

**A DISTANCE EDUCATION LINKING PROGRAMME AT ABET LEVEL
FOUR**

By

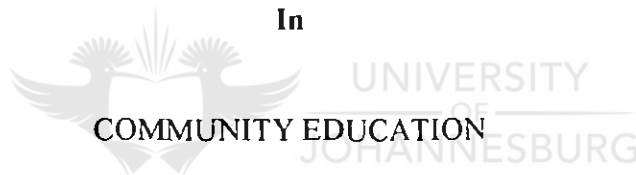
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study has been to focus attention on the support structures and processes to be considered by a core-plus organization, such as the South African Bureau of Standards (SABS) if it intends to realize the prospect of transforming its Elementary Technisa Studies (ETS) learners into self-directed, autonomous adults capable of effectively engaging in Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) through distance education. This quest to maintain continuity in the provision of adult education to its employees, led to the SABS contracting TECHNISA to offer the ETS linking programme to its employees who have successfully advanced to ABET level four (Grade). Completion of the ETS linking programme gains the learners entrance to an NI (National Technical certificate) course offered by TECHNISA. Thus, completion of the ETS linking programme will gain the SABS ABET level four learners entry into the Further Education and Training (FET) band (Grade 9-12).

Due to the fact that the ETS linking programme had been offered to the SABS ABET level four through distance education, this study has explored the challenges faced by the learners who, for the first time in their ABET careers, are expected to be self-directed and autonomous if they hope to succeed in their studies. Furthermore, the study has identified, through the data collected from interviewing and observing the six ETS linking programme learners, and from documented views, the support needs expressed by these adult learners. Those identified support needs are program relevance, educator-learner relationship, time-limitations, knowledge sharing, development and training, learner-support and program structure. These categories translated into recommendations to the SABS, and can also lend themselves applicable to any core-plus organization, which intends introducing the ETS linking program learners to the self-directed, autonomous world of distance education – thus kindling the spirit of lifelong learning in adults. The conclusion of the study emphasized the point that the South African Bureau of Standards will realize its prospects of maintaining continuity in the provision of adult education beyond the ABET band only if it creates and maintains support systems, processes, structures and an environment conducive to the inculcation of lifelong learning in adults.

SECTION 1 : OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

On the 1st June 1998 Sarah Mampuru, a cook at the South African Bureau of standards (SABS) cafeteria, enrolled for the Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) level four programme with pride as she has done for the past three years. This years enrollment, unlike that of the past three years during her ABET levels one to three studies, was different, since it introduced her for the first time in her education career to a relatively unique academic environment. This academic environment is a result of a contractual partnership established between the South African Bureau of Standards (SABS) and the Technical College of South Africa (TECHNISA). The partnership between the SABS and TECHNISA focuses upon introducing the Elementary TECHNISA Studies (ETS), a distance education linking programme, to the SABS level four adult learners. The ETS linking programme is on par with ABET level four, with the only difference being that it is geared towards access to formal vocational education.

On completion of the ETS linking programme the SABS level adult learners will attain a grade 9 (std 7) qualification, which is a minimum entrance requirement for technical college education. This partnership between the SABS and TECHNISA means that Sarah Mampuru and her colleagues will be required, for the first time in their ABET education, to study for the ETS linking programme through distance education. However, Sarah Mampuru and her colleagues enrolled for the ETS linking programme with apprehension since this required them to break new ground by engaging in self-directed learning. This transformation process these adult learners should undergo is, as Mezirow (1991) puts it, threatening, emotionally charged, and extremely difficult. The transformation is of essence since it will determine the success or failure of the ETS linking programme adult learners' ability in engaging in self-directed, autonomous learning which is synonymous with the world of distance education. "One finding is clear", says Tough (1978), "adults want additional competent support with planning and guiding their learning programmes" (Cross, 1981: 195).

This study will endeavour to determine and identify the support systems and structures required for the ETS linking programme adult learner to transform into self-directed, autonomous learners capable of effectively coping with distance education study. In order to know how to support these adult learners, we need to know in some detail what problems they are encountering, what kind of support they need, and how they evaluate their development in the ETS linking programme.

1.2 THE BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM

The SABS has in the past been unable to maintain continuity in the provision of ABET to its adult learners. This was evident in the diminishing number of learners as they progressed through the ABET levels. Through the contractual partnership that the SABS and TECHNISA have entered into, adult learners who have successfully completed ABET level three are enrolled for the ETS linking programme. This programme is geared towards access into formal vocational education. It is hoped that this programme will serve as a route from ABET to the Further Education and Training (FET) band for the SABS adult learners. Through this ETS linking programme, the SABS intends to maintain continuity in the training and development of its human resources.

Throughout ABET levels one to three the SABS adult learners had the privilege of attending the formal class and having a teacher on a daily basis to teach them. For the first time in their ABET years, the level four adult learners are required to engage in their studies through distance education through the ETS linking programme. After years of traditional teacher-centred type of education, the SABS level four adult learners are faced with the challenge to transform into self-directed, autonomous learners for them to effectively cope with the demands of distance education. As to how these learners effectively cope with such a daunting challenge is the interest of this research.

1.3 MOTIVATION FOR THE RESEARCH

Due to the fact that TECHNISA will be offering the ETS linking programme for the SABS adult learners through distance education, the study will focus upon how the adult learners cope with the challenges of studying through distance education. This will be influenced mostly by the process of transformation from the 'dependency syndrome' to the 'reflective posture' which is a demanding and difficult stance to assume. Since these (1998-9 academic year) SABS, level four adult learners enrolled for the ETS linking programme would be the pioneers in the study of ABET through distance education in the history of the SABS, they would serve as a litmus test for the SABS if it hopes to learn from this process for future maintenance of such a programme. This is of paramount importance if we envisage to know how to assist adults become self-directed, autonomous learners. We need to know in some detail what problems they are encountering, what kinds of support they need, and how they evaluate their learning projects. This is equally true for Sarah Mampuru and her colleagues who are faced with the challenge of self-directed study through distance education.



1.4 AIM OF THE STUDY

The partnership entered into by the SABS and TECHNISA is mainly motivated by the need to maintain continuity in the provision of ABET and beyond the Further Education and Training band. Therefore, the partnership is a strategic endeavour, on the part of the SABS, to establish an avenue through which adult learners at the ABET band can gain entry into the formal vocational education. Since enrolling its personnel (adult learner) for the ETS linking programme means that the learners will be engaged with distance education study, it is therefore incumbent upon the SABS to establish support systems and structures if it intends to maintain continuity beyond the ABET band for its adult learners. With this scenario as the background, the study aims to establish through interviews and observations of the ETS linking programme learners and through theoretical views on the subject, the types, forms and sources of support needed by these learners.

