklets'; these were usually found in local clinics and in local 'spaza' shops for free. These booklets are in a form of comic books about HIV and AIDS awareness. Only three learners indicated that they read school books and did their homework. One learner indicated that he/she did not read or write at home. With regard to writing, only two learners said that they wrote personal journals, poems and music. This could be a halo effect as learners seemed to have a common response which is a positive trait or an expected response (Grcic, 2008:4). Here it could be that other learners preferred poetry and music writing , as it is a positive trait, then they would want to associate themselves with a positive trait to avoid being different..

Interviews

All learners who responded indicated that they read magazines and local community newspapers. Two learners said that they sometimes read books from the library and the other one indicated that her sister usually brought the books home. Others made no references to anything at home which involved reading or writing.

Discussion: Most of the learners seemed to engage in certain kinds of literacy practices at home, and they also seemed to have preferences for resources that interested them and that were relevant to their age. There was less interest in doing school activities or reading school

books. They also showed that they used resources that were easily accessible in their immediate environment, for example the local community newspaper which was freely available once a week. When I further probed about the use of a local library, some learners did not even know that they had a library in their community. Others stayed far from the local library as they came from squatter camps. The school's library was not functional. They were occasionally taken to the library by the English teacher when they went to watch a film, but they had never been given books to read.

Question 7: Do you ever read or write for pleasure? If you do read or write, tell me about it.

Narratives

Ten learners indicated that they did not read or write for pleasure. In eleven responses they gave elaborate explanations of the kind of activities that they engaged in and reasons for engaging in them. Two learners said that they read and wrote for pleasure because they entered reading and writing school competitions, others identified reading or writing for pleasure as tools to help them improve their command of English and there were some learners who kept journals, writing about their future aspirations and issues that affected the youth. One learner indicated that he/she read library books in isiXhosa and English. Two learners indicated that they wrote songs and poems for pleasure. One learner said that she/he wrote and read only at school.

Interviews

Not all the learners responded to this question. Two learners indicated that they kept books which they used as journals. One learner highlighted that he mostly preferred communicating with friends through text messaging and listening to music on his phone.

Discussion: Learners seemed to have their own literacy practices that had personal meaning in their lives and they created the meaning themselves. They saw these practices as ways of acquiring language skills that they would need in future. There was also an engagement with popular culture; music and poetry. Engagement in any literacy activities seemed to depend on the kind of home or situation that they came from, for instance one learner commented that he did not have any space at home to write his homework because he lived with ten people in a two-roomed flat. This was also the feeling of other learners who said that that they did not

often find time and the place to read or write because their homes were cramped. Another learner said *"When I try to study at night my mother switches off the light because others are sleep and she says she going to work in the morning"*.

4.3.   FINDINGS FROM THE LEARNERS PORTFOLIOS

4.3.1.   Creative Writing

In all the portfolios there was evidence of creative writing; a friendly letter, an investigation report and filling in a personality Information form. The writing of two learners had content structure with introduction, body and conclusion. Although the sentence structure was obscure in places, their letters were understandable. Some of the learners' writing was not well structured, had no paragraphs and no punctuation. One learner wrote all his activities using capital letters.

Discussion: From the observation of the portfolios, I concluded that the learners had been assessed in one creative piece of writing for the year. This was a summative assessment which counted towards the learner's progress to another grade. The learning outcome for writing states that a learner should be able to write various texts for social purposes, for personal reflection and write creatively (DoE, 2002:103), for example, business letters, email messages, minutes of a meeting, personal journals, writing stories etc. There was no evidence in the portfolios of learners being assessed in other various creative writing activities in order to determine their progress.

It was also evident that there was a lack of formative assessment from the educator as learners had repeated the same mistakes in their initial and final drafts, and a lack of intervention as in the case of a learner who needed attention in basic handwriting skills.

4.3.2.   Investigation Task

All the learners had completed the investigation task. There were no clear instructions about what they were supposed to do and what they were investigating. The task was based on investigating the most popular sporting codes, but it appeared that these codes were already

chosen for them. There were question prompts that had to be completed for each section. Learners had been provided with questionnaires attached to their worksheet, which they had to use to collect data. The task had a number of sections in which marks were allocated for each section. The first section was about the definition of terms, which most of the learners were able to complete as the definitions evidently were directly taken from a dictionary. In the second section, learners had to complete a table which required the description of each sporting code for instance; the number of participants and the instruments used for each sport. In the third section, learners collected data individually and did a group analysis and presented it in the form of a graph. The last section required an analysis in the form of a narrative. All the learners were able to write in this section, as they were guided by question prompts. Generally they attempted to write paragraphs that were structured, but they had grammatical errors. Only two learners were able to write a structured analysis of their findings, and their reports were understandable despite a few grammatical mistakes. Four learners scored over 50%, only one learner scored below 30% in the investigation.

Discussion: Learners seemed to have performed better in this investigation compared to other activities in their portfolios. Although there was no evidence of any marking rubric or a set criteria for marking the task, ticks were used per section for the allocated marks. The investigation did not encourage any independent decision making as the learners were almost given all the information. There was no need for them to do any research using the library or other resources that could help them with the investigation. The task seemed to be constructed as a form that they had to fill in. It could be that their performance was better because it was not constructed as an investigation with a hypothesis that they had to prove and there was no evidence of any independent research. The performance of the learners cannot be taken as authentic because there was no clear outline of the purpose of the task and the outcomes that were intended to be achieved.

4.3.3.   Selective Response Writing

The selective response writing activities included two poetry tests; and two comprehension tests. From all the portfolios there was evidence of selective response writing activities which formed part of the summative assessment. Most of the learners seemed to score marks with the shorter activities like language tests which required one word answers, compared to longer

activities of interpreting meaning in extended sentences, for example, in answering questions based on a comprehension passage, where they had difficulty in using their own interpretation and in constructing sentences. In the midyear examination they scored lower marks than in other assessments that were done during the year. From all the portfolios there was no evidence of learners doing corrections. Two learners had achieved below average in all the assessments, but there was no evidence of intervention from the educator to support the under-performing learners.

Discussion: All the selective response activities were recorded as part of a summative assessment. The indication is that learners performed better on average in the shorter tasks compared to the mid year examinations. From the indication of their performance there is no evidence of proper practice or scaffolding in the activities that were assessed for the mid year exams. It is clear that learners had difficulty in being assessed on a large scale as the examination weighs more marks and it is written under controlled conditions sitting for more than an hour.

4.4. FINDINGS FROM THE EDUCATOR INTERVIEW

Question 1: What kind of literacy activities do the Grade 9s engage in which are suitable for their improvement of English?

Response: The educator identified reading and writing, and watching films as ways to encourage learners to respond. She expressed that she would prefer to do more reading and writing if she could be given more time and fewer learners in her classroom. She commented on the low writing and reading skills that the learners came with from primary school.

Discussion: The educator identified reading and writing as skills that need to be regarded as important in improving learner's acquisition of English. The question of more time and the number of learners per class is a main concern and a challenge to the educator in providing necessary help to the learners.

Question 2: Do you think the activities and tasks that are prescribed by the NCS are likely to give learners in this Grade enough skills to cope at FET level?

Response: The educator elaborated that the NCS had a schedule or a pace setter that helped her to follow and that some of the activities were practical for learners' acquisition of literacy skills, but she highlighted that due to the large classes and to the low literacy skills, it became difficult for her to do other activities like assisting them in reading and writing on an individual basis and to give proper guidance. She gave an example of a learner who could not read and write, who needed to be in a special needs classroom. She said it became a challenge for her to do a proper intervention as she was not well trained in special education and there were no programmes at the school to help those learners.

Discussion: From the educator's response it is clear that learners needed more time and proper guidance to be able to acquire enough literacy skills to proceed to grade ten. There were also no programmes to assist the educator with learners who had special needs. Again the challenge of having a large number of learners in the classroom contributed to not enabling the educator to facilitate effective learning and teaching.

Question 3: Could you give me a brief description of the kind of learners you have in your classroom?

Response: The level varied according to their literacy skills. She said that there were a few learners who had good literacy backgrounds. The majority had low literacy skills, and as a result there was a huge literacy gap that needed to be filled. She related that some of the new learners that came from the Eastern Cape had lower literacy levels compared to those who started grade eight at the school. They seem to struggle more than other learners and this became a challenge to her because she had no strategies that she could use to help learners due to the large numbers in her classes.

Discussion: From the data, there is a sense of learners not having enough literacy skills in order to cope with grade nine. This also implies that learners are not able to perform in other learning areas as English is the LoLT at the school. It then becomes obvious that there is a great need to improve basic literacy skills in order for the learner to acquire the LoLT.

Question 4: Do you have any learning and teaching strategies that work for you in reading and writing?

Response: The educator identified process writing as where a leaner is given a piece of writing; and the writing will then be monitored by the educator. The learner usually is required to write and submit the work, and then the educator will help the learner until the piece of writing has improved. She said it did not always work, as some of the learners had major language barriers. In addition, there was not much support from the parents in assisting with monitoring if the work is done. With regard to reading, she said that sometimes peer assisted reading helped, where a learner is supported by a peer rather than by the educator, however, it did not always succeed because other learners were reluctant readers even with their peers.

Discussion: The educator had strategies that might work, with proper support from more able peers, to improve learners' language skills, although these learners had learning barriers. In process writing a learner is taken through a process of being individually supported and monitored until there is improvement. Parental support or involvement could not be guaranteed as most of these learners came from poor backgrounds; parents not being literate and some living on their own with no parents or guardians as they usually left their parents behind in the rural parts of the Eastern Cape for better education.

Question 5: What are the challenges that you face in a Grade 9 classroom, with regard to teaching English as a First Additional Language?

Response: The educator touched a number of challenges like reluctant speakers, dependency of learners on educators, non-support from parents and absenteeism. She identified the reluctance of learners to participate in class as one of the major challenges in her class. She said that learners preferred to keep quiet rather than to say something because they were afraid that their peers might laugh at them. She added that they seemed to think that they had to be perfect in English before they responded.

Discussion: From the response there is a great feeling of learners having low self-esteem. Motivation seems to play a major role in allowing room for improvement. Our learners have socio-economic challenges that could contribute to dependency on educators and non-parental involvement. Absenteeism could also result from lack of motivation.

Question 6: Do you think the NCS Subject Guidelines for English First Additional Language are realistic enough for you as an educator and for learners to acquire good language skills?

Response: The educator said that partly, they are realistic although she felt that the summative assessments that are prescribed are not enough to judge the learners' progress in Grade 9.

Discussion: The educator raised an issue of concern, that learners were not being assessed enough in order to monitor their progression to Grade10. She also touched on the lack of monitoring from her side as an educator because of the large number of children per class. Another aspect that emerges from the educator's response seems to be assumptions that she can't do more assessments than required or that are stipulated in the Assessment Guidelines. Also it could be that her workload compels her to limit assessment activities only to those that are prescribed.

Question 7: Do you think the current curriculum prepares the learners for Grade 10?

Response: The educator felt that the curriculum did not include clearly described practical skills such as spelling, grammar, and writing. It did not provide learners with a good foundation in literacy that educators could build on when learners came to Grade 9. She also reiterated that learners ended up dropping out from school because they could not cope in higher grades because of lack of basic literacy skills.

Discussion: The response focused on the negative aspects of the NCS, which were a great concern to the educator. She did not seem to be in favour of the current curriculum as it did not provide learners with necessary skills to further their education or gain necessary skills for a job market. This implies the lack of progress in providing learners with good basic literacy skills in the primary grades is a problem that is often experienced by high schools.

Question 8.Tell me your views about the level of reading and writing in Grade 9?

Response: The educator indicated that the level of reading and writing was low; learners still needed to improve basic reading and writing skills. She even highlighted that there were some

learners who could not write meaningful sentences, others had to be taught handwriting. She was concerned about the rate of failure in Grade 9; she had noticed that learners who progressed to Grade 10 were becoming fewer as the years progressed.

Discussion: From the response is seems that although there has been no great improvement of literacy skills, there are no programmes that could be implemented to assist the educators in assisting the learners. Seemingly since the implementation of the NCS, the situation is getting worse. Learners are failing because of language barriers and also because of the lack of assistance from the Department of Education to mentor and assist educators in the implementation of programmes that could help them to improve the situation.