The identification of the support-needs expressed by the ETS programme learners will inform the SABS, TECHNISA and other providers of support as to the establishment of appropriate support systems, structures and processes. In this manner the relevant stakeholders, particularly the SABS, can take the identified support needs as a pointer towards the development, provision and maintenance of the support structures, systems and processes capable of sustaining the commitment of the adult learner engaged in autonomous, self directed learning through distance education.

1.5 METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Since the focus of the study is on the ETS linking programme for the level four adult learners at the SABS, these six learners (who constitute the entire class) will all serve as the sample for the study. This is due to the fact the six learners constitute a manageable group which can be given the same interview and observation focus. In terms of data collection, the method to be employed will be interviews to be conducted with the adult learners enrolled for the ETS linking programme. The first interviews to be conducted with these adult learners will be the focus group interview, which will be supported by the interview guide. The second interview will be in the form of a standardized open-ended “spoken” questionnaire. Both these interviews will be tape-recorded.

The second data collection method will be observations of the adult learners during the scheduled contact sessions between TECHNISA, the SABS co-ordinators, and the adult learners. During the actual interviews the observation methods will be utilised as well. Documents on the theory about the field of this study, will also be used as a third method of data collection from the literature. The recorded data from interviews and observations will be analysed through the process of coding and then converting these codes to categories. From these, main categories will be established which will be the themes or findings of the study. These findings will then be validated by relevant theory from which recommendations will be elicited.

1.6 THE MAIN THEORETICAL VIEWS

The main theoretical views of this study will invariably be influenced by the aim of the study, that is, the support adult learners, engaged in self-directed learning through distance education, require to successfully deal with the relatively new academic world. Since the ETS linking programme for adult learners will be driven by the SABS the (*gesellschaft* or society), the major source of support for these adult learners the (*gemeinschaft* or community), will come from the employer (SABS). Sergiovanni (1992) also represents the theoretical view that it is possible to build a community '*gemeinschaft*' within a society '*gesellschaft*'. This theoretical view is supported further by Freire (1972) who reflects upon 'co-intentionality' between the educator and the learner, which is also one of the major support structures for adults learners. Townsend (1984) represents the theoretical view of the 'core-plus framework' wherein the organization (SABS) offers support to its employers (ETS linking programme learners) by being both architect and support of '*gemeinschaft*' development and changed. Mezirow (1991) represents the theoretical view that "the course contents should be an object for adult learners, therefore, it should lead to transformation, a movement from lack of authenticity, to being true to oneself, authenticity" (Mezirow, 1991 : 191).

SECTION 2 : LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 DISTANCE EDUCATION AND TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

The challenge facing the SABS ABET level four learners, registered for the ETS linking programme with TECHNISA, is to transform from the 'dependency syndrome' to reflective learners if they are to succeed in studying through distance education, which requires them to be self-directed, autonomous learners. This 'reflective' posture is characterized by what (Freire, 1973:72) calls an "epistemological relationship to reality", that is, a situation in which adult learners are being critical examiners of their learning experiences, questioning and interpreting their lives and education rather than "merely walking through them" (Ira Shor, 1987: 99). The challenge for the SABS adult learners lies in their effort to create a new attitude - that of creating a dialogue of 'co-intentionality' so absent in their upbringing and education. According to Freire (1970), reflective learning is developed through co-intentionality between the teacher (SABS-TECHNISA co-ordinators) and the learner, which makes learning collectively owned, not the teacher's own property (Ira Shor, 1987:27).

In such a learning context, adult learners are the subjects of their environment – they are in charge of their development. Vella (1994), agrees with this notion when she asserts that "the content of any adult education programme is an object for learners, learners and teachers are subjects, to examine together as they decide what is useful and true" (Vella 1994 : 97). This assertion is equally true for the SABS level four ETS linking programme learners, who are required to interact on an ongoing basis throughout their studies with both the co-ordinators from TECHNISA (Ms. Judy Blom) and the SABS (Mr. Ornette Nene). Therefore, their success in the ETS linking programme hinges heavily upon their effective use of 'co-intentionality', by engaging in constructive dialogue with both co-ordinators thus using profitably the support these co-ordinators are offering them.

In this manner, the adult learners would be taking charge of their learning and lives. For adult learners to change, says Sergiovanni (1994), they have to challenge practices that have always appeared sensible, and this is hard to do. A good place to start is for the adult learners to examine unstated assumptions behind acceptable practices. For the SABS adult learners the first assumption to challenge is the role played by the co-ordinators of the ETS linking programme, particularly Judy Blom from TECHNISA, who functions as both co-ordinator and teacher of the adult learners throughout the programme. In order to assume that reflective posture, it is incumbent upon the SABS adult learners to discard the assumption that the teacher (co-ordinator) is an authority figure. The teacher should move from acting as an authority figure to become the guide or pointer-out who also participates in learning in proportion to the vitality, and relevance of his/her facts and experiences. According to Freire (1989), in the education of problem-solving, adult learners experience education as something they do, not something done to them. Therefore they are not 'depositories' who passively learn new knowledge and skills 'deposited' upon them by the teacher (Freire, 1989: 27).

Mezirow (1991), defined the aims of adult education as "a co-operative venture in non-authoritarian, informal learning ... a quest of the mind which digs down to the roots of the preconception which formulate our conduct" (Mezirow, 1991:61). With this spirit of co-operation, Vygotsky (1978), also argued that knowledge sharing is an important aspect of the adult learning environment. He emphasized the creation of collective interrelated 'zones of proximal development' as part of knowledge sharing and of a transitive teaching and learning system. In such a co-operative learning environment, the SABS ETS linking programme learners would enrich their support base by not only engaging effectively with both their co-ordinators in the spirit of 'co-intentionality', but also offer support to one another as frequently as possible. This could only be achieved when they consider one another as reservoirs of knowledge to be tapped when a need arises. This exercise would be in tandem with the call for the recognition of prior learning and knowledge (RPL) as espoused by the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Far from eschewing assistance from educators and co-ordinators, most adult learners are eager for assistance and support.