4.5.   CONCLUSION

My conclusions will be presented as a chapter on its own as I draw conclusions from the discussions in this chapter and link these discussions with the themes that emerged from my literature review. Careful conclusions are going to be drawn from the discussions looking at the gaps that emerged from the expectations set up in various themes that come from the literature review and the expectations of the NCS.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

5.1. INTRODUCTION

The data that were provided in the narratives and in the interviews were to address the first and the second research question: to find out the kind of literacy practices that Grade 9 learners demonstrate and if these practices do achieve the intentions of the NCS at FET level. The learner portfolios focused on the third research question which inquired if the assessments facilitate their success to Grade 10.

The learners' portfolios contained literacy activities which had been assessed during the year. These literacy activities were prescribed in the National Curriculum Statement (NCS), for the purpose of assessing the learner performance in order to progress to Grade 10. These prescribed practices are guided by the learning outcomes that are prescribed in the NCS. For example, the learning outcome for reading and writing focuses on the learners' critical responses to visual, cultural and emotional values of text (DoE, 2002:98). This learning outcome becomes important in exploring the theme of critical literacy. The findings then fall into major themes that emerged from the literature reviewed in chapter two, which included multilingualism, LoLT, adolescent literacy and literacy as social practice.

This chapter will present the conclusions drawn from the discussions in chapter four. Here the pattern of the discussion is focused on linking the findings and the following themes that emerged in my literature review:

- Literacy and the language of learning and teaching (LoLT);
- multilingualism;
- literacy as social practice;
- adolescent literacy; and
- critical literacy.

The main focus was to inquire about the kind of literacy practices that come from school and also from home which could facilitate the acquisition of English as LoLT through reading and

writing. I have made a link by comparing the expectations set up in the NCS with the gaps in actual practice extracted from my data.

5.2.   THEMES THAT INFORMED ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The learners' portfolios contained literacy activities which had been assessed during the year. These literacy activities were prescribed in the National Curriculum Statement (NCS), for the purpose of assessing the learner performance in order to progress to Grade 10. These prescribed practices are guided by the learning outcomes that are prescribed in the NCS. For example, the learning outcome for reading and writing focuses on the learners' critical responses to visual, cultural and emotional values of text (DoE, 2002:98). This learning outcome becomes important in exploring the theme of critical literacy. The findings then fall into major themes that emerged from the literature reviewed in chapter two, which included LoLT, multilingualism, literacy as social practice, adolescent literacy and critical literacy

5.2.1.   The Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT)

When learners use a LoLT at school which is not their mother tongue, schools have to provide support in the LoLT until the learners are able to learn in the target language effectively (DOE, 2003: 20).

The ideal expectation in the acquisition of the LoLT is that learners have to be proficient both in their mother tongue and in an additional language. It is clear from the findings that most of the learners had a limited experience of English at an early age which was grade one, but it was not developed because it was not the LoLT at a primary level of their schooling. The mother tongue, IsiXhosa, was their LoLT. A few learners who had an opportunity to start learning English in Grade 1, were able to communicate well in English and they had confidence in the language compared to the others. This then shows that somehow the South African language policies are failing our learners and depriving them of an opportunity to acquire the language an early age. We could clearly see from the data that those learners who were competent in English were those who had been exposed to it at an early age.

There was an indication from the findings that learners see English as dominant in providing access to economic emancipation in their lives. They even recognise that English is a language that is used globally and it is very important for them to acquire good language skills for their future careers. Therefore there is willingness to learn the language but there is minimal assistance in helping our learners to improve their language skills. The NCS is not providing clear directives in improving learners' language skills, it is clear to those that have access to resources and those who have already acquired good language skills in Grade 9 are at an advantage to improve their language proficiency. These learners themselves have limited access to learning resources due to their socio economic backgrounds. Also the school itself is depriving learners of the opportunity to access learning resources that could facilitate learning; this is due to not having a fully functional library and computer laboratory.

In this study, the data reveals that learners are still struggling with writing, reading, expressing personal meaning and manipulating English as their First Additional Language. This clearly gives us an impression that the LoLT does not assist them in preparation for Grade 10, as a number of them only experience English in the classroom. The point is that there is not much effective learning of English in the classroom as it is supposed to be the place where they experience most of the English. The classroom environment of these learners does not facilitate proper mediation for them to be able to manipulate and use English as LoLT across the curriculum.

The additive approach that is envisaged by the NCS which adds value to the home language in order to promote good acquisition of English as an additional language is not fully taken into consideration as a learning strategy. Learners are instructed in IsiXhosa for most of the subjects, they only use English when it is an English period, but they are expected to write in English and be assessed in English. This means that there is no equal distribution of language usage between the LoLT and the mother tongue.

5.2.2.   Multilingualism

Multilingualism provides a frame of reference for discussing acquiring the first additional language. The NCS prescribes additive multilingualism from the fourth year of schooling. Learners are supposed to learn in their mother tongue for the first three years of schooling,

and then the additional language may be introduced gradually, while the home language is maintained. According to the NCS (DOE, 2002:4), when learners in Grade 9 proceed to Grade 10, they should be able to use their home language and first additional language effectively and with confidence for a variety of purposes, including learning.

The study reveals that learners' first preference is English, as they regard it as the language of great importance for economic emancipation and gaining access to educational opportunities. There is awareness that English is a prerequisite for their educational success. Mother tongue acquisition is devalued because resources available in mother tongue to support the acquisition of English are very limited. At the same time learners have limited access to English resources as the school does not have a well resourced library. Therefore, there is no equal distribution of resources in both languages in order for learners to be provided with necessary support. Unfortunately for our learners, parents and teachers in South Africa appear to be unaware of the importance of mother tongue in cognitive development and the acquisition of additional language (Lemmer nd, in Du Plessis, 2006:37).

The findings from the study showed that learners who had good articulation of English because they had an immersion experience in English from Grade 1, also showed good articulation in interpreting IsiXhosa to English. This shows the importance of mastering the mother-tongue in order to have a good manipulation of the First Additional Language. This means that they have mastered a bilingual mode which is not subtractive. Even through the immersion experience, they did not lose command of their mother tongue.

English as LoLT in most schools is not a true reflection of the situation. My findings reveal that learners are instructed in various amounts of IsiXhosa in all the subjects except English. This suggests that in most of the lessons, instruction is in IsiXhosa, so eventually learners would not be encouraged to use English when engaging in discussion with their classmates. An exception is only made when an educator's mother tongue is English or Afrikaans, then learners are instructed in English for the rest of the lesson. In the end these learners are assessed in English, and it becomes difficult for them to acquire literacy skills because the LoLT which is officially English is not used appropriately to the advantage of learner's language development. In two studies conducted by Probyn (1995; 2001) the findings showed that relative amounts of mother tongue instruction are frequently used by educators in

the classroom for various purposes, especially when educators share a common home language with learners (Probyn, 2005: 1857).

The study also reveals that mother tongue reading is not valued, due to the lack of learning resources that are in IsiXhosa. Learners are not exposed to those kinds of resources; they then tend to devalue their mother tongue. Broom (2004: 509) comments that when a language is devalued, it becomes subtractive because it eventually falls under the term 'minority language'. To concur with Broom, it is clearly evident from this study that English is a national language which is regarded as more important than the home language because of its demand with regard to economic emancipation and getting access to better education. Thus the more we devalue the home language, the more the promotion of effective additive bilingualism is doomed to being not successful in enriching learners with proper language skills to support acquisition of English as a First Additional language. The data clearly reveals that the language preference for most learners is English as they consider it as the language of economic emancipation. Although they are struggling in English, it still plays a dominant role in their lives. There is eagerness to learn English but they lack the confidence to manipulate the language at a classroom level. They are not confident in reading and writing at classroom level. Some learners who do engage in reading and writing outside school, are the ones who are a bit confident and they have good articulation of English which results from the early exposure to English in grade one. I can then conclude that if a learner is exposed to both L1 and L2 at an early age, they have greater chances to have a good command of L2 later.

The findings from the portfolios clearly showed that the kind of activities that the learners are assessed in are not enough for their progression to Grade 10 or do not predict their success in Grade 10. Learners still need to be assisted by the educator especially in writing. Proper monitoring and formative intervention strategies need to be implemented. The challenge of a large number of learners per class seemed to be an obstacle for the educator to do proper interventions. Learners performed low in summative assessments which were once-off assessments that happened without formative processes leading up to the summative assessment. In comparison to learners' success following formative assessmen, this shows that if learners are given support and assistance they could improve.

The educator interview showed that there was also a lack of professional development with regard to the GET phase. The educator was aware of learning strategies that were prescribed but there was difficulty in implementing them as there was no proper training for the NCS. The Department of Education does not have programs to develop educators in their subjects of specialisation especially in the GET phase. It becomes difficult then for educators to implement the expectations of the NCS with the challenges that they face. For instance, the large number of learners per class makes it difficult to support those that have learning barriers. That is why then we have a gap between the GET and the FET phase because the expectations from the policies are not applicable to every learner or every school. The reality is that our learners lack basic language skills to proceed to Grade 10 and it then becomes a challenge at the FET level to prepare them for the tertiary level.

5.2.3.   Literacy as social practice

The learners indicated that learning does not happen only at school, although some learners had indicated that they were more exposed to reading and writing activities mostly at school. Some learners were able to identify spaces where they could allow themselves to use English for their own benefit and to explore those spaces within their social structures, for example by using Lingua Franca English (LFE), although they live in a multilingual society. These spaces are created by the learners themselves in having confidence in manipulating the language and using English around their contextual environment. Canagarajah (2007:925) points out that the use of English as a lingua franca facilitates communication while further developing language awareness, which could result in developing language proficiency. This comes through the use of cell-phones, and interaction amongst other people who do not necessarily speak IsiXhosa. At the same time the issue of lack of self confidence, the limited access to resources within their communities, could be due to the socio-economic status that limits their ability to be able to use the language in various forms. The school itself does not provide learners with resources or opportunities to use English in various social activities that could assist learners in acquiring the language.

Preferred practices were identified in the data; learners preferred writing poetry, and choosing their own literacy material, mostly magazines for reading rather than books. Some of the learners identified magazines that were freely available from their communities, which talked

about relevant issues like HIV/AIDS and a soccer magazine which was popular amongst the boys. We could then conclude that the practices that are chosen by the learners or that are popular are significant in engaging learners in socio-economic issues that they experience. This could in turn shape their language acquisition as they would engage in issues that are closely relevant to their contextual environment and that they are interested in. This form of engagement could be taken to the classroom environment, were it could assist learners in forming relevant discussions and debates. Guiterez & Orrellana (2006:119) comment that learners must be understood in relation to the practices of which they are part, the available resources and specific demands of the context. The point that is made here is that the use of available resources is supposed to be integrated in classroom practice and be understood so that it comes from the context that is also understood by the learners themselves. It is then going to be easy to use learning resources that are available in their immediate environment.

The literacy materials that were most popular from the findings also give an indication that learners are not exposed to enough learning material like books, because of the communities that they live in. For instance facilities like libraries are not available within their reach as most of them come from squatter camps; the school's library which could be their reachable place for resources is not fully resourced and made available to them. In order for learners to access resources it depends where they are situated.

The use of multimedia also proved to be popular amongst those who could afford cell phones. It plays a major role in using English to communicate with peers, for example using text messaging and chatting sites like Facebook or Mxit. Although some were not exposed to these forms of multimedia, the most popular one was watching DVDs and TV. These resources form an important framework for transforming and creating suitable spaces in our schools for learning by not limiting learning to certain literacy genres that we consider acceptable in the learning environment.

From the findings, the school becomes an important fragment of the learners' social interaction. As some have indicated that they use English language mostly at school, and given the environment they come from, accessibility of resources such as the library that is far from the squatter camps, could be limited Cell phones are not affordable to all of them and the

lack of proper infrastructure to access information, for instance in the whole of Langa township there are only two internet cafés.

Therefore it becomes essential for the school to provide facilities that could help learners to use the resources that are available to learn. There is infrastructure but learners do not have access to the computer labs and the libraries are not fully resourced. With the kind of socio economic challenges that they have, where there is limited access to libraries and internet cafés outside school, the school has the responsibility of providing these resources that are popular amongst the learners and those that are preferred both for leisure and learning.