Clearly, the quality of support the SABS learners receive can determine their success or failure in their endeavour to be self-directed, autonomous learners. “One finding is clear”, says Tough (1978), “adult learners want additional competent support with planning and guiding their learning programmes” (Cross, 1981: 195). This is equally true with all adult learners, as with the SABS ETS linking programme learners. However, Freire (1979) echoes Giroux (1983) when he cautions against ‘student resistance’ to reflective education. He asserts that this phenomenon is initially developed in a school system devoted to ‘banking pedagogy’ wherein students internalize values and habits which sabotage their critical thought. This ultimately leads to the development of alienated anti-intellectual adults after years in ‘mass-education’ and ‘mass-culture’ (Shor, 1987:29). This analogy is applicable to the SABS adult learners who, after years in the ‘banking style’ classrooms during their formal education years and throughout ABET levels one to three, do not see themselves as people who can transform knowledge in order to empower themselves.

There needs to be a concerted effort from both the adult learners and the respective institutions (SABS and TECHNISA), through their co-ordinators, to support the learners by gradually fostering a culture of creativity in the ETS linking programme. This will develop in learners the impatience and vivacity which characterize search and invention. This will not be a mean task for both the adult learners and co-ordinators, who will be faced with the challenge of liberating themselves from ‘authority-dependence’ to ‘transformative learning’, which is threatening, emotionally charged and extremely difficult. This ‘dependency syndrome’, according to Vella (1994), should be eradicated from the adult learners’ minds since it “eats at the heart of a development process” (Vella: 94).

2.2 ADULT EDUCATION AND PROGRAMME RELEVANCE

According to Tough (1978), self-directed learning is “deliberate learning in which the person’s primary intention is to gain certain definite knowledge or skills” (Cross, 1981:186). Like all adults learners, the SABS adult learners enrolled for the ETS linking programme largely because they are experiencing some inadequacy in coping with current work and life issues.

They definitely want to apply tomorrow what they learn today, so the time perspective is one of immediacy of application. Therefore, they enter into any educational endeavour with a problem-centered orientation to learning. For any learning programme to be interesting to the adult learners, it should satisfy the need to be realistic, relevant and responsive to the learners' needs. This is echoed by Cross (1991: 249) when she states that:

the most important goal of education at all levels and it's agencies of the learning society is the development of lifelong learners who possess the basic skills for learning, plus the motivation to pursue a variety of learning interest throughout their lives.

It is when the programmes offered to adult learners do not satisfy their immediate educational, social and economic needs that they become disillusioned and their motivation deteriorates.

Finding competent support, however, turns out to be one of the major problems in self-directed learning programmes, such as the ETS linking programme for which the SABS adults learners are enrolled. According to Tough (1971), empirical data on 'what goes wrong' in adult learning programmes shows that the most frequent source of confusion, frustration and even anger occurs during the contact with the person, book or other resource that is expected to be of help (Cross, 1981:195). This condition will invariably apply to the ETS linking programme learners at the SABS since they will be engaging in distance education which requires them to be autonomous, self-directed learners.

Dedication, discipline and perseverance will be virtues these adult learners will have to possess in abundance. After years of being exposed to the traditional teacher-centered system of education, they suddenly find themselves in a situation where their success in the ETS linking programme will be determined by their ability to transform from being passive 'receptors' of knowledge to being 'reflective' learners. Furthermore, adult learners are required to define their problems, locate appropriate learning materials, and demonstrate not just subject-matter comprehension but also the ability to apply knowledge on the job, in the home and for personal development.

This is the daunting challenge facing the SABS adult learners if they intend being lifelong learners. According to Cross (1981: xxi),

lifelong learning is not a privilege or right; it is a necessity for anyone, young or old, who must live with the escalating pace of change – in the family, on the job, in the community, and in the worldwide society.

Since studying through distance education is the first-time experience for these ABET level four adult learners through the ETS linking programme, this experience ushers them into the world of self-directed learning and autonomy which is a prerequisite for lifelong learning.

2.3 DISTANCE EDUCATION AND LEARNER SUPPORT

For this experience to be a success, adult learners need to be accorded adequate support, by both TECHNISA and the SABS, with planning and guiding their learning programmes. Stemming from the contractual agreement entered into by both organizations (TECHNISA and SABS), the decision to appoint two co-ordinators, one from each organization, was made with the intention to offer both academic and administrative support to the adult learners throughout their studies for the duration of the ETS linking programme.

The co-ordinator from TECHNISA would give support to adult learners by tutoring them once per month, according to a predetermined schedule, in both English and Mathematics. The SABS Training department's lecture rooms were identified as venues for these monthly interventions. Judy Blom would also be accessible on the telephone, during the day and in the evening, at agreed time intervals to offer advice and respond to questions from adult learners. The administration of the registration of the ETS linking programme learners for the Independent Examination Board (IEB) would also be handled by her. She would also collect, mark, record and return the assignments to respective adult learners and thereafter prepare a progress report for each learner enrolled for the ETS linking programme.

The SABS co-ordinator (Mr. O.J. Nene) would provide administrative support to adult learners such as the collection of assignments from learners and channeling them to TECHNISA and the receiving of the marked, and evaluated assignments from TECHNISA on behalf of the SABS adult learners. He will also liaise with the adult learners' supervisors in terms of their academic progress, consultation dates and other related issues. Again, the SABS co-ordinator is required to liaise with TECHNISA on behalf of the learners, in terms of their immediate academic needs and concerns throughout their studies. Over and above the academic and administrative support given to the adult learners, the SABS also offers financial assistance to them by financing in full their academic, administrative and examinations (IEB) costs.

All these well-meaning gestures by the SABS, can easily be an exercise in the futility if the ETS linking programme adult learners are not given the opportunity to demonstrate not only subject-matter comprehension, but also the ability to apply the newly acquired knowledge and skills on the job and for personal development. Townsend (1984) emphasizes that programmes offered to adult learners should empower them at decision-making, at participating, and at problem-solving - thus assisting the individuals to become participative persons (Townsend 1984:11). For the SABS to be credible in its personnel development initiative, it should complement the academic and administrative support it provides to the ETS adults learners with a more broadly based policy. This policy should incorporate the development of personal skills, leadership skills and involvement strategies for a range of employees at all levels of the organization. Equity will no longer be seen to be incompatible with quality as more people, including the ETS linking programme adult learners, are involved in decisions that affect their futures. For this initiative to be sustained, the SABS should not only incorporate the development of its personnel in its policy, but also develop strategies and mechanisms of linking personnel development with career-paths. This will add value to the employees of the SABS and thus enhance the stature of the organization in general. Therefore, the support of adult learners should not be limited to only academic, administrative and financial levels, but should also translate into opportunities for empowered employees to exercise their newly acquired decision-making skills and knowledge within their working environments.