In this study, the data show that there is a range of practices that emerge outside school, but they are not valued to be used at the classroom level. This results in learners not considering them as a part of learning, because schools do not incorporate them in everyday learning. The important question that might be asked is: How can schools connect the everyday multiliteracies, make them productive for better development of social, linguistic and cognitive skills of learner and be a benefit to them (Guiterez & Orrellana, 2006: 120)?

5.2.4.   Adolescent Literacy

Adolescent literacy is concerned with learners' identities as the learners are at a stage where they are trying to position themselves within the society that they live in. When learners progress to Grade 10, the language of learning becomes a basis of developing their career paths and social positionality. The NCS implies that in this highly competitive technological world and in the development of entrepreneurship, achieving this goal depends on the learner's language competency (DoE, 2003:12). This reflects that the element of language competency plays a pivotal role in shaping the futures of learners at an adolescent stage.

Although the data reveals that a number of learners in Grade 9 are still lagging behind in English, they still experience social pressure to be able to use the language for various purposes in their lives. For instance, they have to use English when using multimedia as they communicate with their peers who do not necessarily speak their mother tongue. Literacy is also used as means of constructing their social identities in English as it is used around their communities. Therefore they need basic proficiency, so that they are able to participate fully

at school and in society. Meltzer et al. (2001:7) comments that learners at this stage need good literacy skills especially reading and writing in order to participate fully and claim their rights and fulfil their responsibilities. Failure to acquire these skills results in a high rate of school dropouts, unemployment and an increase in socio–economic problems.

There is an indication from the findings that our learners have low-self esteem in expressing themselves not only in English but also in front of their classmates. This demotivation is escalated also by the lack of basic reading and writing skills. It is clear from most of the learners in this study that their literacy skills were not developed at a primary level. Peer support then becomes a preferred way of boosting their self-esteem and getting necessary help without being ridiculed in the classroom, as indicated from the data. This could be one of the best practices which could be used to assist learners in improving their language skills.

There are literacy practices that are most popular amongst the learners, which are seen as the means of defining themselves and tackling issues that are of concern in their lives. For instance, learners have a preference for writing poems, reading magazines and writing music instead of being confined to literary texts that do not address the socio- economic challenges that they face in their communities and those that do not have any relevance to their well-being. These literacy practices that are preferred, act as a way of constructing their social identities. At the same time they create space for free expression without any criticism or judgement. Also these practices could address any discomforts that exist in their society. Although these practices are not entirely accepted in a classroom environment, they could be a key in unleashing their capabilities and draw interest in reading and writing. Alvermann (2001:3) states that young people's literacy skills are not keeping pace with societal demands of living in an information age that change rapidly. In order to close this literacy gap, we need to accept practices that are popular among adolescents and encourage the use of multimedia to enhance their language skills.

The challenge of teenagers who are still lagging behind is a common sight in South Africa especially in township schools, as we have a language policy that is not properly implemented and which is disadvantaging the learners because English is not necessarily their First Additional Language, as they come from multilingual backgrounds. Also socio- economic background of these learners does not necessarily facilitate any assistance in uplifting or

developing their literacy skills, as most of them come from squatter camps where poverty is prevalent . Also, a finding of this study was that some of the learners who started learning English in Grade 6 come from the rural parts of the Eastern Cape. It is a known trend in Cape Town that each year there are number of learners who move from the rural parts of the Eastern Cape to seek better educational opportunities.

In adolescence there is an urgency of acquiring a language for academic purposes as they are supposed to be preparing for tertiary education. In the case of this research, it becomes a reality that most learners in this study have not acquired enough language skills to prepare for tertiary level. The classroom environment does not accommodate the "marginalised readers" in assisting in unleashing other practices from them that could be beneficial to their language improvement. This means the classroom environment does not allow alternative literacy practices that might come from the learners themselves, especially literacy practices that are inter-connected with their cultural practices.

The learners' progress in literacy is often assessed at a classroom level, so as to monitor their progress and give support where there are barriers. The language barriers are a reality to these learners as it hinders their progression not only to the next grade, but also to tertiary level. Learners, who proceed to tertiary with limited academic language proficiency, are likely to find difficulty in their studies which may result in high levels of school dropouts, which is prevalent among teenagers.

5.2.5. Critical Literacy

From the findings of this study critical literacy is not clearly revealed as a concept which exists in the learners' everyday learning, although there is awareness of becoming responsible citizens and that their education is vital in shaping their future aspirations. The concept of critically evaluating issues of their concern is not something that is seen as a key to becoming agents of democracy. Learners find it challenging to connect what they learn in the classroom with what is happening around them in their society. This may mean that learners are not being engaged in critical discourses that may help them to recognise their purpose of being agents of change, or they are not provided with the opportunity in the classroom to engage in critical discourses.

Learners' inequalities in their education, for instance they do not have easy access to learning resources because of socio-economic challenges, has devastating effects in lifelong learning and in the development of their human capacity in becoming agents of change in their society. Critical literacy provides grounds for learners to have critical interpretation skills in order for them to be able to connect their school practices with sets of practices that emerge from socio-cultural backgrounds. Beck (2005:393) explains that critical literacy in the classroom should involve lively discussions about controversial, provocative issues that are deeply relevant to learners' lives beyond the classroom.

The anticipation in grade nine is that learners are supposed to be critical thinkers, be able to manipulate the language in order to engage in important debates and discussions on issues that concern their well–being. This study has found that, due to their low confidence and the language barriers that exist amongst them, they are not able to use and manipulate the language to their advantage in being critical thinkers. The classroom environment does not create a platform to expose learners to the kind of discourse that would encourage critical literacy to be an everyday practice.

The expectation from the writing outcomes of the NCS is that the learner must be able to write different kinds of factual and imaginative texts for a wide range of purposes (DOE, 2002:20). This would make the learner engage with texts critically as they have a wide range of purposes. The imaginative texts would make the learners create texts that are close to issues that affect them and also create an opportunity to explore their role in the society as valuable.