Townsend (1984), also explains that the two major purposes of an institution-funded adult education programme, are to “focus on the needs of the individual to become a self-fulfilled, active participant in the institution” and also emphasized “the individual serving the needs of the institution”. He further argues that these are no longer mutually exclusive, but in fact, complement each other in today’s society (Townsend 1984:11). At the SABS this collaborative philosophy between employer and employee requires much more coherent and systematic strategies of intervention and positive action and collaboration at all levels of the organization, that is, from management to the supervisory level.

2.4 A CORE-PLUS FRAMEWORK FOR ADULT EDUCATION

According to Cohen (1985) “A community is that entity to which one belongs, greater than kinship but more immediate than the abstraction we call society” (Cohen 1985 : 15). This analogy aptly typifies the existence of ABET within the SABS, which is a community (ETS linking programme) within a society (SABS). Tönnies also describes a transition taking place between ‘*gemeinschaft*’, a community of intimacy, of close personal knowledge, of stability; and ‘*gesellschaft*’, a society characterized by ego-focussed, highly specific and possible discontinuous relationships, in which the individual interacts within different social milieux for different purposes (Cohen, 1985: 22). This transition, as Cohen (1985) puts it, suggests the boundary between community and society, that exist in the minds of the beholders – that is, a symbolic construction of a boundary. Put into context, the adult learner at the SABS, registered for the ETS linking programme, are bound together by a common objective of using this education program to empower themselves and thus improving their ability of relating new knowledge and skills to their respective vocational and social contexts. They are bound by the ‘*gemeinschaft*’ of the mind. This community of mental intimacy translates into psychological support they offer one another, which motivates them to persevere and urge them to further their studies in spite of the socio-economic challenges facing them. “This community of mind”, explains Sergiovanni (1994), “provides the basics for solidifying the feelings and identities associated with being a community of kinship and a community of place” (Sergiovanni, 1994 : 8).

For the SABS, as the *'gesellschaft'* within which various *'gemeinschafts'* exist, to respond effectively to the rapidly changing internal and external environments, it should empower its personnel with new knowledge, new skills and a new attitude if it intends to stay competitive. The 'core-plus' concept, as espoused by Townsend (1984), suggests that as many people as possible should be involved in the decisions that affect them. Therefore, organizations, such as the SABS, have a role in providing adult learners (employees) with the knowledge and skills necessary to be involved and to have a positive attitude towards that involvement. The development of a core-plus organization can provide the SABS with the opportunity to be both the architect and supporter of community development and change. The SABS has an obligation, as enunciated by its mission statement and the human resources department's training mission statement, which is to enhance the quality and standard of all its people. This obligation can be achieved by the SABS through various core-plus programmes, such as the ABET programme and also programmes and activities that foster the development of a positive attitude towards lifelong learning.

Programmes such as the ETS linking programme promote community service, problem-solving, decision-making and an understanding that the SABS physical facilities, particularly the human resource development department's training facilities, are 'community facilities' and that work-based learning is appropriate, no matter what one's age might be. Minzey (1979) states that for a core-plus organization (*gesellschaft*), to be both an architect and supporter of community (*gemeinschaft*) development and change, it should endeavour to focus on the needs of the organization without down-playing the needs of the individual to become an active participant in the organization. This notion is supported by Cohen (1985), when he explains that community and engagement in non-communal relations are 'differing but complementary' modes of social life. He refers to the engagement as 'two sides of the same coin' which function as 'complementary opposition' (Cohen, 1985 : 25).

However, Redcliffe (1981), according to Cohen (1985), argues to the contrary when he states that the outward spread of societal (*gesellschaft*) influences from the centre will make communities (*gemeinschaft*) on the periphery less like the former selves and "... indeed will dissipate their distinctive cultures - and will turn them, instead, into small scale versions of the centre itself". Stein (1964), amongst others, disagrees with this notion and refers to this myth as 'the eclipse of community' (Cohen 1985: 85). Sergiovanni (1994), cautions against the false notion that communities (*gemeinschaft*) will naturally thrive within a society (*gesellschaft*) when he asserts that "much of what passes for organizational change is superficial and ultimately fails because the difficulty of the task - organizational change is underestimated" (Sergiovanni 1994:1). The process of organizational change within the SABS, instituted in 1995, has been fraught with resistance from various quarters and it has been far from being a smooth transition. It thus supports Sergiovanni's assertion that such a change should not be underestimated since it is structural, physical, constitutional and attitudinal which proved to be the most difficult of all changes within the SABS.

This change process is best explicated by Habermas (1987), when he highlights the difficult dialect between the 'society' (*gesellschaft*) - the socio-economic system which provides employment and security in exchange for loyalty and the 'community' (*gemeinschaft*), which is characterized by reflective discourse and interpersonal relationships (Mezirow, 1991 : 61). Therefore, the fundamental human right to understand the meaning of one's experience through discourse implies not only a basic education to develop cognitive skills, but also physical security, health, employment and shelter. To change the perception an organization (*gesellschaft*) upholds in expecting unquestioned loyalty from employees in exchange for employment, health and security, employees should challenge these unstated assumptions and question accepted practices within their organizations. Within the context of the SABS, adult learners should dispel the misconception that the academic support offered by the organization is a gesture of goodwill which must be reciprocated with blind loyalty by the employees.

They should know that it is their fundamental right to be involved in decisions that affect their futures, and that the SABS has an obligation to provide them with the knowledge and skills necessary to be involved and to have a positive attitude towards that involvement. Equipped with such an attitude, the adult learner will cease from being alienated and intimidated by these "... systematic influences which are inimical to adult reflective discourse and action" (Mezirow 1991: 61). In such an environment the myth of the 'eclipse of community' can be dispelled since community (*gemeinschaft*) engagements, such as the ETS linking programme, can occur within the environs of a society (*gesellschaft*) as complex as the SABS. This is what Cohen (1985) refers to as 'complementary opposition' Sergiovanni (1994:173) aptly puts it that:

too much *gemeinschaft* blocks progress. By the same token, too much *gesellschaft* creates loss of community. The answer is not to turn the clock back to a more romantic *gemeinschaft* world, but to build *gemeinschaft* within *gesellschaft*.



SECTION 3 : THE FIELD STUDY

3.1 BACKGROUND TO THE INVESTIGATION

The SABS adult learners who enrolled for the ETS linking programme with TECHNISA had the privilege of engaging in contact sessions with both co-ordinators (Ms. Judy Blom – Technisa, and Mr. Ornette Nene – SABS) within the physical premises of their organization (SABS). These contact sessions were scheduled in conjunction with the supervisors of the respective adult learners. These supervisors had to consent by giving the Human Resources Development Department the required authority to schedule these contact sessions during working hours. The six adult learners enrolled to the ETS linking programmes are:

Table 1 : The courses in the programme

	COURSE	NAME	DEPARTMENT
1.	Mathematics	Arthur Mahloko	Transport department
2.	English	Bessie Mokoena	Textiles department
3.	English	George Lapane	Microbiology department
4.	Mathematics	Jonas Monama	Textiles department
5.	Mathematics	David Khoza	Fibre department
6.	Mathematics	Sarah Mampuru	Catering department

The scheduled contact sessions took place at the Human Resources Development Department's lecture rooms (Neptune and Jupiter lecture rooms). The programmes scheduled for the first cycle (trimester) were as follows:

Table 2 : Timetable

	DATES	TIME	VENUE
1.	5 June 1998	08H00 – 10H30 Mathematics 10H30 – 13H00 English	Neptune room
2.	3 July 1998	08H00 – 10H30 Mathematics 10H30 – 13H00 English	Neptune room
3.	7 August 1998	08H00 – 10H30 Mathematics 10H30 – 13H00 English	Neptune room
4.	4 September 1998	08H00 – 10H30 Mathematics 10H30 – 13H00 English	Neptune room

CO-ORDINATOR : Judy Blom (TECHNISA)

During these sessions, adult learners engaged in ‘co-intentionality’ with the co-ordinator-cum-facilitator from TECHNISA (Judy Blom). All their concerns and questions pertaining to their respective subjects were listened to and addressed by the co-ordinator. I had the opportunity of attending two contact sessions (3 July and 4 September) as an observer and I gathered valuable information and insight into the deliberations taking place in such encounters. As the SABS co-ordinator I also had contact sessions with the ETS linking programmes adult learners during the following scheduled periods:

Table 3 : Schedule

	DATES	TIME	VENUE
1.	12 June	09H00 – 10H00	Jupiter room
2.	26 June	09H00 – 10H00	Jupiter room
3.	10 July	09H00 – 10H00	Jupiter room
4.	31 July	09H00 – 10H00	Jupiter room
5.	14 August	09H00 – 11H00	Neptune room
6.	28 August	09H00 – 12H00	Neptune room
7.	11 September	09H00 – 10H00	Neptune room
8.	25 September	09H00 – 10H00	Neptune room

CO-ORDINATOR: Ornette Nene (SABS)

Unlike Judy Blom who functioned as both administrative co-ordinator and academic facilitator of the adult learners, I only functioned as an administrative co-ordinator. This entailed collating concerns and questions from the learners and channelled them to TECHNISA, through Judy Blom. I also served as a liaison between the Human Resources Development Department, which offered financial and administrative support to adult learners, and the venue for the contact sessions. This meant that I had the responsibility of negotiating a uniform time schedule with the various supervisors to allow their employees to attend the contact sessions with both Judy Blom (TECHNISA) and myself.

It was during these contact sessions I held with the adult learners that I had the opportunities of observing them and engaging in both formal and informal conversations about their feelings, thoughts and expectations from the ETS linking programme.

3.2 THE STRATEGY FOR DATA COLLECTION

It was easy for me to gain entry and acceptance from the group since they could first relate to me as a colleague before perceiving me as their co-ordinator and a researcher. For ethical reasons, I had the obligation to request their permission to carry out research on them and thus use them as my research sample and population. With their blessing I had the opportunity to make use of the scheduled contact sessions to carry out my observations and interviews. I also had to formally request in writing permission from the SABS, through the Human Resources Department, to conduct the research on the ETS linking programme adult learners. Since these ETS linking programme learners in the first cohort were six in total number, I decided to use all six as the research sample. Therefore, I informed them of the interviews I had to conduct with them and the fact that I will be using a tape-recorder during the interviews so as to capture every response and input from all respondents.

The first interview, the focus-group interview, which appeared like an informal conversation to the participants, took place on the 14th August 1998 from 09H00-11H00 at the Neptune lecture room, with all the six adult learners as participants. Even though the interview was informal, I also made use of an interview guide, which contained questions I wanted to explore in the course of the interview. This not only allowed me to keep the group interaction focussed, but also to let individual perspectives and experiences to emerge. The entire interview took two hours to complete. The second interview, which is the standardized open-ended interview, took place on the 28th August 1998 at the Neptune lecture room. Like the first interview, this one was also tape-recorded. The adult learners were interviewed individually from structured questions I had prepared in advance.

It took three hours to conduct the interview on all six adult learners, since I had budgeted approximately thirty minutes for each individual interview. For both interviews, I had prepared the questions in English. Therefore, I had to rephrase most of my questions during the interviews in either Zulu or Northern Sotho since most of my respondents (interviewees) expressed the need to respond in their mother tongue in order to provide appropriate responses. I had the responsibility to translate their responses from either Zulu or Northern Sotho to English during analysis and coding. This required me to diligently playback the cassettes containing the interviews and laboriously translate each and every word, phrase or sentence which was uttered in Zulu or Northern Sotho. In the final analysis I had translated and transferred the tape interviews to paper. Therefore, I organized the data collected into three main types: field notes of what I saw and heard, transcripts of interviews and information from documents. This was done in order to be able to code the entire body of data from which I then extracted main categories which were ultimately the research findings (themes).

3.3 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

The following are the questions that were contained in the interview guide that accompanied the first interview (focus group interview) administered to the SABS ETS linking programme adult learners:

INTERVIEW GUIDE:

1. TIME :
 - When do you study?
 - What time of the day do you set aside for study? Why?
 - For how long do you study?
 - How often do you study per week?

2. METHOD:
 - How do you study?
 - What methods of study do you use? Why?
 - With whom do you study?

3. SUPPORT:
- What type of support study do get from :
 - i) SABS?
 - ii) TECHNISA?
 - What do you think of the support provided by both these institutions?
 - What additional support, if any, do you think you need from both institutions?
 - Who else gives you support in your studies?