The summative assessments that are reflected in the learners' portfolios do not reflect these outcomes. There is no evidence from the portfolios that learners had been given a wide variety of writing activities in order to acquire writing skills that are required to achieve the ideal outcome. This gives us an indication that it might be that the educator does not have enough knowledge in not only using different assessment strategies, but also activities that would engage learners critically, for example, debates, poetry, editorials, role plays etc.

5.3.   CONCLUSION

This research project has found that English is the language that strongly influences the learners' choices, but however they have challenges of learning English to an extent that it becomes valuable to their future aspirations and gaining access to privileges. I have found that the classroom is that most vital component that could provide a foreground to effective learning of the language, although that does not reflect in my data. Therefore this chapter looked at the gaps that exist in these learners' education, which prevents them from acquiring language skills that are expected of them to proceed to FET level. These gaps were compared with the expectations from the NCS and the themes that were discussed in chapter two.

The aim was to draw conclusions from the findings in chapter four, which provided the literacy practices that are familiar with their linguistic ability of English as LoLT.
Linguistically the learners were more exposed to IsiXhosa and that is also reflected in them being instructed in the language in the majority of the subjects as the educators speak IsiXhosa. This creates major challenges in the acquisition of English as LoLT; it then means that of course learning English will be difficult as it is not encouraged across the curriculum.

CHAPTER 6: RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THIS CHAPTER

This chapter would be informed by giving recommendations according to the themes from my literature review in chapter two.

6.1.1. Recommendations on the use of English as LoLT

- With our learners it becomes clear that English has to be introduced simultaneously with their home language, having bilingual or multilingual approaches in early years of their schooling or at primary level. Failing to do that, we will remain with learners who are not going to acquire basic language skills that are needed at a higher level of their schooling especially in an environment where the LoLT is English. My data clearly shows that among these learners who are in GET level, a number of them still lack basic writing skills in English in a school where the LoLT is English. It becomes important then to look at the level of language acquisition and be conscious of the challenges that these learners face and also of language becoming a barrier to their learning.

- The themes have raised a number of concerns with regard to the implementation of language policies in South African schools. The data reveal quite a number of discrepancies between actual practices and expectations for learners' competencies implied in the NCS. Practically different circumstances should be considered in helping learners to acquire LoLT at different levels. For instance, the overcrowding of classrooms, lack of exposure to appropriate learning resources, illiteracy and other socio-economic factors.

- Setting realistic goals for our learners needs to be recognised by the schools and the society, especially looking at programs that could help to uplift the education of our learners. In the USA, there has been success in bilingual programmes which have helped to bridge the language gap across the curriculum.

- Learners need to be motivated in order learn effectively, educators have a duty to create an enabling environment for learners to appreciate both their mother-tongue and the first additional language. This could be done through educators planning lessons together in order to share their best practices and to find solutions in problems they face at classroom level.

6.1.2.   Recommendations on encouraging multilingualism

- In order to avoid subtractive approach in mother-tongue, learners need a bilingual approach from primary years, when both languages receive equal status in instruction.

- Code switching may be a useful method incorporated in teaching strategies of educators, instead of immersing learners in IsiXhosa or English. Learners would transfer language skills and this builds competency in language acquisition. This means that educators who are not familiar with IsiXhosa have to learn their learners' mother-tongue in order to code-switch and it has to be accepted at school as a teaching and learning tool. Ustunel & Seedhouse (2005:305) comment that code switching helps in using the mother tongue or L1 as a powerful influential tool for the language learning process, since learners tend to regard L1 as a common communication tool.

- Multilingual teaching needs to be encouraged by providing resources of both languages on an equal basis. This means educators also have to be well trained in using multilingual methods of teaching in the classroom.

6.1.3.   Recommendations on Professional Development

- It is clear from this study that educators need professional development in improving methodology and classroom instruction. The Department of Education has to implement teacher development programmes which will enhance educators' teaching skills in different environments.

- Workshops need to be structured in a way that will expose teachers to shared best practices and to resources that are relevant to their teaching in different contextual environments.

- Educators need to be motivated in order to make changes. Motivation comes through having high expectations, having a sense of purpose and the ability to make a difference to the education of the children (McKinsey & Company, 2007:27)

- Classrooms should be training and support grounds for educators, so as to have real scenarios of classroom practices. This it would be particular and practical to the challenges that are often experienced by educators.

- Expert educators have to provide mentoring in terms of one-on-one coaching, modelling best instruction and helping educators to reflect on their own practice (MacKinsey & Company, 2007: 29). This would be one of the most practical and relevant interventions that our education sector could provide in making sure that our educators are supported in a positive way.

6.1.4.   Recommendations on Critical Literacy

- Critical literacy needs to be integrated in everyday teaching and learning through using various kinds of learning resources that the learners are more exposed to as revealed in this study, for instance, magazines, newspapers and technology, television and radio. These kinds of resources could be a springboard for creating discussions that come from their social contexts, which would encourage critical thinking.

- To these learners, the classroom is the most important space that creates a learning environment where the learners feel secure and protected. Therefore critical literacy has to manifest in the classroom, the educator facilitating activities that would encourage critical thinking. This implies that as educators we transform our methodology of teaching by using guiding questions that would initiate critical thinking; exposing our learners to other reading texts that are freely available to them, like newspapers; and

taking action in social issues like using a school project to contribute to the needs of the community (Stribling, 2008: 36).

6.1.5. Recommendations in adolescent literacy

- The study reveals that our schools do not provide any intervention programmes to those learners who are lagging behind in reading and writing. Therefore, the school has to accommodate the wide range of reading and writing practices that come with learners. Phelps (2005:4) comments that although adolescent learners find reading and writing challenging, where there is interest, they have motivation.

- Literacy has an important function of developing the identities of adolescents. We need to give our learners freedom in the classroom to explore and use the various kinds of literacy texts that are proved to be popular and accessible to them. This would give them a chance to question and critique issues that are of interest to them. Guidance from the educator and peers is paramount in giving feedback and encouraging good practices.

- The issue of peer support came out from this study in that learners prefer reading to their peers first in small groups, where they could correct each other rather than reading for the whole class. Giving learners more opportunities to work together in small groups, interacting with one another would encourage engagement and build their self-esteem.