4 PERSONAL EXPERIENCE:

- How do you experience self-directed study through distance education?
- How do you experience the ETS linking programme?
- Is it relevant to your work, social and/or family life?
- How do you experience the support you get from both TECHNISA and the SABS co-ordinators?

The main intention behind commencing with administering a focus-group interview before the open-ended one, was that I wanted to capture the group's spirit that undoubtedly emerged over the three month period these ETS linking programme learners had been together. This assisted me in capturing the group dynamics by assessing the extent to which there was a relatively consistent, shared view on the ETS programme by the respondents. Since I was the one administering the interview, I had the responsibility of translating and rephrasing the questions in the respondents' own languages. Their responses to the questions posed during this interview offered me a pointer as to the type of questions to prepare and incorporate in designing a questionnaire for the standardized open-ended interview.

The following is the format of the standardized open-ended questionnaire administered to all the six ETS linking programme adult learners from the SABS:

STANDARDIZED OPEN – ENDED INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE:

1. When do you study?
2. How much time do you spend studying per session/day?
3. How many times do you study per week?
4. Where do you study?
5. With whom do you study?
6. How do you study? Explain.
7. Why have you enrolled for the ETS linking programme? Explain.
8. Who offers you support, advice and guidance when you study on your own?
9. What do you do when you do not understand the contents of your study material?
10. What do you think about the assistance offered by SABS?
11. What do you think about the assistance offered by TECHNISA?
12. What additional assistance, if any, do think should be offered to you by both the SABS and TECHNISA?

The raw data were coded (See table 4, p27-28) according to codes that were awarded inductively. Subsequently these coded data were clustered into groups or categories.

3.4 CATEGORIES EMERGING FROM RAW DATA

The categories that were constructed from the three main types of data, namely the field notes, interviews and documents, were then linked to the actual statements made by the adult learners (interviewees) themselves. The following quotations give credence to the seven identified main categories that emerged from the translated and transcribed raw data:

3.4.1 PROGRAMME RELEVANCE

BESSIE MOKOENA: Oh well....we know that without studying there is nothing you can know... hmm...for instance you cannot communicate with people if you are not interested in studying. You cannot understand what people are sayingeh...even at work there are some of the things that we do...and if you are not studying you cannot do. For instance, the job that I do requires a lot of Mathematics ...yes...so that helps me a lot. Without studying you cannot go further. At the moment I am a technician but I want to gain more knowledge....I am in the Textiles department...I want to achieve beyond what I have now...I want to continue studying.

3.4.2 EDUCATOR – LEARNER RELATIONSHIP

SARAH MAMPURU: If it is possible for the SABS to give us someone to assist us with our studies once per month before the lady from TECHNISA (Judy) comes... Why I say this ...when we have some problems ... yes... immediately when I get a problem... I go to that particular person to help me with that problem...because sometimes it happens that you think if something ... at that moment you are busy studying there is something that you don't understand and you need help as soon as possible...because you still carry it in your mind the question you want to ask... immediately.

3.4.3 KNOWLEDGE SHARING

JONAS MONAMA: Us as a group should have...well...three (3) hours to sit and discuss for ourselves... ja... well...at least twice per month... for us to discuss as a group.

3.4.4 DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

DAVID KHOZA: I am happy ... because when I started at the Bureau (SABS) I wasn't like this ... you see.. I did not attend formal schooling at all...so...and the work I do needs a Mathematics background. So, this study helps me with my job...that is why I correspond because I gain something...I've got good practice but not good education...I have doing this job for ten years but I don't have the qualifications...Another thing ...I must get the information from the book if I want to test something at work...so...because I am not good at studying ...I need this education.

3.4.5 LEARNER SUPPORT

ARTHUR MAHLOKO: A friend at work helps me when I have a problem...at times teachers from the local school do assist when they are available.

GEORGE LAPANE: My wife gives me support...she is not educated...she says I must try harder...because she says next time it won't be easy to study...yes...it helps me a lot.

SARAH MAMPURU: My little girl sometimes helps me.. ag..not every time you know... she stays with my mother...she is in standard eight.

BESSIE MOKOENA: I study alone... but if I find some difficulties eh... when I come to work I ask my co – workers to help me... Sometimes I use a dictionary... but it happens that still when I'm using my dictionary I still cannot understand... this is a problem.

3.4.6 TIME LIMITATIONS

ARTHUR MAHLOKO: I study at home... during the day it is noisy... kids and so on... I usually go and study in the open veld under the trees where there is no noise at all.

GEORGE LAPANE: I study at home ... hmm... I wait until the children are asleep then I study... Sometimes I close the door and study when I want to be alone without noise... There is no time to study at work.

JONAS MONAMA: I find some difficulty to study... because I am living in somebody's house and they are selling beer... so... you see... there is a lot of problems... there is a lot of noise... during weekends it is worse... it is disturbing.

DAVID KHOZA: I would like to them (SABS) maybe... to extend the time to five hours per day... right... twice per month... I think the time is to little... you see... because it takes long to get help from TECHNISA... to come once a month... that time is too short.

3.3.7 PROGRAMME STRUCTURE

BESSIE MOKOENA : What I do is ...I go through the study guide ...it is not difficult with English because they give a lot of examples and exercises to do... When dealing with test – yourself (exercises) I try to recall what I’ve studied ...and then they also give us answers after testing yourself.



Table 4

Conceptual categorizing of coded data

CATEGORY	CONCEPTS	CODES	DIMENSIONS	
1. Program Relevance	-Future intentions	FI	1111	4
	-Personal ambitions	PA	111	3
	-Better communication	BC	11111	5
	-Personal survival	PS	111	3
	-Career path	CP	111111	6
	-Employment prospects	EP	11111	5
2. Educator Learner Relationship	-Personalized assistance	PA	11111	5
	-Appreciation of supervisor support	ASS	111111	6
	-Need of urgent assistance	NUA	11111	5
	-More contact needed	MCN	11111	5
	-Supervisor support	SS	1111	4
	-Tutoring needed	TN	111	3
3. Knowledge Sharing	-Lack of study network	LSN	1111	4
	-Ground discussions	GD	11111	5
	-Co-worker assistance	CA	11	2
	-Group study method	GSM	111111	6
	-Lack of external support	LES	1111	4
3. Development and Training	-Employer involvement appreciated	EIA	111111	6
	-Work related programme	WRP	111111	6
	-Personal development	PD	11111	5
	-Physical facilities adequate	PFA	1111	4

Continuation of table 4

CATEGORY	CONCEPTS	CODES	DIMENSIONS	
5. Learner Support	- Partner support	PS	11	2
	- Study method	SM	111111	6
	- Study time-off	STO	11111	5
	- Co-worker support	CWS	11	2
	- Financial support	FS	111111	6
	- Career guidance	CG	11111	5
	- Solutions to problems	SP	1111	4
6. Time Limitations	- Limited home study	LHS	11111	5
	- Limited supervisor contact	LSC	1111	4
	- Difficulty in obtaining timely supervisor assistance	TSA	11111	5
	- Completion of assignments	CA	1111	4
	- Immediate help with study problems	HSP	111111	6
7. Programme Structure	- Study guide helpful	SGH	111111	6
	- Modular system	MS	11111	5
	- Supervisor assistance helpful	SAH	11111	5
	- Self-directed study demanding	SD	11111	5
	- Assignment system manageable	ASM	1111	4

The above table is a summary of data conceptualizing and categorizing.

Dimensional Range : 4 – 6 Most
 1 – 3 Some
 0 None

SECTION 4 : SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 LINK BETWEEN CATEGORIES

Since the adult learner enters into an educational activity with a problem-centred orientation to learning, his/her time perspective is one of immediacy of application. Vella (1994) also asserts that the content of the course is an object for (adult) learners, and that learners and teachers as subjects should exercise together as they decide what is useful and true (Vella, 1994 : 97). Therefore, for the **programme to be relevant**, it should take into account the adult learner's **time-limitations**. The learner wants to apply tomorrow what he/she learns today, but also needs to be developed through 'co-intentionality' between the **educator and learner**, which is a generic process of adult education. In the process of transformation both the **educator and the learner share knowledge**. In this way, expertise is distributed to provide a richer knowledge base for all and 'the social becomes the individual'.

For an adult programme, such as the ETS linking programme, to be relevant, it should accord adult learners with the **knowledge** and skills necessary to demonstrate not only subject-matter comprehension but also the ability to apply the knowledge on the job, in their homes, and for personal development. For the adult **programme structure** to contribute to the **development and training** of the learners, it should be learner-centred and relevant, since it is the learner who has to demonstrate defined capabilities, skills and understanding. The programme structure should be outcomes-based. It is evident that there is definitely a pattern emerging from the seven main categories of support needs expressed by the ETS linking programme learners at the SABS. These seven main categories (findings) are discussed in detail below.

4.2. DISCUSSION OF CATEGORIES

4.2.1 PROGRAM RELEVANCE

Townsend (1984), argues that in the core-plus framework, the programmes offered to employees (adult learners) should not only satisfy the need of the organization, but also be realistic, relevant and responsive to the adult learners' needs (Townsend, 1984 : 17). Therefore, programmes offered to adult learners should empower them at decision-making, at participation, and at problem-solving, thus assisting the individuals to become participative persons. This viewpoint is further developed by Minzey (1979), when he asserts that the two major purposes of an institution-funded adult education programme, like the ETS linking programme, are to "focus on the needs of the individual to become a self-fulfilled, active participant in society". He also emphasises serving the needs of society (Townsend, 1984 : 11). These are no longer mutually exclusive, but in fact complement each other in today's institutions. To respond to the rapidly changing environment, the SABS must develop its human resources by teaching new knowledge, new skills and new attitudes. The development of a core-plus organization provides the opportunity for the SABS to be both architect and supporter of 'community development' and change. Cohen (1995), refers to this as 'complementary opposition'

4.2.2 EDUCATOR-LEARNER RELATIONSHIP

According to Freire (1972), reflective learning is developed through 'co-intentionality' between the educator and the learners, which makes learning collectively owned, and not the educator's own property (Shor, 1987:27). Vella (1994) agrees with this notion when she asserts that the "content of any adult education programme is an object for learners, learners and educators are objects, to examine together as they decide what is useful and true" (Vella, 1994 : 97). In such a context, as Freire (1972) puts it, learners experience education as something they do, not something done to them.

Therefore, 'co-intentionality' begins when the teacher presents a problem for inquiry related to a key aspect of the learners' experience, so that learners see their thoughts and language in the study. This is a challenge facing the SABS adult learners enrolled for the ETS linking programme, who have to engage in the process of transformative learning which is threatening and emotionally charged, and extremely difficult. This transformative posture will challenge adult learners to prepare themselves for social change, to advance democracy and equality as they advance their literary knowledge. This process will only be realised when they experience education as 'something they do, not something done to them' by those who consider themselves knowledgeable.

4.2.3 KNOWLEDGE SHARING

According to Vygotsky (1978), knowledge sharing is an important aspect of the (adult) learning environment. Hence he emphasized the creation of collective, interrelated 'zones of proximal development' as part of a transitive learning environment (Brown, Metz and Campione, 1990 :21). In such a context, both the educator and the learners share knowledge, expertise is distributed to provide richer knowledge base for all and the social becomes the individual. The core-plus perspective (Townsend 1984) also includes activities that foster the development of a positive attitude towards lifelong learning and knowledge sharing. The SABS has the responsibility to empower its personnel through activities such as the ETS linking programme, that will assist them to become participative individuals in the organization. Since the ETS linking programme adult learners need programmes which are result- oriented, this requires the SABS to offer programmes which provide them opportunities to exercise their newly acquired decision-making skills.

4.2.4 DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

The ETS linking programme adult learners have been unequivocal in their appreciation of the role the SABS plays in providing programs that accord them with the knowledge and skills necessary to be involved and to have a positive attitude towards that involvement.

However, Sergiovanni (1994), cautions against blind appreciation of such gestures when he argues that “much of what poses for institutional reform is superficial and ultimately fails because the difficulty of the task-institutional change is underestimated” (Sergiovanni, 1994 : 1). This viewpoint is supported by Tönnies when he asserts that “in *gessellschaft* every person strives for that which is to his/her own advantage as he/she affirms the actions of others only insofar as and as long as they can further his/her interests” (Sergiovanni, 1994 : 9).

This situation is further explicated by Habérmas (1987) when he discusses the difficult dialectic between the ‘system’ (*gesellschaft*) such as the SABS the socio-economic system which provides employment and security in exchange for loyalty and the ‘lifeworld’ (*gemeinschaft*). To change such a relationship, adult learners should challenge practices that have always appeared sensible, and a good place to start is examining the unstated assumptions behind accepted practices.