6.2. Conclusion

Although this study could not be generalised, I believe it represents the reality that exists in township schools in the Western Cape. Bilingual education becomes imperative to second language learners. It has to start at an early age not as 'additive' but both languages should acquire equal status. These learners come from different circumstances and different environments; this should be considered in using English as LoLT in schools especially if there are language barriers which affect the academic performance of learners.

It is clear from this study that the school is the most important environment to uplift and improve literacy levels. We still need well resourced libraries, computer labs in our schools that are working in order for the learners to have access every day. Learners' exposure to resources could create interest and engagement in literacy activities. Educators also have to be well informed through professional development programmes that could address challenges that they face on a daily basis like the overcrowding of classrooms and the providing of innovative ways to improve classroom instruction.

What I have gathered from this study is that learners lack the confidence to communicate in English. They prefer to keep silent than to try speaking. This tells us that they need to be engaged at a classroom level in order to encourage communication and critical questioning in order to build their confidence. Interaction is a significant factor in language development. Therefore the classroom should be viewed as a place where understanding and knowledge is constructed through interaction and engagement (Gibbons, 2002:15).

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APPENDICES

1.   Permission to conduct research in WCED schools
2.   Learners' narratives prompts
3.   Learners' interviews / narratives consent form
4.   Learners' interview transcripts
5.   Educator interview consent form
6.   Educator interview questions

1. PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN WCED SCHOOLS

Naam
Enquiries   Dr RS Cornelissen
Navrae

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Verwysing
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Isalathiso

Wes-Kaap Onderwysdepartement

Western Cape Education Department

ISebe leMfundo leNtshona Koloni

Mrs Nososi Ntshuntshe
NY 12 No. 10
GUGULETHU
7750

Dear Mrs N. Ntshuntshe

RESEARCH PROPOSAL: LITERACY PRACTICES AND ENGLISH AS THE LANGUAGE OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN A GRADE 9 CLASSROOM.

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

1.   Principals, educators and learners are under no obligation to assist you in your investigation.
2.   Principals, educators, learners and schools should not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation.
3.   You make all the arrangements concerning your investigation.
4.   Educators' programmes are not to be interrupted.
5.   The Study is to be conducted from 23rd September 2008 to 30th October 2008
6.   Should you wish to extend the period of your survey, please contact Dr R. Cornelissen at the contact numbers above quoting the reference number.
7.   A photocopy of this letter must be submitted to the principal where the intended research is to be conducted.
8.   Your research will be limited to the list of schools as forwarded to the Western Cape Education Department.
9.   A brief summary of the content, findings and recommendations is provided to the Director: Research Services.
10.   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.

for: HEAD: EDUCATION
DATE: 23rd September 2008

2. LEARNERS' NARRATIVES PROMPTS

**CAPE PENINSULA
UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY**

Cape Town Campus
P O Box 652
CAPE TOWN 8000

Bellville Campus
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SECTION 1

1.   When did English come to your life?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

2.   What kind of things did you come in contact with which were in English?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

3.   Why do you think you need to learn English?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

4.   Do you want to learn it? Why?

_____
_____
_____
_____

5.   What kind of problems do you encounter in learning or using English?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

6.   Where and when do you use a lot of English?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

SECTION 2

Tell me a story about the first book you ever read.

1. What was the name of the book?
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

2. In which language was the book written in?

_____
_____

3. Do you still remember what the book was about? Tell me about it.

_____
_____
_____
_____

_____
_____
_____
_____

4. What kind things do you choose to read during the reading period?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

5. Why do you need reading in your life?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

6. What kind of reading and writing activities would you like to have during the English period?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

7. What kind of things do you read /write at home?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

7.1 Do you ever read/write outside school? Yes/No

_____
_____

7.2 If you do, tell me about it

_____
_____
_____

_____
_____
_____

7.3 Do you ever read /write for pleasure? Yes/ No

_____

7.4 If yes, tell me about it.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

3. LEARNERS' INTERVIEWS / NARRATIVES CONSENT VORM

CAPE PENINSULA
UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

Cape Town Campus
P O Box 652
CAPE TOWN 8000

Bellville Campus
P O Box 1906
BELLVILLE 7535

Learner interview/ Narratives Consent Form

Purpose: Mrs N. Ntshuntshe is conducting interviews and research on literacy practices to grade 9 learners. The information gathered will be only used for the purpose of research and it will be kept strictly confidential.

Name of the learner: _____Date:_____

Learner Consent:

I voluntary give Ms Ntshuntshe my consent to interview me. I understand that any information from these interviews will be kept strictly confidential and that it will only contribute to her research.

Signature: _____Date:_____

4. LEARNERS' INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

Group 1

These interviews are group interviews which were conducted to probe more on the narratives, one groups was interviewed, it had five respondents. The questions that were used are the question prompts from the narratives. The interviews are addressing the first research question which is; what kind of literacy practices do the Grade 9 learners in the site of this study demonstrate?

Q1: When did English come to your life?

R 1: Yes , ehh…..the first time I started at school and with my family in

Discussion: All learners agreed that they still remember when English came to their lives.

Q 2: Do you still remember the grade

Grade 1 (CONFIDENTLY)

R 2 : Grade 6 (LOW VOICE)

R 3: Grade 5

R 4 : I started it in grade 3

R5: grade 6 (IN A LOW VOICE)

Discussion: 2 learners indicated that they were exposed to English from grade 1 and at home, 4 of the learners mentioned grade 3 and grade 4. 2 learners indicated that they were introduced to English in grade 6 when they came to study in Cape Town, coming from the Eastern Cape.

Q 3: What kind of things did you come in contact with which were in English, it could be at school or at home?

R 1: Both….at home when you are meeting a white person

R 2: at school, when you talk to the teacher

R 3: in library

R4: at school when I 'm in English period, speaking Xhosa in other subjects

R5: at school

Discussion: Most of the learners did not seem to understand the question, one learner said that the things that she came in contact with that were books at school and at the library. Two learners indicated that they came in contact with English resources at school, others did not respond.

Q: Why do you think you need to learn English?