4.2.5 LEARNER SUPPORT

It has emerged through the findings of the study that the ETS linking programme for adult learners, as with all adult learners, needs additional competent help with planning and guiding their learning programmes. In Coolican’s (1975) summaries of nine research studies of self-directed learning, the two resources named most often were human resources-intimate friends, co-workers, neighbours or relatives, and paid experts, educators, co-ordinators, facilitators and others. The third most common resource was books and pamphlets (Cross, 1981 : 195). Empirical data on ‘what goes wrong’ in adult learning programmes shows that the most frequent source of confusion, frustration, and even anger occurs during the contact with the person, book or other resource that is expected to be of help (Tough, 1975 : 185).

It would be helpful to know why adult learners are satisfied or dissatisfied with the support they receive, and what kinds of problems they experience, and what they think can be done about providing better assistance for self-directed learners, such as the SABS, ETS linking programme adult learners.

4.2.6 TIME-LIMITATIONS

From the findings of this study it has been abundantly clear that due to the various roles adult learners have to assume, time management is of utmost importance since they have to manage the limited time at their disposal to also cater for their academic demands. The demands of adult education programmes, such as the ETS linking programme, are such that the adult learner is required to define the problem, locate appropriate learning materials, and demonstrate subject-matter comprehension. They should also demonstrate the ability to apply the acquired knowledge on the job, in the home, and for personal development. Schaie and Parr (1981) advance the thesis that the educational model that would capitalize on the learning strengths of adults would de-emphasize the processing and acquisition of large amounts of new information, emphasizing instead the development of cognitive functions calling for integration, interpretation and application of knowledge. Speed and quickness in learning would also give way to emphasis on responsibility and accuracy (Cross, 1981 : 163).

4.2.7 PROGRAMME STRUCTURE

The adult learner comes into an educational activity, such as the ETS linking programme, largely because he/she is experiencing some inadequacy in coping with current life issues. Therefore, he/she enters into a learning programme with a problem-centred orientation to learning. According to Bellis (1987), an outcomes-based approach to adult education must be learner-centred since it is the learner who has to demonstrate defined capabilities, skills and understanding.

If the purpose of instruction is to ensure that all learners achieve particular outcomes, then neither the educator nor the study-guide can simply act as transmitter of information. The curriculum, teaching methods and study guide at all levels should encourage independent thought, the capacity to question, weigh evidence and form judgments (Cross, 1981 : 15).

4.3. IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

In terms of the *Peer Review of the South African Bureau of Standards Report* (DACST, 1997) commissioned by Mr. Lionel Mtshali, Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, it was identified that the SABS has not developed the training of its human resource to any significant extent. The panel recommended that the SABS must develop an accelerated programme of training and development in its key competencies. This will not only assist the SABS to diversify its own staff, but also assist in the broad capacity development programme of the country. The ETS linking programme for the SABS adult learners is one such capacity building endeavour in the right direction. This recommendation is further strengthened by Townsend (1984) when he asserts that the core-plus framework of an organization should provide support which is complemented by a more broadly based policy that incorporates the development of personnel skills, leadership skills and involvement activities for a range of employees at all levels of the organization. The SABS is obligated by the mission statement of the Human Resources Development Department which is '...to supply and maintain the quality of human resources within the SABS in order to efficiently comply with its own mission'.

Therefore, the implications of the findings are that the SABS should, as also emphasized by the *Peer Review of the South African Bureau of Standards Report*, (DACST,1997) identify development and training as one of its core competencies. Furthermore, its employees, who have been enrolled in programmes such as the ETS linking programmes through TECHNISA, should be accorded the necessary support. These learners should be enrolled in relevant programmes that empower them at decision-making, knowledge sharing, and in reflective action (praxis). This will only be realized when the SABS adult learners, such as the ETS linking programme learners, are enrolled in programmes that encourage independent thought, the capacity to question, weigh evidence and the ability to apply the knowledge on the job, at home, and for personal development.

4.4 CONCLUSION

Kanpol (1994) has observed that there is a tendency to perceive adult education as a dumping ground for the economically disadvantaged. This leads to minimal support being given to adult education (Kanpol, 1994:26). To avert this perception, Mezirow (1991) proposes that adult education should neither be neutral nor should it take sides with a specific deprived group, it should not just work with victims and advocacy groups. It should also work with employers, officials and other stakeholders wherever adult education can contribute to a solution (Mezirow, 1991: 63). The core-plus framework provides the SABS (*gesellschaft*) the opportunity to be both the architect and supporter of adult education, 'community' (*gemeinschaft*) development and change. Therefore, the ETS linking programme offered to Sarah Mampuru and her colleagues should not only satisfy the needs of the SABS, but also be realistic, relevant and responsive to the learners needs.

If this 'complementary opposition', Cohen (1985) can be established at the SABS this study would have taken a step in the right direction in identifying support structures and systems necessary to assist Sarah Mampuru and her colleagues in their study through distance education. To maintain continuity of ABET beyond level three at the SABS, this ETS linking programme serves as a litmus test in determining the ability and potential of Sarah Mampuru and her colleagues, as adult learners, to engage in self-directed learning. This programme also ushers them into a relatively new world of distance education which is synonymous with autonomous learning. Tough (1978) says that adults want additional competent support with planning and guiding their learning projects. While most self-directed adult learners decide to maintain control over the direction of their learning programmes, this does not mean that they should work alone. Tough (1978) found through his research that the average adult learner receives information, advice, encouragement and other support from ten people; no one gets support from fewer than four persons (Cross, 1981 : 195).

From a social constructivist perspective, Seligmann (1998) is in agreement with Henning (1997) when she asserts that “(adult) learning cannot be simply a matter of ‘acquiring’ knowledge but is a constructive process that involves their negotiation of meaning, which assumes the participation of others” (Seligmann, 1998:5-6). Therefore, adult learners need optimal support structures to compensate for the glaring absence of educational face to face interaction.

If we wish to know how to support adult learners to become self-directed and autonomous, we need to know in some detail what problems they are encountering, what kinds of support they need, and how they assess their development in their learning programmes. Furthermore, whether one wants to know how to facilitate adult learning through distance education or how to present information to adults, more in-depth research of how adult learning actually takes place in everyday setting is necessary, and one that should receive first priority in the South African adult education system.



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