R 1: it's a national language

R 2: you can get a job

R 3: when you meet a white person, when you want her/him to help you

(silence)- no response

R 4: at school

Discussion: Three learners said they needed English in order to get a job, 2 indicated that it is a national language and they need it in order to learn at school. 1 learner indicated that English is needed when you communicate with a white person.

Q 4: Do you want to learn English? Why?

R1: Yes, in many times I don't want to speak Xhosa only, I think it's an important language that I can learn in my life.

Discussion: One learner responded to this question by saying that many are times he would like to speak English because it is an important language. Other gave the same response to the previous question that they want to learn English because they want to get jobs and learn at school.

Q: If you had a choice of choosing one language to learn, which one would, you choose?

R : (ALL) English

Discussion: All learners indicated that they would choose English as a language that they would like to learn

Q 5: What kind of problems do you encounter in learning English?

R 1: vocab, hard words

R2: difficult words

R3: understanding (most of them)

R4: speaking English (they felt it was much better to write)

Discussion: The were quite a number of responses to this question, two learners indicated that English has difficult words that are hard to understand, others said they find it hard to understand English, especially when the teacher uses English all the time. Other learners indicated that they encounter problems when they are supposed to speak English; they also said that they preferred to write than to speak.

What could make you improve your English?

 R 1: read something and talk about it with your friends

 R 2: read books

R3 : speak it no matter if you cannot

R 4: Speak with your friends in English with your friends so you understand each other, they can correct your mistakes.

Discussion: Most of the learners identified reading and speaking English regularly. 1 learner said that she could improve her English by speaking English with her friends first and they could correct each others' mistakes, so that when she speaks in class she won't be afraid to be laughed at. All learners agreed with the latter statement by nodding their heads and saying yes.

Q 6: Where and when do you use a lot of English?

R 1: At home, when I'm going to the Mall

R 2: When we meet tourists

R3: When we meet stranger people

R4: At school in the classroom, when it is English.

R5: When I'm talking with a white teacher at school (meaning coloured educators).

Discussion: All Learners indicated that they use English at home and also at school. One learner said that he uses English when he is sent to the Mall. Others said when they speak to tourists that come to visit in their communities. One learner said that she uses English when she speaks to strangers because where she lives other people do not speak IsiXhosa. Most of the learners indicated that they use English at school during the English period and when they speak with "white teachers" (coloured educators).

SECTION 2

1. Tell me a story about the first book you ever read

R1 : It was a book about a '*Golden Goose which lay an egg'* (She was able to summarise the story, but not fluent, everyone understood)

R 2 ; The book was about a girl who was taking care of her three siblings and she went to beg a white farmer for a job he ended up taking all of them in and the girl working for the Whiteman. Eventually after some time the white man fell in love (the story was told fluently, very confident and she was able to capture the audience, although she had some grammatical mistakes but overall, the story was well understood.

Discussion: Only two learners were able to tell the story of the first book that they have read. One learner told the story about the 'Golden Goose', she was able to summarise the story in an understandable way, although her language was not fluent but she attempted to tell the motive of the story and she indicated that it was her favourite childhood book. It was written in English. The other learner told a story of the first book that she ever read was in IsiXhosa and it was about children who were orphaned at a young age, their big sister who was 15 years old had to leave school and take care of her siblings. The learner was able to tell the story, she was very confident and she also made gestures when telling the story, the other learners were listening attentively with interest. She felt that the story had relation with what she is experiencing in her community and she was able to give reasons why she loved the story. She said that she loved the story because it had a happy ending because most of the stories that she often hear about orphans, do not have a happy ending. Although the book was in IsiXhosa she was able to tell the story, not very fluently but she was understood.

Q: In which language was the book written inn?

R 1: In XHOSA

Q: What kind of choose do you choose to read during the English period?

R 1: Poetry

R 2: magazines

R 3:newspapers, books

R 4: we prefer to read things that are interesting and have pictures

Discussion: All learners responded to this question. Two learners indicated that they would choose to read poetry. Three learners preferred magazines and newspapers because they talk about things that are happening in their lives and they are interesting because they have pictures. Other 2 learners said that they would like to read books that are interesting not those that are read at school (meaning 'I'm David' – which is the prescribed book).

Q: Why do you need reading in your life?

R 1: to learn more

R 2: to know words

R 3 : able to understand something you don't know

Discussion: Most of the learners responded by saying they need reading because they could learn more and know English words. One learner said that she needs reading so that she could understand things that are in English.

Q: What kind of reading and writing activities would you like to have during the English period?

R 1: You can write about yourself

R 2: write your own poems

R 3: music

Discussion: Three learners indicated that they would like to write about themselves and write music. Other said that they would like to write their own poems and read them in class. One learner indicated that she would like to read interesting books from the library.

Q: What kind of things do you read / write at home?

R 1: books, my sister's books

R 2: magazines, local newspapers

Discussion: All learners indicated that they read magazines and local community newspapers. Two learners said that they sometimes read books from the library and the other one indicated that her sister usually brings the books at home

5. EDUCATOR INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

**CAPE PENINSULA
UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY**

Cape Town Campus
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CAPE TOWN 8000

Bellville Campus
P O Box 1906
BELLVILLE 7535

Educator Interview Consent Form

Purpose: Mrs N. Ntshuntshe is conducting interviews on literacy practices to grade 9 learners. The information from these interviews will be only used for the purpose of research and it will be kept strictly confidential.

Name of the Educator: _____Date:_____

I voluntary give Ms Ntshuntshe my consent to interview me. I understand that any information from these interviews will be kept strictly confidential and that it will only contribute to her research.

Signature: _____Date:_____

6. EDUCATOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is your understanding of literacy practices?

2. Could you give me a brief description of your classroom?

3. Do you have any learning and teaching strategies that work for you in reading and writing?

    a. Which ones?
    b. Why do they work?

4. What are the challenges that you face in a Grade 9 classroom, with regards to teaching English as a First Additional Language?

    a. How do you overcome them?

5. Do you always follow the subject guidelines? Why?

6. Do you think the subject guidelines for English are realistic enough for effective teaching and learning in this school?

7. Do you think the current curriculum prepares the learners for Grade 10?

8. In your class do you combine reading and writing?

9. How do you assess reading and writing given the number of learners you have?

10. Tell me about your views about the level of reading and writing in Grade 9?